

Pastors Training Pack

Equipping you with Biblical Church Growth and Leadership



Have you ever wondered why some Churches Fail
and what we can do about it?

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Preface

Some books pick at the churches flaws and scabs to only inflict more pain and destruction. This book is not about picking the wounds and scabs, but calling the Christians to nurse the wounds so they are healed. Calling for reform so we can be the church as Christ called us to be. I love the church, I have dedicated my life to His service and to His bride the church. It grieves me deeply to see her failing and wounded. I love the church and I hope you do too.

I must say this to you, just as you see a warning when you rent a movie even before the previews, so I must give a warning before you read this book. It can be harsh! Because I'm calling people out of their comfortable zone, and to rally together. Because if we love the church we must be willing to get rid of what is hurting her. This will cause us to stretch where we may not want to and move us from our fears into His call. Because I love the church, sometimes we need a sheep dog to guide us back to the Shepherd's path. Because a good shepherd does not desire the sheep to be lost and will allow the sheep dog to take a small bite to enable the sheep to find its way back onto the path. This book is a sheep dog, thus it may bite you. It certainly has bitten me. But remember the bite is out of love, and we grow best out of overcoming hurt.

This book has been birthed from a labor of over 10 years of intense and ongoing research, study, and over 20 years of serving in pastoral ministry. My experience of caring for some of God's dysfunctional children and doing church growth consulting has opened my eyes to a growing problem in the church. I have seen some churches grow like crazy, they break all the typical "church growth" rules, and I have seen churches meticulously follow the church growth advice only to fail. Why does one church prosper and another one down the street close down. The answers are not in most seminars, tapes, or books, because sometimes people do not like the real answers because they see the church and people as either non-threatening or too big to go after. We must act on it and not be the people who decide to go on as if it is not a problem as if it does not exist.

Psalm 27 is an excellent template on how the Church sometimes functions. The Psalm is not about the church specifically; rather it is about worship and the love of God and His people. Yet this theme is sandwiched between being beaten by our fellow man, and the trouble we have in society! This book seeks to understand the mindset of the people who claim Jesus as Lord. People who go to church, have access to His Word and His people, and have more knowledge and resources than ever before but are not acting and behaving in the character and ways we are called too. We are sandwiched between the Christians' evil desires and schemes that seek their own and not the Lord. While facing the world's declining values, which we are seemingly following. Psalm 27 directs us not to give up and seek our Lord, who first sought us, even against hostilities all around us. This book I hope will follow suit to show the responsibility and hope we have in Christ.

My goal in this book is to point out the problems that I have observed over the years; problems which I will call “diseases” that strike at the core and foundation of churches. These diseases destroy more effectively than any fire or termite could ever do. The following chapters are designed to clarify these diseases, in effect pointing out the facts and recklessness that is caused by the misdirecting attentions and actions of the parishioners.

This book is also and most emphatically about loving the bride of Christ, the hope and opportunities we have. Christ has empowered us His people His church, all we need to do is follow His plan and not our desires and aspirations that claw and eat away God’s opportunities and call. What we must realize is that our faith must disagree with the nature of sin and people political agendas. Because what Christ gave us must move us and then transform us, and we must transform our thinking and actions (see Romans 12).

“...and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16: 18-19)

Chapter I What Went Wrong/What Went Right *“Why people are not going to Church”*

Do you ever feel you suffer as much for the church as you do from it?

To often people have to imagine what a healthy church should be like. Or they try to imagine a world without a church. The typical churchgoer will see the church down the street growing and impacting the neighborhood, while their church recedes into its own arrogance, like a diseased infected animal that is paralyzed from moving to its call. So why does this happen? Why do some churches grow and some do not, more importantly why do some churches seem to prosper with excited people while others try to hide their public Christianity. Why do so many churches decay and die. In my years of pastoral ministry and church growth consulting, I have seen a lot of churches grow when they should not have, and I have seen churches falter when they should have grown. I have seen people so excited about their church, it is all they can talk about, and others who hide the fact that they are Christians, too embarrassed to tell even their family members. And I have seen so many people who have been hurt and abused by churches, to the point they leave from strife and with hurt.

Why does one church succeed while another does not? The real answers are frightful and too often ignored.

We have a problem in our church in America, a big problem. Perhaps it is two problems. The first is that church has formed a bad reputation in our general society. People are dropping out of our churches in mass droves, while others do not dare to set foot in a church! People are being hurt, ignored and even abused by the institution that was designed to save, love, and help the people of God and the people around them. The church was to train its people and release them into the world with the power of the Spirit to proclaim the Kingdom of Christ, yet the kingdom of selfishness and misdirected priorities have taken over.

The second problem is that some people will just hop to the bigger and “better” church down the street or even across town, while abandoning their home church where they worshipped all of their lives. Churches with beautiful majestic buildings that have been around for over a hundred years are closing their doors, and new churches in shopping centers are flourishing. How and why is this happening? Is it a cultural phenomenon because of changing methodologies and perceptions or is something else happening? Are the new ways of worship, teaching, and facilities only a covering for the real reasons why some churches fail? And is it two distinct problems or is there really only one main problem?

We are called to be the haven of rest, a place of growth, a place of encouragement, a place of learning, a place of comfort, and most important a place of worship! So why are there so many hurting and wounded people out there, who are fed-up at us: The Church?

Where did we go wrong, why did we go wrong? Is there an answer for these questions? Are we willing to find out so we can correct them and honestly be used to further God's Glory and God's purpose? Well, I believe there is an answer! And I believe we are willing! If we do not, the future is too frightening to look upon. We just might look like some Hollywood apoplectic "B" movie where Christianity is a figment of history, or be like parts of Europe are today! Lost! Totally lost! I firmly believe we do not have to imagine a healthy church, we can move the church as God has called us to do, He has given us the opportunities, resources and power, if only we obey.

I believe we do need to do a better job at reaching people, changing some methodologies, and being creative is a good approach to start with, but it is not the main problem! These are not the core issues on why people are finding other various activities to fill the Sunday time slot! Yes, we do need to re-think our methods without compromising the message. The church thinks the guitar and keyboard are of the Devil, while lecturing boring, monotone messages from The King James; then, wonders where all the people are. Something needs to change. But, again this is not the main problem! The problem is not the historical architecture of gothic design, that theater style is more conducive to people, that chairs are better than pews, and storefronts are better than the A-frame. The problem is that the church has lost its way; we have fallen off the path that Christ has for us! Either we reform and then the Lord can use us to usher in revival (Theologically speaking He does not need us! But God through history has usually used people in His plan), or we will be like a Science Fiction movie where religion is a relic of the past!

The Problem of a Lost Focus

Pastors and leaders have neglected their spiritual growth and replaced it with church growth. Worship has fallen from the gratitude and praise of God, where we are to surrender to His Lordship, and replaced it with entertainment. The sermon has gone from the proclamation of God's Holy Word, to the telling of jokes and stories, and shows with no word from our Lord and application to our lives. There is nothing wrong with humor and stories, I use them a lot personally, but never to compromise the message, only to compliment it! The problem is, the entertainment has replaced the pronouncement of His Holy Word. Just as it was in Jeremiah's time, the church is in an awful and dysfunctional state.

"I am with you and will save you, declares the LORD. Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished. This is what the LORD says: Your wound is incurable, your injury beyond healing. There is no one to plead your cause, no remedy for your sore, no healing for you." (Jeremiah 30:11-13)

Can this be a prediction of the church in America too? I believe it may, but I also believe we can turn it around, by repenting from our self-motivated desires over to His call and purpose for His church. The church may just be in such an awful state that we

will receive judgment or we can be left to our own self, by which we are doing a great job of self-destruction.

“Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security.” (Jeremiah 33:6)

Through Christ we have hope, if we turn from our self-directed focus and ways back to His focus and ways. But if we keep relying on blind shepherds we will have so many blind sheep we will fall to our own destruction and ruin. God will heal His church if we respond to Him with repentance and the expectancy of His grace. But will the strong-willed, self-powered so-called leaders and evangelists respond? Or are they too far into themselves and their self-seeking money-grabbing desires? Will the church step up to the promise of His call, and yield to Christ's supremacy, or will we go it alone? Read verses 13-14 and ask how you can respond? Pray for the deceivers so they too can seek the Scriptures and ask that question and in so doing realize their folly and repent! Intimate personal surrender to His holiness is the must for every Christian leader, and in response intimate care for His sheep with their eyes opened wide.

We cannot depend on blind shepherds, we must get involved and be the change makers that move people by the power of Christ beyond ourselves and into His direction and call. Individual Christians can make the difference, because we are the church. God's Word says He will provide the godly shepherds, and we must seek them out or be them if so called, and not respond to the false deceivers; leave them alone and they will go away. Let the Lord be in charge and not our selfish inclinations.

The Problem of being Out of Touch

Too many churches are out of touch with the society it is in, and it is arrogant toward the people it should be reaching. We as a church must revolutionize our core values of who we are. We need to take a hard look at what the Scriptures really say for us to do, and not rely on our experience and what we have done in the past. What is going to happen on the Day of Judgment, will we hear “well done good and faithful servant” or will we hear “get away, I never knew you?” Harsh, you may say; no, I do not think so!

“The United States is now the third largest mission field in the world. Only India and China have more non-believers.” (Mission America Monthly 1/98 page 1)

Yes we can get turned around quite easily, and place our trust in the institution of the church, instead of the Savior of Christ, as Head of the church. There is no true perfect church, because we are in the process of growth and learning. This is true for those of us who know theology, but to the non-Christian, and the non-disciplined Christian, there is no distinction. Misplaced faith will disappoint greatly, so what are you going to do about it? The church is society's view of Christ. So we must strive to model it as if Christ is truly the Head. The expectations are not unrealistic, but a command directly from Christ - Matthew 28! Disillusioned exceptions and frustrations are our

failure as the representative body of Christ, and not the decline of society. You see, we are the society, when we blame our own culture, we are in fact blaming ourselves! When we complain about the problems of culture, we are the culture since over 50% of Americans claim to attend a church; then the blame is mostly on us.

Conflict is Timeless

“Our churches are filled with conflict and strife; thus, people do not want another place of problems, when their world has so much conflict already.”

The church for nearly 2,000 years has been an institution riddled with conflict and problems. It is the duty of Christian leadership to define these problems, whether they come from our rules, policies, or even perceived principles. Then, as leaders, through prayer and Scripture, formulate the goals and objectives for dealing with these diseases. We must have a plan in place to build a detector to determine the strife before it gets out of hand, and have a policy and methodology of treating it in an atmosphere of care and love. The church must purge, erase, and get rid of any form of a "we've always done it this way" attitude, because when we have this mindset, it will disable us from having any serious insight into the problems and frustrations that the church deals with.

Once we purge the thinking that blocked our effectiveness of being God's child, then He can use us in a better and more profound way. Once this happens, then we can formulate the goals and objectives to further Christ's Kingdom. Then we will be able to decide on the right decisions based on God's will, because we are reading the Scriptures, and are steeped in prayer. Then Christ can use us to take the necessary action to convince people of their wrong thinking, and evil scheming and plotting. Yes, there will be growing pains and frustrations because most people do not like change, even the change that Christ calls them to, and this seems to cause us to rebel against God and against godly people the most. We need to focus on the results, the results of a church filled with Christ's presence because we invited Him into "our place" with love, care and worship, a place where evil is rooted out and the purpose of the church unfolds. Then we become the body of Christ fully effective and able to be used by Him to further His Kingdom.

What really complicates things is that most people are not even aware of the problems they bring, or the conflict that is caused by their attitudes and actions. They may have learned how to live with it in acceptance, or they may not admit to it at all. What comes out of these struggles and conflicts are the barriers to further God's kingdom. Psychologists tell us that people cannot always verbalize their pain and feelings. They may not be willing to seek out the help they need. If you do any kind of marriage counseling, you know this very well. The results of the unmentioned strife, is the person leaving the church because we have failed to meet the deeper needs of the family and individual. We failed to notice or just chose not to, resulting in our ignoring the person's problem. We fail to see the person as Christ does. Thus ministry does not happen as it should.

What we are to do is rise to the occasion as a unified force of bettering our behaviors and bettering the way we engage society. A lot of the magazine articles and books on this subject are focused on the change of paradigms. We need to change the vision and ways that we “do church,” and the methods of worship and outreach. Well, I do agree with this, as long it does not compromise the Word of the Lord and mission of the church. But the bigger problem is not the music choice or color of the carpet. It’s not about whether we call the front part of the church a narthex, foyer, lobby or entrée way: It’s about us as human beings created by God, saved by Christ. We trade in our evil ways of social interaction with the gratitude of what Christ has done, so that we reciprocate with our actions and deeds to each other and the world around us, mirroring the person and work of Christ!

“I’d join the movement if there was one I could believe in I’d take bread and wine if there was a church I could receive in.” (U2 Acrobat)

Our job as the church is not just its defense; but its reform. Just as Martin Luther nailed his 95 thesis on the Whittenberg Door, as a wake-up call to the wrong path the church was on. So must we take up the challenge to wake ourselves up from the menagerie, the fake storefront we have made for ourselves, and calling it the Lord’s church. All we are doing is fooling ourselves and hurting our Lord by our misdirected actions. We should not be viewed as a reckless and arrogant force in society, but as the feet of good news.

We must, as the body of Christ, get out of our little cliques, so we can allow the Holy Spirit to transform our thinking, so we become real to the people around us. So that we genuinely care for other people as Christ cared for them. We no longer see people as obstacles, contradictions, and as being in the way, rather we see them as Christ would see them. When we become real, we fully realize our human nature and the emotions and concerns that plague us. Then we can grow beyond our hidden agenda, and allow Christ into our hearts and minds. This will enable us to go beyond our experiences, and go beyond our own hurts, and see what life is really about. Then we will realize from Scripture and the spiritual disciplines that life is about relationships, with Christ, with other Christians, and with other people around us. So we don’t need to climb the highest mountain in Tibet, and ask the Dalai Lama the meaning of life when God has revealed it to us so clearly in His Word.

Then, because of that transformation, we’re serving Christ out of our love and desire to do so, not just out of obligation and contempt. But we’re serving Christ because of the joy that is overflowing from us, and is going to those around us. We’re now demonstrating Christ and faith in everyday life. We are Christians because of what Christ has done for us, in turn reflecting our integrity that is based on who we are in Christ, so that our morals and our values are pure, and are all expressing Christ’s nature. All these diseases will become eradicated, as the tent of Christ’s purity smokes them out like termites.

Unity in the church is something that is not easily achieved. You can ask yourself the question, is your church characterized by controversy or unity? So often churches are characterized by the first premise, as we allow trivial matters to disrupt our worship and outreach, which is our primary call for the church. We must see the errors of our ways when we spend so much time arguing about carpet that irreversible damage is done to the community. Statistics tell us a very few percentage of churches actually split over doctrinal issues, but rather over trivial matters!

The Simple Problem is...

The primary attraction to healthy and growing churches is not so much the principles they are following, it is how they are doing and applying those principles!

To say it flat out, the problem is not so much how we do things, it's how we are! The problem is not what we do in our worship services; it is how we treat the people that go to our services. The problem is not how we are dressing for services but how we love and care at our services. The problem is not so much who we are; the problem is how we are. Too often we confuse the WHO with the HOW! The problem is not so much as being a Christian in of itself, but, the problem is how we treat others as Christians. It is easy to change the who, that is our cultural identity, how outside people look upon us, the way we reach out and present the Gospel. We can change our worship format, and make our parking lots bigger, and make our programs more relevant. Trying to be a better WHO. But what about changing the HOW, to change how we are, how we behave, how we treat each other, how we are loving, and how we care. The big how is that we model Christ as a reality, that Jesus Christ really is in our lives!

Yes the church is a human institution, filled with our fallen nature. So we should expect a few flaws of unsatisfactory reactions by people. After all, you cannot please everyone. And there is no institution better; after all, who is going to marry you and bury you? Who is going to hold your baby up in baptism or dedication? These important stages of life are centered upon the church, all the richness of the traditions, and all the hope we have to look to: Would you rather go to the courthouse? Well, if we do not reform, people will rather go to the courthouse! And then where does that leave the church and its relevance in culture?

Our job is simple, we are to seize the opportunities Christ has for us and not allow them to be forgotten and lost to our misdirected ways. We are to make known the person and work of Christ! We are to proclaim the Gospel of God who became flesh, to be one of us. To announce how Christ taught and what He taught. We are to make known how our Lord died and rose again. How He saved us from our sins, from ourselves. That there is only one way out and Christ is the way. Once we know this and internalize what it really means, to the point of "existential transformation," the complete change to the very core of who we are as a person, which is the basis for our personality and actions. We are no longer of the world so we do not need to behave worse than the world. We become mirrors of the character of Christ, and we walk in that

character with love and care. Let us embrace and lift up the church as it was meant and called to do - seize the day - seize His opportunities!

Chapter II *The Ultimate Destroyer!*

“There is no better way to start conflict, than to spread gossip!”

The definition of gossip is simple, *“Rumor or talk of a personal or sensational nature, someone who habitually spreads sensational or intimate facts.”* (Webster’s Dictionary)

We Christians seem to have the problem of getting stuck in our own little world. Not so much the world of our subculture where we buy our clothes and our car, and go only to “Christian” businesses and have only Christian friends. This is an entirely different problem in of itself. There's nothing wrong with frequenting Christian businesses, but if all we do is live our lives in the Christian subculture, how can we effectively further Christ's kingdom? We can't. But this is not what we're talking about. Rather we seem to get stuck in our own mindset, where we evaluate all of our experiences, including meeting and relating to people, and even worshipping God, to our own very limited experience and way of thinking.

When we engage in this behavior, we severely limit our ability to be used to emphasize the gifts that Christ gave us, and let the Word of God transform us. We keep comparing everything to our own way of thinking and our experience, and if something doesn't match it, we throw it out. Now, most Christians would never admit to doing this, because most of them do not realize they're doing it, but the result of these actions is that these Christians do not grow spiritually and the churches do not grow numerically. If you are not sure you have this problem, then ask yourself this question; Do you compare your experiences to God’s Word, or do you compare God’s Word to your experiences?

This question is designed to focus our attention on God’s Word as absolute and authoritative. The Bible is the final authority on all matters of faith and practice. So if you have an experience, then you are to test it according to God’s Word, and not the opposite. Which would be to compare it to our own extremely limited experiences, or our friend’s limited knowledge and experience. This opposite would be to put the focus on our experience as normative. Thus all of our encounters in life are compared to our views and experience, and only then compared secondarily to God’s Word. And if God’s Word is not in compliance with our experiences; then we reject the Scripture and not our experience. That is why we have so much false teaching in the church and media today. People have the innate ability, due to our fallen nature, to elevate our experience over anything else, and rationalize and reject what does not match, even over God’s Word.

So what does this have to do with gossip? A lot! It has to do with all interpretations and experiences of the Christian life and walk. Gossip has become a normative practice in the Christian life. When we run across the Christian who honestly believes that gossip is okay, and even beneficial, we know why they came to that conclusion, when God’s Word is clear and imperative on the evils of gossip.

The Soil that Grows Gossip

Most Christians have not let Christ transform them beyond the first stage of salvation; especially in their way of thinking and mindset. This places a limit on how and what Christ is able to accomplish in their lives. Therefore, the result of this behavior is that gossip becomes a normal practice. So most Christians listening to or spreading the news are not aware that it is wrong, because their experience and minds tell them it's okay. It's okay because others are doing, it's okay because I get away with it, and it's okay because I never heard a correction from reliable sources. Proverbs tells us that *“A scoffer who is rebuked will only hate you; the wise, when rebuked, will love you.”* (Proverbs 9:8) What this verse is in effect saying is when a person hears correct teaching and does not like it or does not like the person who gave it to them, then they will throw it out as worthless. You don't have to listen to someone you don't like. This is a big part of the problem of false teachings. And the problem of good teaching going to waste!

The Disease of Gossip

Here are some true stories from my experience over the years. All the stories are true; there is no need to make up stuff when any person off the street can give you an ear full. I have changed names and places, so no one comes looking for a lawsuit.

A family from a church where I was on staff, had suffered mercilessly from slander and gossip by the pastor's wife. The wife of that family was grief stricken and in tears. The husband was totally disillusioned, and the children were scarred for life. They were a part of that church for at least two years, and served in the music ministry and in leadership positions. They were very outgoing, loving, gifted and a light to others; the type of Christians we should all strive to be. The devastating incident began when the pastor's wife wanted to sing on a regular basis for worship; even though she was very vocal publicly that she did not want to sing, saying she was just too overwhelmed to do anything else. The pastor's wife did not have the gifts to lead worship, but felt if she got rid of that couple, then there would be no one else to do it. Then she would come to the rescue, and save the day.

So the pastor's wife started to spread rumors, saying this couple was not spiritually mature, and should not be in leadership. She said they could not sing, and were driving people away from worship. In fact, this couple were growing, committed Christians, who practiced the disciplines of the faith and were encouragers and disciplers to others. They were very good at leading worship in quality and in heart. However, they were in the way. She wanted what they had; the spiritual maturity and being up front in the congregation. But she did not know how to attain it herself, so she decided to bring them down and in the process attain what the couple had, because it's so much easier to attain maturity through robbing it from one person and giving it to yourself. The Bible tells us that the way we achieve maturity is through the practice of prayer and growth through Scripture and worship.

The rumors became bigger and bigger, until the pastor's wife started to slander their children. Since the pastor's wife also worked in the church office, she manipulated the camp scholarship records, saying their kids did not earn enough money for camp, thus they should not go! In fact they not only earned their share, but worked hard to cover others as well. Then she called the other parents of the church spreading untrue accusations about their children, to the point that parents were pulling their youth from Sunday school and the youth programs. The couple went to the pastor and confronted him in a non-vindictive way on the issues they were suffering from the abuse of his wife. They did this on several occasions. The pastor said nothing during their meetings; he just folded his arms and stared at the floor. Afterwards he made a comment from the pulpit that humiliated the couple further.

The couple came to me burned and extremely hurt, saying "*church, screw it!*" The couple was caught up in a political power struggle through no fault of their own. A mean-spirited person, who felt she was in the right, because she was the pastor's wife, therefore she should be the logical choice to be leading worship. Even though she had her fingers in every piece of the church pie already, and definitely did not have the gifts to sing in public. (There is nothing wrong with not having the right gifts for the occasion, we all have gifts, and should find them and be disciplined to use them in the field that they are meant. If I would sing publicly, cats would show up! I do not have those gifts.) The ironic thing is, the point of worship is to give our gratitude to our Lord for His grace covering our sins! Worship is not about power struggles, and it is not to be a show of glorifying ourselves. This pastor's wife had no clue of the purpose of worship in the church.

Too many people give up their faith because of the mean gestures of Christians. By God's grace, this family moved on to a better church where the Word is taught and discipline is practiced. But the damage done to them, especially the children, will be with them all their lives. The church they fled lost over 20 families in a few short months because the pastor's wife was spreading gossip about them too! In the course of a year, this church was completely dead. The pastor's wife is as happy as a clam that she won and all those "unspiritual people" are finally gone! All there is, is a small core of elderly people, who either did not care what went on, or just ignored what was going on around them. The church was now a just a place of social interaction, just what they wanted. A place where she had final control, and could be the up-front person and rule the nest.

Make no mistake, gossip will destroy with a greater impact and power than possibly any other event a church could ever face!

Listening to All Criticism, Having the Nose for the News:

Gossip Mongers! This was the phrase I heard from a close friend who grew up in the church but now won't go. The definition is a person who loves to listen in to the tantalizing details of other people's lives, which they do not need to hear, nor should they. This person is in love with what is insatiable news of other people's discontent. They love the dirt and the scoop, and not only do they love to hear it, but they'll repeat it

and repeat it and repeat it. What separates these people from the gossipers is that they do not start the gossip, they only listen to it or repeat it. They feel they are above the gossips because they do not dare make up something about someone, but they will quickly believe it when someone else tells them, and thus spread it around the world.

These people give credence to every rumor, story, or criticism that springs up around them. It does not make a difference if it's true or not because the trust relationship is automatically developed between listener and hearer. The hearer of the gossip automatically trusts that what the person saying is true because they are their friends, or they don't care if it's true because they feel no responsibility for its truthfulness since they did not start it in the first place. But in God's eyes it's all the same if you started it or if you spread it; the sin, the damage, and the result are the same. The result is that someone is hurt or driven away because of slander.

A story in point. I have a close relative who is very involved in a church that, for the most part, is doing a great job in reaching out to the neighborhood. As a matter fact, I think it is one of the best churches for modeling the great commission of Matthew 28 I have observed. But this church has a flaw, (as all churches do, because they are filled with people who have fallen short of God's glory. We all make mistakes, the question is do we keep repeating them, and make the same ones over and over, or do we learn and grow from them, not to repeat them.) This church chose not to learn or grow.

This church has a senior pastor who is young and inexperienced and has no formal training. This pastor has a nose for the news of discontent people in a very big way, when he should have a heart to help these people out of their problems, not just listen to them and spread them!

This pastor loves to hear all that the people in this church are doing, which is good, but then he uses the information against them, which is bad. He does this by listening to people tell him stories and then believes the stories without checking the facts or going to the person as the Bible commands us to do. The result of this is a lot of people have left the church because they have been slanted. The pastor, who when he hears something about someone, believes that rumor. The pastor then confronts that individual without asking their side or investigating the offense effectively. Thus the parishioners become hurt and resentful and then leave.

One such instance that I personally observed in this church was that "elder A" was removed from his post because another elder, "elder B," told the pastor "elder A" was disloyal. The pastor did not go to "elder A," but removed him from the board prior to asking for his side or what happened, he just believed "elder B." To make matters worse, there were no details to this rumor, just that the pastor was told "elder A" was not loyal. In fact, this elder was very loyal to the church and a year after this incident was still active in the church as a lay minister; now this is loyalty! The other elder was jealous and knew the pastor would do something, all he had to do was say something against someone. This is a sad story because this is a good church filled with good people, and a good pastor with a heart for the Lord; but, he will not listen to people

confronting him on these issues. Instead, he escalates the issue causing the people that confront him to leave to another church, or leave the church altogether.

The result of this gossip being spread and not adequately dealt with, especially by the pastor, created an atmosphere of distrust. Once the leadership of the church is causing discontent, not only are they missing the mark that Christ has for us, but they create such an untrusting atmosphere that the true believers cannot confide with counseling matters, nor do they mature adequately. This is a lesson for all of us; we all have skills and issues that we all need to work on with our spiritual walk with the Lord. I do not believe we as Christians will ever reach full perfection, nor does God call us to be totally perfect. But what God does call us to be is our best. And when we refuse to grow, and we keep making the same mistakes over and over again all that we're doing is hurting Christ, His people, and ourselves.

The Bible gives us clear direction on how we are to keep our mouths in His direction, that is God's direction not ourselves. Proverbs gives us many verses that shows our human weakness and fallen state that seeks out the destruction of each other instead of building each other up as God desires us to do.

“A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered. Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue... without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.”
(Proverbs 17:27-28; 26:20)

The Bible is directing us to restrain our speech and a wise person controls their tongue, what we say and how we say it. The Bible goes on to say that people that spread gossip have malicious intentions as much as the people who start the gossip in the first place. This malice leads to destruction of property and persons, just as bad as a fire would destroy a home or even a church.

Hiding Gossip Behind Prayer

One of the most despicable things I've ever seen in my ministerial experience was a prayer group spending all their time gossiping and very little time actually in the Word of God and prayer. While on staff at a church, where we were putting together small groups for the purpose of spiritual growth, I encountered this to be not such an unusual problem. The group's format was supposed to be worship, prayer, study, accountability, and sharing. One of the first groups to be put together was at the initiative of the church secretary, this secretary loved to gossip, and so she got together with two other ladies in the church who loved to gossip and invited a few others to join them. As I would go around visiting the groups, checking on the leadership and making sure everything was running smoothly, this group required a lot of attention. The leadership and people that attended this group had no intention of prayer or study whatsoever, and would actually spend all their time gossiping, while strutting around the church telling everyone how spiritual they were because they were the first small group. Talk about not getting the point!

Over the years I observed many small groups and Bible studies following this format. One third of their time is spent welcoming and greeting people, along with idle conversation, which isn't a bad idea because it encourages relationship building. The problem is when they get into the next two-thirds of their program. Usually the second part of their program is spent gossiping. This gossiping is usually in the context of prayer requests such as; "let's remember deacon Charles who needs to see a psychiatrist, or let us remember sister Joan in prayer because nobody likes her, or let us remember the pastor that God will teach him to let sister Janice, who's here with us, be in leadership;" and so forth. These prayer requests are only designed to spread gossip and slander at the massive cost to the church and community, due to the damage of the body of Christ. When our focus is to be mean to each other and belittle each other, all we accomplish is the shooting of ourselves. As Christians, we all are partakers and participants of the body of Christ, so we're just shooting parts of our own body. What they're doing is taking something Holy of God, which is prayer, and turning it into slander and misinformation for a very un-holy agenda. These belittling, embarrassing, hateful, harassing, vexing, loathsome, obnoxious, offensive, un-inviting, annoying, burdensome, upsetting, tormenting, and just plain nasty behaviors do not belong in the body of Christ, and certainly do nothing to further the Kingdom of God.

Prayer is the business of building our relationship up with God , and of uplifting each other to further God's kingdom. Yes, we're to bring requests from each other before God, this is intercession; an important aspect of prayer and community building. What prayer is not, is a place to share information that no one else needs to know. We do not need to share personal matters unless the person we're sharing about has agreed for this to happen. Breaking confidentiality to people who do not have the right to know is very dangerous and destructive. As is bringing slanderous accusations without facts or verification to back them up and especially not going through the process of Matthew 18, which we will discuss at a later chapter. Some Christians are very careful not to divulge confidential matters but instead will let loose just enough information to leave an impression, which may not be true. Especially when it comes to someone else's character, such as, "let's pray for Brother John because he keeps losing his job." With just that little bit of information no one knows the reasons why John lost his job, perhaps it's illness, perhaps incorrect career decisions, perhaps it's the economy, it can be many reasons besides that John may not be a good worker or not have the necessary skills. Even if it is a skills or ethic problem, it's up to the body of Christ to help John with the skills and work ethic. We're called to build each other up, not to tear each other down.

Bible studies, small groups, and prayer groups are essential for spiritual formation and growth and for us to come to our full potential as Christians, seeking the heart of God. We must be in communication with God, through prayer, practicing the spiritual disciplines, and encouraging and lifting each other up. The small group is the perfect vehicle for this endeavor. But when our own agenda clouds the focus of these groups, then it creates a vacuum so that the forces of evil replace what has become an empty meeting. The primary focus of these groups must be spiritual growth and

accountability. But beware, be very aware of the role of our evil nature that will dissipate the growth process and neuter our effectiveness to each other and the world; so that a vacuum is not formed thus souring the work of Christ.

An elder in a church I was consulting said that gossip is necessary for convicting people and is needed to give constructive criticism, and that it keeps people informed so we know who to help and pray for. There is a fine line between gossip and constructive criticism. First, gossip always seeks to put people down and escalates the problem. Gossip is dividing to the people involved and is subjective and not based on fact. Constructive criticism seeks to lift the person up and encourage growth and improvement. It is objective, based on fact, and seeks to unite people and to direct positive change. This elder may have had the right motives and heart, but was not mature enough in the faith to know the difference. If the leaders do not know the difference between constructive criticism and gossip, you will have a church riddled with strife, not a pleasant place to be, or a haven of rest that we are called to provide.

When we gossip, when we hear something and turn around and repeat it without knowing its validity, we are being malicious and have no concern for the truth. And when we have no concern for the truth, then we have no concern for the Lord, who is a God of truth!

For the Christian who is living contrary to the will of God, especially in matters of morality and values, the best way to cover sin up is to attack others who have values, in that way they can rationalize that they're doing the right thing, which gives them comfort and security. Christian leaders need to be aware of this phenomenon, so we can correct these behaviors before they blow up and cause mass destruction by spreading and effecting the body of Christ. That's why it is so imperative that a church has a caring and loving attitude, it must be prominent in the church, so when such cancerous outbreaks occur they can be easily spotted. Just as a forest fire cannot easily spread when the ground is wet; however, a fire will spread rapidly when there is a dry environment. When a church is wet with love and caring attitudes and healthy Biblical teaching, the fires of these diseases cannot spread because there's no fuel to spread them.

Then we can concentrate on ministering to and caring for that individual. Because the person who usually causes the attack needs ministering in a big way, even though they may not want it or feel that they need it. They're hurting too, just like a wounded dog. I'm not saying some Christians are dogs, this is just an illustration.

People when they're so hurt and injured and see no other way out of the situation, they will create an environment to relieve that hurting by afflicting hurt on someone else. In most cases this is done unintentionally. But there are people who are in need of putting other people down with cynical and sly remarks to make themselves feel good. It is imperative for pastors and leaders and mature Christians to be aware of

the interpersonal dynamics of human behavior, so they can understand what is going on and provide remedies for dysfunctional situations.

This is not a new phenomenon as the early church struggled with it. The book of James was a counter to the problem of slander and called people to make the necessary changes to their relationships so they could be more effective for Christ. The main area of needed change was the tongue.

“Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider how a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and itself set on fire by hell.” (James 3:5-6)

The Four Waves that the Beast of Destruction operates!

The Word of God is clear; gossip will corrupt the whole person! The impact we should feel from these verses should bring us down to our knees. Gossip is so inviting. How often have I found myself slipping with my tongue, without the intention of doing any harm. Yet it has! When we have a clear view of gossip's “geniuses;” how gossip comes about, and how it destroys; then we can be better at protecting others from the harm that we may cause. Gossip in my experience causes 4 distinct waves of destruction:

1. **First and foremost, gossip violates Scripture! (Psalm 5:9; 12:3; 52:2)** The pastor's wife a few pages back knew this very well, as we all should. The bottom line is we are not taking God's Word seriously enough. We tend to elevate our experiences over God's Word, rather than mistrusting our experiences, and trusting God's direction. Remember God is a God of truth, and He expects His children to be truthful to each other. When we reject the truth of Scripture we are in fact rejecting God Himself.
2. **Gossip violates the person's reputation we are speaking about! (Psalm 109:2-3; 120:2-3)** There are times when we need to speak about another person, to protect someone else. For example, when I was a youth pastor, I was concerned that no one working with youth had any kind of sex offense. So I would check references, this is not gossip. Gossip of this kind is spreading a tale we have heard or have made up without any factual basis to it. Now my pastor friend, who made me lose my appetite, did speak the truth; however, he did it in a way that had no reason to be told, just for the sake of conversation and building himself up. Just like stories that are made up just for the sake of putting someone else down. If you hear that someone has not been to church in a while, that does not mean you spread it around the world. What it does mean is that you go to the pastor and/or the leadership, and they deal with it. You may also visit that person yourself in a loving and encouraging way.

3. Gossip violates the person's reputation who is spreading it! (**Proverbs 10:18-21; 16:28; 17:4; James 1:26**) It is simple; if you spread false information, people will not believe you when you are telling the truth, i.e. the boy who cried wolf. The result of the pastor's wife was the loss of a church and her reputation. When this happens the sacredness of trust is violated, and when there's no trust then no healthy relationships will be able to develop. Our relationship with God becomes affected, and the congregation's relationships to each other are extremely limited in their ability to grow too. Although typically the person gossiping defensively spins it around so that it is everyone else's fault. Just as that pastor's wife did.

4. Gossip effects the listener's impression! (**Proverbs 25:23 Jeremiah 9:8**) The person hearing the rumor may believe it and in turn share it with others, thus creating a never ending cycle of misinformation. Thus the cycles of hurt and pain keep going. This happened at my church in the south, where one leader's gossip caused the destruction, because people who heard it believed it, and in turn told others. This is also where the gossiping groups come into action. They spend their time gossiping and not in the spiritual disciplines of growth in Christ. So the people get the wrong message. The untruth of the news is actually not the only thing being misrepresented. Since the method, as well as the action of spreading it in the first place, is also being misrepresented. Hence the attitude of since every one else is doing it, then it is okay if I do it too.

The Three Breeds of Gossip

"A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered. Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue, without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down." (Proverbs 17:27-28; 26:20)

The Bible is directing us to restrain our speech. A wise person controls their tongue; what they say and how they say it. The Bible goes on to say that people who spread gossip have malicious intentions as much as the people who start the gossip in the first place. This malice leads to the destruction of property and persons, just as bad as a fire would destroy a home or a church.

The important lesson we must learn is the church is not a building, but the people of God who just use the building to meet in. Too many churches think the building is the most important thing of God, and miss the point of what it is for.

Remember this important truth; when our focus is to be mean to each other and find fault with each other, all we accomplish is the shooting of ourselves. Because we all are partakers and participants of the body of Christ, so we're just shooting parts of our own body. We are taking something Holy of God, such as using prayer and relationships to spread gossip, thus we turn prayer into slander and misinformation for a very un-holy agenda, which does nothing to further the Kingdom of God.

Gossip has three breeds, or three different levels. Separating these three levels can be as hard as separating the chocolate chips out of a cookie. It is extremely hard to do without disturbing the cookie! So it is with our mislaid words.

First: Is the "chit chat" we all do. "Did you hear that the Chaedwicks are moving" or "Steve 's parents gave him a new car for Ground Hog Day." This is basic information without harmful intent, but we must be careful what we say and how we say it!

Second: Gets stickier; "Did you hear that Debby's parents are fighting again" or "Have you heard that Kevin is in a real bad mood, so just ignore him." This may not be mean or vindictive, but this tells a story of someone's character that may not be true. And we will base our judgments on false and misleading information.

Third: Is slander! Maliciously telling or repeating a tale that may or may not be true to tear someone down. "Do not go near Patty, she is weird and nobody likes her" or "The new family is only here because the father lost his job and they had to move, and his parents have lots of money." This third level of gossip destroys people's reputations and betrays secrets that are not meant for our ears. This level prevents friendships and takes potentially good relations and destroys them, doing exactly what Satan wants!

This third level is slander, and God hates it!!! Webster's Dictionary tells us slander is, "the utterance of false charges or misrepresentations which defame and damage reputations." This may be viewed as ordinary conversations during lunch, or at the water cooler, but make no mistake, slander seeks to distort and to destroy! It tears down the people of God, where our call is to build them up!

"The Disease of Diotrephes"

"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone--and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true." (III John 9-12)

Diotrephes had a reign of tyranny through gossip and slander in the name of Christ. John makes a strong and decisive stand against gossip. John is representing not only his apostleship, but mainly the authoritative presence of Christ. The presence of Christ is a stern warning, and a loving encouragement for us, that we must replace the temptation of spreading gossip and replace it with the love of Christ.

We get 6 negative and destructive themes from this passage that should act like a brick wall to our slanderous remarks:

"Who loves to be first": Christ first loves us, He goes first. Why do people want to be first? Because we want to be a god to ourselves, and God of the universe keeps getting in the way. Yet He loves us first.

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped." (Philp 2:3-6)

How can we develop this attitude in Philippians? Should Christians have a 'me first' attitude? Instead of trying to be first, we should place Christ first, and then gossip will fall aside.

"He would have nothing to do with us": The "us" is the people of faith in Christ. Have you ever experienced someone having nothing to do with you? Did this experience happen when you did something right and your friends, or co-workers were upset, perhaps because they felt betrayed? Maybe they wanted to go out drinking and you turned them down. Perhaps a friend wanted to do something stupid and you tried to talk them out of it, and they got mad at you. Maybe it was you who tried to pressure a friend to do something wrong and they got mad at you!

We must ask ourselves; Diotrephes rejected the truth of an Apostle; how do we reject the truth of our Lord and Savior?

"To what he is doing, gossiping maliciously": Have you known people who just love to gossip? People who have the nose for the news of others, but with a perverted intent. They do not want the news to help and encourage them, but to put them down. How does this make you feel; perhaps you are hurt by it, or you get excited about it. But how does your Lord feel about it, and how does He feel about your response toward gossip? What would your church be like if everyone was encouraging to everyone else, regardless of what may have gone on before. Regardless if we like them or not, because we are responding to Christ's love. Remember God loves us first. So if God first loves us and we do not deserve it, should we not do the same to each other?

"He refuses to welcome the brothers": Do you know people who just are not hospitable, they are disrespectful, condescending, or ignore new people. These people have bad attitudes and do not like certain people, so they decide to be mean. How does this make you feel? Have you ever experienced such treatment? Have you witnessed it happening in school, work, home, or even church? Maybe you are the one who is mean to others, maybe you do not even know you are doing it, if so, what can you do about it?

"He also stops those who want to do so": Can you imagine that someone in the name of Christ is stopping other Christians from following Christ's character! Do you or do you know others who stop people from doing the right thing? How do they keep

others from doing what is right? Check out James 4:17! How can you be an encourager instead of a gossiper?

"And puts them out of the church": Diotrephes was on the warpath, he actually got rid of people who were faithful to Christ, because they got in his way. In my experience there is nothing a child of the Devil hates more than a child of God. If you are a faithful Christian you can expect people to come against you, even other Christians. But God is on the side of the faithful and true and not on the side of those who cause division and destruction. So take comfort in His grace, for He will be with you and they will get what is coming in the end. How can our church practice discipline? So are you ever a Diotrephes? Are there Diotrephes in your group or church? Check out I Corinthians 5:1-5 & Matthew 18:15-17. **What can we do, how can we be encouragers and attractive to each other, including visitors?**

Missing the Mark that Christ has for us

The result of gossip being spread and not adequately dealt with; especially by leaders, creates an atmosphere of distrust. Once the leadership of the church is causing discontent, not only are they missing the mark that Christ has for us, but they create such an untrusting atmosphere that the true believers cannot confide with counseling matters, nor do they mature adequately. This is a lesson for all of us; we all have skills and issues that we need to work on in our spiritual walk with the Lord. I do not believe we as Christians will ever achieve full perfection, nor does God call us to be totally perfect. But what God does call us is to be our best. And when we refuse to grow, and we keep making the same mistakes over and over again all we're doing is hurting Christ, His people and ourselves.

The Bible gives us clear direction on how we are to keep our mouths in His direction; God's direction not our own. Proverbs gives us many verses that show our human weakness and fallen state that seeks out the destruction of each other instead of building each other up as God desires us to do.

What we can Do:

If you still are not sure what is gossip and what is not, use this simple formula or acronym to give you the nudge: **THINK!!!**

T-THINK (Proverbs 16:23), are you? And if you are thinking, is the information **TRUE**? If the information is not true, then dispose of it. If you are not sure of its validity, then check it out with reliable sources! If a person keeps spreading the slander, then seek out the pastor and or leadership in charge.

H-HELPFUL (Proverbs 18:20), is it? Will the information be an encouragement and blessing to the person you are sharing about or sharing to? If not, then do not share it, unless it is necessary to protect some one. Such as telling the church leadership that someone is gossiping and refuses correction.

I-INSPIRING (Proverbs 24:26), is it? Will the information convict someone in a Biblical way, and in a positive way? Will the information be uplifting? If so, then give it, if not, then don't do it!

N-NECESSARY (Proverbs 10:10), is it? Does the person need the information, or do you need to tell it? If it's the telling, then it is of no worth! Don't do it!

K-KIND (Proverbs 12:18; 25), is it? Will the information be kind to the person, so in turn you will be kind in giving it?

If you cannot honestly justify your message to this acronym, then do not say it! Instead try to say something encouraging, from your heart, and always, if in doubt, PRAY with Psalm 141:3 *"Help me guard my words whenever I say something."* (Contemporary English Version)

"When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal." (James 3:2)

James in this verse is communicating to us that with a small piece of hardware we can control a large animal, so why not put a control on our own mouths. Without such a piece of hardware, a bridle, we would not be able to control a horse. In a similar way, when we put the control of our mouth in the hands of Jesus and in turn surrender our will and desire to slander; then we can be a great blessing to those around us, instead of being a hindrance. The question is, who has control of your tongue? Whose direction are the words and actions that come from your mouth aimed to?

The willingness to come before God and seek forgiveness is paramount. The willingness to ask God for help in controlling our mouths is by the book: God's book! *"Help me Lord to keep my mouth shut!"* (Psalm 141:3 LB) If you are a typical American, you can be expected to say over 30 conversations a day; that is, saying over 20,000 words a day for a man, and 30,000 words a day for a woman, and for the typical pastor...let's not go there! You will spend 1/5th of your life talking, and you can fill 66 books each with 800 pages in a typical year! So we need help. And as Christians, God's Word and Prayer are the only valid means of our tongue's salvation! Yes, we need help!

The tongue can be a force to spread the good news as it was meant; however, it too often is the force of evil in our churches. It can be so evil and so good. The same tongue can be a Billy Graham, or the church lady on Saturday Night Live. The tongue can say I love you and I care for you, and it can say I hate you. It expresses the love and hate, and the praise and contempt of our soul. So watch it and guard it, or the pew you sit in will be empty!

The gossip itself may not last, because if it is false, time will unravel it. That is why I was not allowed to put a stop to it at that church in the south. The leaders knew it was untrue, so the one leader spreading the false information was just shooting herself.

Well this turned up true, but what they did not realize is that even though the truth came out, the damage done was irreparable. Damaging information should never be spread. The only exception is, if it's true AND is essential for someone's protection. If you hear someone's boy friend has a gun and is looking for Suzy, then gossip away to the police and Suzy! But if it's someone's secret salad dressing recipe, keep it to yourself

With the control of our tongue, we will be able to say no! I will not spread that false information! A single word can condemn or glorify. It can ask, will you marry me, and say I do, and then it can divorce us from those promises. The action is what you make of it and whose control your will is in! The actions of our gossip will not only effect the others we try to harm but will boomerang back to hit us! And continue like a disease and infect our whole being. The richness of encouragement or the destruction of gossip are yours to command, but beware we will all be held accountable for our actions! Yes, there is Grace, but make no mistake the importance of responsibility!

When we get to heaven we will be with a lot of X-hypocrites! Let us watch our mouths!!!

Chapter III Living Honestly

“Overcoming the Extermination that Hypocrisy Causes”

“Such is the destiny of all who forget God, so perishes the hope of the godless.”
(Job 8:13)

Being and living an honest Christian life should just be a natural endeavor. We, who have been filled with the Holy Spirit, know the Scriptures should have no problem with honest living, yet we do. The entire human race is hypocritical at one time or another, somehow this is our nature, as demonstrated by our history, actions, interpersonal relationships, divorce court and testimony by behavioral scientists. There is perhaps not a person on this planet who has not experienced hypocrisy at one time or another, either being hurt from its destructive force, or by spreading it. Usually it is both. And we Christian seem not to be immune from this infection.

For the Christian, the greatest testimony would be our fallen nature, which strives to do evil, while struggling with our new life in Christ. Since sin has encroached into all of creation; we should expect sins intrusion into our behaviors. This causes us to

behave in one way, while desiring or even thinking we are acting in a total different manner. For example, I may walk up to someone to engage him or her in an encouraging conversation, but instead I say something of offense, maybe on purpose, even though that was not my intention. This is contradictory, and this is hypocrisy. I could be trying to be funny and using humor inappropriately, or accidentally let something slip out. The cause was that my guard was down, and what my mind was thinking and what my mouth was saying were not working together. This is hypocrisy. And the effect is the listener gets a mixed message. It may be intentional or it may be just the slip of the tongue; but to the hearer of the words, it is all the same; damaging, destructive, awful, addictive, and most of all, not Christian love.

What we have here are not excuses that we can claim as a defense, but causes that can, and must, be overcome by the mature Christian. We now have the knowledge of our histories and the science of our behaviors as warnings to be on our guard, especially as an ambassador of Christ! If not, what comes out of our behavior is a contradictory witness; we may desire to earnestly live the life of Christian maturity, but instead we drive people away from the Lord! What we end up doing is the opposite of Christian Living!

The word hypocrisy is from the Greek cultural stage performances of centuries ago, before the time of Christ. To the Greeks it meant an actor playing a part on a stage. So the actor, holding up a mask on a pole expressing an emotion of anger is one person who is distinct from the person he was playing, who may have been quite happy at the time.

The Biblical definition translates to the actor who was hiding more than emotion on a mask, but wickedness under the mask. The appearance of virtue may be what was portrayed, but godlessness is what was being accomplished: so was the charge of Christ to the Pharisees in Matthew 23. The Hebrew term means polluted, and refers to those who forget God, also it is subscribed mean wickedness, lawlessness, and impiety. And in the Old Testament hypocrisy is much more than just masking evil with good, it's godlessness which is a greater crime than just insincerity. It is living a life without God, and being contradictory towards Him.

Similarly, today we wear nice clothes to church, with big smiles on our faces, carrying our Bibles; then after church we go out for brunch, sit down at the table and talk about the sermon, and then stiff the waitress with a minuscule tip. Or it can be the mechanic with a fish on his sign charging for parts and services that he is not performing. Or it can be the committee assigned to do evangelism, yet never attempts or performs its function. These scenarios are hypocrisy, this is godlessness, they may seem like "so-what," but not to the non-Christian they are very harsh! And they are the fuel that keep people away from church!

The opposite of godlessness is godliness; this is the act of honoring God with our best. Then we live out our faith in obedience, with love and trust in Christ. When we are seen at brunch talking about the sermon, we need to realize that obviously the waitress

and other patrons will hear us. At the same time we need to be considerate, even though the waitress might be having a bad day; then leave a big tip. The first scenario shows Christians are hypocrites, the waitress may realize her attitude and what Christ might be like with a good witness. We may think this is unimportant, after all its just a tip, but the smallest slip can inflict great harm.

In the second scenario the mechanic is misrepresenting values to a world who lacks them, but they do know them (Romans1)! And they expect certain behaviors from those representing a higher order, such as Christianity. The third scenario may not inflict harm directly or even be noticed; however, the harm is even higher by being hypocritical to our Lord's call! Well actually every hypocritical action in the Lord's name is a slap in His face!

The reason the Pharisees were so despised throughout church history is due to the charge that Christ made. Jesus confronted the Pharisees directly with the accusation of godlessness. This charge was the worst thing a Hebrew person could receive. This is the reason that the Pharisees wanted so desperately to kill Christ. Jesus saw that the emperor wore no clothes! Just like when someone calls us a hypocrite and we get angry even though the charge may be true. The hypocrisy can come in many forms, it can be blatant, like the Pharisees, or subtle like the Christians not leaving a good enough tip, and the results are the same to those around us! Yet this focus of hatred Christians have had to the Pharisees, due to their hypocrisy has ironically become the norm of our Christian society! Even though we may not like it or even admit it!

Why do we do it?

So why do Christians make two completely contradictory actions? Why do we make excuses for our disobedience when we know in our hearts we are doing wrong? Psychologists call it "cognitive dissonance;" this is when a person harbors two completely different views while acting on one behavior and, at the same time, believing they are doing something quite different. This can be caused by stressful situations, being uncomfortable, and being unable to modify our beliefs to fit our situation. So we develop rationalizations by believing we are right in our actions because our beliefs are right, regardless of our actions.

A contradictory action is when committee members who had a three-hour meeting on evangelism and did nothing on their subject, yet go home feeling well accomplished that the meeting on evangelism was evangelism. Thus the opportunities and potential relationships never get formed and developed. The Christian businessman cheating his customers, so they go away swearing never to frequent a Christian business again, yet he rationalizes that he is doing it to support his family. And of course the gossip we talked about in the last two chapters.

The early church struggled with this and called it Gnosticism; we will discuss this later in another chapter. Do we try to keep our image intact only to Christians around us, and let our true nature slip to people at work or when we go shopping? The problem is

most people, especially non-Christians, will see right through our hypocrisy, even though we may not see it or admit it!

The Extermination that Hypocrisy Causes

When the average Joe or Joann off the street is polled on why they do not go to church, it won't be long before the word hypocrisy comes up! Why? Why do non-church people have such a negative response to the church and especially to hypocrisy? The typical apologetic response from Christian leadership is that hypocrisy is a buzzword non-Christians use in covering up their inability to have an authority figure in their life such as God. So, the typical response is to label all Christians as hypocrites, this may be true in some cases; however, the vast majority of people when really listened to have had severe mis-dealings with Christians. I believe the typical apologetic response is a whitewash of not wanting to get to the true under-current of what is going on in our church and our lives. Most Christians just flat out do not want to change their behavior regardless of what anyone thinks or even what Scripture teaches.

People flat out do not realize what they are doing to one another, we are not living honestly with one another. We sit in our pews with our nice suits and dresses, with big smiles on our faces, but do we really realize how we are mirroring Christ to the world, or to the person sitting right next to us? Are we doing it as Christ would, or are we mirroring how we feel and desire too, regardless of our mandate from our Lord? Hypocrisy is a destroyer of the church. If Satan was to sit down in a counsel of demons to implant a strategy to tear down the church in America all Satan would need to do was place a few key individuals in each church to spread gossip and rumors.

Satan cannot do any better than that, perhaps this is where it all originates. But in any case, no matter where the slander of hypocrisy comes from, it all comes down to us. As Christians, we have the responsibility to act as the Disciples of Christ. The well-trained sheep dog will go out into the herd and gently nudge the sheep by their rear ankles to where they need to go. The sheep dog causes no harm to the sheep and provides the leadership and strength to place the sheep where it needs to be. If you were to place a pit-bull, who is not trained, out into a sheep field, all it will do is go around and maul the sheep. So what are you doing? Are you mauling sheep or are you shepherding with love and care?

"I felt he was a hypocrite. Dad could talk about peace and love out loud to the world, but he could never show it to the people who supposedly meant the most to him: his wife and son. How can you talk about peace and love and have a family in bits and pieces -- no communication, adultery, divorce? You can't do it, not if you're being true and honest with yourself." (Julian Lennon age 35, who was abandoned by his father, Beatle John Lennon, at the age of five.)

The people you run into during the course of your life, those you speak to at work, see while shopping or when you go out with friends, or even friends of friends; these are the people you are influencing. Hypocrisy in their experience usually has been

something simpler and maybe even sublime. The hypocrisy that most people experience happens in the workplace. For example, when someone acted unkindly towards a co-worker by spreading rumors and being abrupt to their fellow employees; then later to find out that the person is active in a church. Or the non-Christian has just been invited to go to church with someone, when two hours ago they have been stabbed in the back by gossip by the person who spread the gossip in the first place. Another example is when someone finally gets enough courage to attend church for the first time, or possibly to come back after a long time, only to be greeted with sarcasm, or are shunned and ignored. What is your way of influencing (Matthew 23:23-33)?

The Pharisees were experts on seeing the hypocrisy in other people, but they failed to see it in themselves. They could look down the corridor of time and see all the errors and mistakes their ancestors made in the past. They now see themselves more accomplished and unable to do the ungodly acts of years past. But the Pharisees could not see the damage and hurt and oppression that they were causing, that they were causing the very same problems they were criticizing their ancestors for. They were actually leading people away from God! The very opposite of their job description, the very opposite of their call from the Lord. This is as dangerous, more dangerous than a brood of Vipers! A snake can kill you physically; a Pharisee can kill you spiritually. And if we say, no way! I would never act like a Pharisee, then woe to us, for we do the very same thing as they have done in the past. When we spread rumors and stir up dissension, while we see ourselves as unable to do the evil of years past; then, all we are doing is deceiving others and ourselves. We have to ask ourselves if our cups are clean on the outside while they are filthy within, are our tombs nicely groomed on the outside, but filled with disgusting rot!? Are we willing to live lives of distinction with integrity and honesty to be glorifiers of His kingdom?

The Root of Compliance

Hypocrisy is the biggest danger to those of us who have grown up in the church, who are so-called second generation Christians. If we grew up in a Christian home, attended church all of our lives, and even went to a Christian school, then we lived most of our lives in the Christian sub-culture. Now there's nothing wrong with that. The problem is we can get in the habit of playing the role of the Christian, and we do not take a deeper ownership of faith, thus resulting in mixed messages we portray to those around us. A way that we can apply what Jesus taught in Matthew 23 is to look at the word hypocrisy as it originally meant to Greek culture. Jesus warns us of the danger of pretending and going through the motions of being a Christian, without earnestly living a life as a Christian is meant to. We must realize the danger we portray by living a double life. If we are all friendly and loving at church, genuinely seeking after each other with encouragement and care, but on Mondays go to work with contempt and a condescending attitude with our coworkers, then what are we doing? What are we expecting people to think, when we live a double life, or a secret agent Christian? Are you putting on a performance or are you genuinely focused on the Lordship of Christ, so that it flows to those around you?

When you ask someone, would you like to be a Christian, what you are in fact saying is, would you like to be like me? So we must be careful in our daily actions, words, and deeds; about how we tell someone about the Lord. Remember Jesus is warning us about misleading people. What would you think if diplomats from the United States were going to foreign countries acting any way they pleased, and made up U.S. policy on a whim? Well, we would be outraged! Foreign countries would have a false impression of the United States and our government would have no control over its diplomatic core, or the policies it is trying to convey to the rest of the world. The same applies to us as ambassadors to Christ. How do you think the Lord feels when we are out in the world misrepresenting Him?

Don't ever believe that our performances are realities; people will see right through us. There are times when we have bad days, when we will make mistakes, after all we are human, and we cannot be perfect all the time. I do not believe our culture wants us to be perfect, but genuine. So when we make mistakes be up front about it, be willing to apologize, give in and go to the people you intentionally or unintentionally hurt and make up with them. Practicing forgiveness and acceptance are paramount, and go against the grain of our nature, but remember God calls us out of our nature to be transformed by Him.

Pride; the Destroyer of Humbleness

Pride is the fruit of hypocrisy (or should I say rotten vegetable?), and humbleness is the destroyer of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy cannot exist in an environment filled with humbleness; this is because when we are humble we are glued to our Lord and not to ourselves. Pride is perhaps the first sin that entered God's universe; it is also perhaps the last sin that can be conquered. This sin is so enticing it corrupts our innermost being, it gives us the illusion to think over highly of ourselves. So that self-esteem and self love is the priority for our lives, and not the Lord! It causes inordinate amounts of mis-treatment, rudeness and hurt. Pride is the sin that made Satan stumble and fall from grace, and in turn one-third of the heavenly host who fell into the self-destruction of pride and arrogance that then turned into demons, the devil and hell. Pride is what killed the Jews under Hitler, and causes the ethnic cleansing that goes on today in so many countries. Pride is the over zealousness of our self-love, that we place ourselves as the center of the universe and not Christ.

The world may see pride as a sign of respect and dignity, that our worth as human beings is supreme, that we deserve respect and even worship for ourselves. The world may take pleasure and satisfaction with pride as it represents achievements that we deserve. But the source of pride is ourselves, it is conceit; when we are filled with conceit we have a vastly exaggerated opinion of ourselves. We become the main show, filled with self-righteousness, this is disclosed through our imaginations about ourselves, and not from the reality of who we are; who and what we are made to be.

The tower of Babel in Genesis is a prime example as the people saw the great creation they made, and because it was the greatest endeavor by humans at that time,

saw themselves as supreme, and equal with God. It is like a great architect or builder standing on the 100th floor of a skyscraper seeing the wonderful job they made and comparing it to the job that God has done. Then when the sensible person sees the skyscraper at 20,000 feet from an airplane, all they see is a speck among the great landscape of mountains and valleys in the creation that God has made. This is pride, this is delusion!

We feel we can amortize Christ, that we can dissolve all the debt that we owe Christ and the gratitude we should feel, and replace it with our own dignity and self worth. This is the root of liberalism, the replacement of what Christ has done, with ourselves elevated into God's position. This is the ultimate act of pride. Our self-esteem must come from who we are in Christ, what Christ has done for us. This should give us an enormous satisfaction and worth for ourselves. That the King and Creator of the universe cares and loves us, and He is living within us, guiding, loving and holding us. You cannot have an adequate substitution for that! But it is sad that we try so hard to substitute the wonders of the truth of what Christ did for us with stupid insignificant lies. It would be like giving up living on the Queen Mary to live on a rowboat. We think our pride is the answer, and not Christ. Christ is calling us from an over-exaggerated opinion of ourselves, calling us out of our vanity and out of our delusions of conceit. Christ calls us out of conceit, which is out of ourselves and into Himself.

The practical application of pride is when we go to the church and see someone strut around the place like a rooster in a hen house. So full of themselves and swimming in their delusions. So when the non-Christian visits the church or even the Christian and has a run in with Mr. & Mrs. "puff up," the result of the run in is hurt and disillusionment with the church. This Mr. & Mrs. "puff up" are full of themselves and not full of Christ, so the comments of arrogance and the attitude of condescension flows from their words and actions. I cannot count how many times I've seen this played out in churches and it hurts me so much; imagine how it hurts our Lord!

God's Covering Protects

God is not in the business of gossip, hypocrisy, and legalism nor are the angels and hosts of heaven. They look down at us from heaven, and know all of our deepest inner-most secrets, and the angels see them in plain view, but do they act on this knowledge, are they talking among themselves on how bad and wicked we can be now? NO! God creates a blanket that covers us that nurtures and protects us from ourselves. This covering also protects God from our wicked nature. God is Holy and cannot be corrupted by our sin, so His grace covers us. In theology this is called propitiation. God's wrath is pleased by the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf. So our response for this covering must be the response of modeling God's character. How we look and respond to each other, Christian or non-Christian, with love, care and respect. The question is do we go around and uncover each other's blankets reviewing the wickedness into..., well, we do! But God desires us not to. God desires us to model his character and when we are modeling his character then we do not go around slandering each other with hypocrisy, and legislating rules to make ourselves feel good.

Let us not fall into the trap of putting on a performance, of acting out the Christian life. Let us not play a Christian, but let us be Christian. Let our actions be responding to the transformation of Christ's grace by living honest lives. We must allow Christ's amazing grace to root out all the evil within us; especially the hypocrisy that causes so much destruction.

Legalism

The law from within is legalism, it is the making up of whims and procedures that distract people away from the true gospel. Legalism is just another form of hypocrisy according to the non-Christian. And another word for discontent among the people who choose not to go to church. People see a series of actions that have to be done in a certain way, such as a certain dress, or the certain look, or knowing the right words for prayer or a hymn. The reason is that people see the distortion and over-obedience to what seems to be silly laws of no consequence, such as no playing cards or dancing. Or they're afraid of walking into a church service only to be completely lost and confused as to what is going on. When others in our midst are not conforming to our law from within, we quickly turn and bite as a well-trained police dog. We pronounce harsh judgment and sentencing, we are then careless of the consequences because we are right in our thinking. This biting is judgmentalism, and it comes from the law we make up by ourselves when we are not in tune with our Lord.

What people tend to do with their desires are to only hear about something, without verification or insight, just second or third hand information so they could formulate their opinions with disgust and contempt. This is judgmentalism, or legalism, when we refuse to listen, when we view a person by their actions without knowing them, without knowing the circumstances, and quickly pass our values onto an unknown situation, as if our values are stronger and better.

"If we have to use force, it is because we are America! We are that indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see further into the future." (Madeleine Albright, as quoted in "Plough" May 1998)

If it is your desire to destroy the church, all you need to do is wrap yourself in arrogance and condescending actions so you put down everyone in your path while you puff yourself up along with a better than thou attitude. You will soon realize that the visitors at your church do not stay, the people whose hearts are after God will leave, and teaching that is relevant will dissipate. What you'll have is a very comfortable, well-managed group of people that you can control and rule over. All conforming to your whims and rules, all believing that they are better than everyone else, that they're right and everyone else is wrong. If this is what you want; if this is what you desire, then go for it. After all, everyone else is. Remember there is a judgment, and a responsibility that goes along with our faith; and you'll be held accountable for your practices that go contrary to Scripture and God's will. And it will be woe to you, you hypocrite. (see Matthew 23: 25)

God does not want us to have a comfortable little group where everyone thinks the same, acts the same, and follows a list of do's and don'ts, while keeping everyone else out that does not conform to our views. Do not forsake Scripture and the call of our Lord. God does not call us to divide His body and take His precious truths and turn them into a whip to pound and punish people to conform. No, Scripture is God's love letter to us, so the more we know, the more responsible we become to follow His precepts and teachings. They are designed to help us grow closer to Him in maturity and faith. They're not meant to push people away with judgmental actions and harsh attitudes. If this is what you want to do, or if this is what you're doing, be warned; it will destroy your church and it will grieve our Lord greatly.

Must we Comply to our Whims or God's

Christians have the uncanny ability to punish people who do not conform to their way of thinking. I'm not talking about theological thinking; I'm talking about how we dress, fix our hair, what kind of car do we drive, what we do for a living, what kind of friends we have; the stupid, superficial things. God calls us to reach out to one another with love in His grace, yet we seem to prefer to mock others and belittle them with condescending remarks and sly comments. Christians, above all others, should exemplify an attitude of trust with care and compassion. What we are not called to do is to maul people, yet we do it so well.

According to the New Testament, legalism is obedience to the practice of good works, which as Christians we are to be rich in our deeds.

“Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and be generous and willing to share.” (1 Timothy 6:18)

The problem and the fear from the non-Christian is that legalism blinds them from the truth, they do not know what legalism really is. The non-Christian only sees it as a barrier to truth, an obstruction to knowledge and sincerity. Because the definitions are different for the Christian and the non-Christian, so in this chapter I will be talking mostly about the non-Christian's definition of legalism, and how it impacts Christians and non-Christians alike.

Christian leaders need to become very concerned with the church buying into the world's way of doing things to the point that faith and culture are blurred and there's no real distinction. Non-Christians quickly pick up on this when they see there's no true distinction between an atheist's role in society and a Christian's. Then the non-Christian sees Christians as being judgmental and hypocritical. They see no role or reason for Christianity to be in their life. When the church buys into the world wholeheartedly, how can it be a witness to the world? Most non-Christians are much smarter than we give them credit for, especially when it comes to discerning our behavior.

In generations past, Christian distinctions and values were based on not drinking, smoking, dancing, and certainly not going to the movies. These standards meant cultural distinction and drew a so-called line in the sand. This differentiated Christians

from non-Christians. I do not endorse these rules because their 'better than thou attitude' is damaging in itself. These rules and regulations caused a lot of problems years ago with judgmentalism. Today we are faced with a compromise and no reference point for who we are as Christians. What flows out of this is apathy by Christians who have given up trying to make a distinction of who they are in contemporary culture.

The call of the Christian in this regard is to be in the world, but not of it. We are to engage in our culture without letting its values effect who we are. So we can draw a distinction out of our love and care for each other and the people around us. Then this will be our distinction, because they will know us by our love. Then we can be better at modeling the character of Christ as a distinction and as a hope to the non-Christian. If we are not different enough, then all that we will portray is judgmentalism and apathy, and this is not the call of our Lord.

The Truth or the "Tilt"

True legalism is our love and devotion to earnestly seek out to love and serve the Lord. But legalism can be corrupted and distorted to be a series of rules and regulations, where salvation is based on merit. This form of legalism skews the true purpose and meaning of how we are saved out of our fallen nature. For there is nothing we can do or add to God's plan of salvation, to gain favor, it is only what God has accomplished through Jesus Christ that earns our salvation. The result of this salvation is what should be our gratitude and desire to model Christ with His character living out in our lives. Where Christians treat people with respect and kindness, not with the attitude of being arrogant and condescending to others. We are called to be humble and filled with compassion and love, where our deeds reflect the nature of our heart, a heart bought by our Lord who gave us His Grace. Grace is the ultimate, un-earnable gift.

The Pharisees saw legalism as a series of systematic rules to try to earn the approval of God based on their ancestry to Abraham. Every single law and rule was laid down in minute detail. All these rules and regulations kept the people spinning around like a dog chasing it's tail. The result of this chase is that the very laws the Pharisees created conflicted with what the law was all about, which was to be in a covenant with God.

One of the reasons for these feelings of superiority that the Pharisees had, and that we feel today is that we are more educated. We are in a superior position, with the ability to look back and judge. We feel we have more knowledge, and thus have more to offer. We feel we are more established and can look at the past with condescending retrospect. And some of this is true. We do have more knowledge today; after all we are in the information age. It's not a matter of the knowledge we have; it's about how we use that knowledge, and if we use it. It's been said people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. It's also been said that knowledge is power, so are we willing to use the power to further God's kingdom, or will we try to use the power to destroy it? Can we truly look at ourselves with the same eyes that others see, or that

Christ sees? Are we willing and capable to use the power that Christ gives us for his glory?

The hypocrisy of legalism is when the Christian expects the non-Christian to conform and when they don't conform they are shunned by the Christian. All too often a non-Christian will visit a church, maybe with a relative or friend, only to hear or receive some kind of sarcastic comment or look. I honestly believe most Christians do not do this intentionally, although some do, rather, they forget whom they are representing. This is a destructive force; yes, we have rich traditions that we should not give up; however, we need to be sensitive in nurturing a non-believer. And we should not expect the behavior from a non-believer to be the same as a person who grew up the church! We need to be sensitive with the way we look so we do not stare, as well as what we say, and how we say it. Remember people are watching, remember what is most important is what God calls us to be. Remember Christ's sober warning to the Pharisees, and to us - Do not be a snake!

" You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? (Galatians 3:1-3)

In Galatians 3, Paul is rebuking the Galatian church for mixing up grace and law. Although the Galatians had become Christians by the knowledge of the resurrection, they did not continue to walk by faith in their new life in Christ, rather they decided to be religious by creating all kinds of rules and regulations and still subscribing to their Jewish ancestry. Paul is trying to explain to them that Christianity and Judaism are no longer on the same path, and being a Christian does not make you a Jew, nor does being born a Jew make you a Christian. Paul is clearly expounding a warning against legalism that we are not to base our salvation by doing some kind of good works or deeds, or by following a set of rules. Salvation is generated by God's grace alone, our only effort is our faith in Jesus Christ. There's nothing we can do to gain favor with God, there's nothing we can do to win salvation; when we have the view that we can gain spiritual favor by our own efforts then we have a skewed understanding of grace and God's Word.

Paul's call to the Galatians is that they are foolish and bewitched not only because of their misunderstanding of grace but their wrongful proclamation of it. This is also a stern warning for us when we misrepresent God's truth. Legalism is not a small matter in small churches; rather it's a very significant issue that is rampant in the church across America. I observed this myself and heard countless callous stories by individuals who I talked to over the years, and have seen the statistics that back this statement up. Legalism is not denominational traditions or the traditions of a local church fellowship, but rather the atmosphere that envelops, constructs, and controls the flow of the Holy Spirit which is the very oxygen to the breathing Christian.

In the Old Testament, God gave Moses the law. The law displayed to the Jewish people the holiness of God, and that they had to be perfect to enter His presence and offer sacrifices of restitution to cover their sins. This law conveys the majesty and awesomeness of God's holiness, a good understanding of the law gives us a better understanding of the immeasurable value of Grace. We cannot have grace without the law. The problem is when the Christian, who is saved by grace and no longer bound to the law, goes back to the law or creates their own law to give them a better sense of being religious. One of the objections of the gospel by non-Christians is that it is too simple, so there is a natural tendency to add to it with their own efforts. This puts the focus on us as human beings in our effort to work out and move forward with our salvation. It ignores the truths of God's Word and the wonderful gifts He bestowed on us. When we trust in ourselves to work out our salvation, we're not in the love relationship, and definitely not in a trusting relationship with Christ and what He has done for us.

Legalism, the Problem of Discontentment!

Legalism in a local church may be subtle and not painted on a marquee in the front lawn. When the visitor comes or the new Christian becomes involved, the legalism chokes them off from their abilities and potential. It can look like the attitude of "we have always done it this way," or the attitude that "only certain people can be in leadership." It could be only "certain" people can belong to our church. Sometimes we develop an elaborate stifling process that will choke off any new idea or disable the willingness and enthusiasm of its members to reach out and grow. Or legalism can be overt.

Too many churches like to make all kinds of rules and regulations because the people in leadership like to make dogma and doctrine. It gives them a sense of purpose, power, importance, and righteousness. Now churches do need rules and regulations to function properly, there must be a clearly defined process of doing things that encourages and equips the believers to further the kingdom and not constrict and dictate. There must be a balance. Without rules, you have chaos. With too many rules, you have stifling, which leads to doing nothing. The leadership must realize the purpose of the church and the place for rules and regulations.

Buildings, facilities, committees, and organizational plans are designed to be an equipping process to be used by God to further His kingdom. Buildings are to house the programs and ministry events, committees are to be places where planning takes place to implement the truth of Scripture. A clear organizational structure keeps the body of Christ on track and eliminates power plays and struggles. When we see buildings as the most important aspect of the church, and cry bloody murder when the children dirty the carpet, there is something definitely wrong. Then if you wonder why there are no young families at your church, it's time to stop what you're doing and think it through with prayer and Scripture. If not, you will lose your children, and then you will lose the families.

When we think the committee is the ministry in of itself and organizational structure is worship, then you have legalism, and you have a dead church. I have been on staff on too many churches that have this mindset.

One of the frustrations of being a leader or pastor is trying to convince people to serve in leadership positions, especially if you are in a church where the Word is absent and serious teaching is avoided. Then the people you recruit do not have the passion nor are they disciplined in their gifts to serve effectively. So when there's no committed, disciplined, and mature Christian people to recruit from, then all we will have are people who figure out the time that it takes for the meetings alone, because they don't see beyond the actual meeting of the committee. To them the committee itself is the ministry and they strut around church prideful that they are on a committee. Committees are not the ministries, they are the means to accomplish ministry. These types of people who aren't disciplined in the Christian faith will not be able to see beyond these walls, and time constraints.

Too many churches do this and it is sad because they miss the boat, the why of who we are, and what we are supposed to do as a body of believers. The purpose of the endeavor that Christ calls us to is to do ministry, not just talk about it. When this happens, we revert to legalism, because the true purpose of the church structure and ministry is skewed, and replaced with our desires and plans.

I was on staff in a church working with inner city youth. Most of these youth had never seen the inside of a church before, and when I started working with them, the Lord used me to bring these youth into the Kingdom. When they came to know the Lord, they wanted to start going to worship services, not just the youth programs. This, of course, is one of the main goals of an effective youth program. When they started attending church, the complaints started too. The complaints were that the kids were not dressed right, they were sitting in someone else's seat, they did not belong there. Although the youth never disrupted the service, the complaints were relentless. The main complaints were that they just did not fit in "their" church and the church people did not like them there: this is Legalism!

The people of that church were self-righteous, they grew up in the church, and it belonged to them. Anyone coming in, if they did not fit their idea of how a Christian should be, was instantly shunned and put down. This is legalism gone awry! This is how legalism misses the mark of what it means to be a follower of Christ. After all, can you picture Jesus at the temple steps saying, "you do not belong here, you are not dressed right, you have the wrong skin color, you do not fit my idea of what a Christian should be?" Of course the only people Jesus would keep out were the hypocrites and legalists, the very people who want to keep the others out!

The character of our hearts is expressed by the actions and deeds we do to those around us. People can recognize what is in our heart by the actions that flow out of us. We need to remember non-Christian people are watching our actions and deeds, what we say and how we say it. They will match our actions with their values and

understanding of what a church person should be. Sometimes the non-Christian's view is skewed, and we should expect that; however, what usually is not skewed is the expectation of a higher standard. The world's standard is usually not the norm of behavior for Christians to follow, especially as applied to values and moral living. However, there is a standard we can learn from the world, that is the standard of truth and the awareness of double-sided, or double standard living. I'm always amazed by the expectations from most non-Christians I have met. They're usually right on the mark, better in fact than most Christians I have seen! The non-Christian has a better sense of how a Christian should behave, than most Christians! And this truth is real sad!

Why we judge: Our independent and untrusting nature

American Christians tend to be very independent and do not like to submit or relinquish authority to other people. It interrupts our perceived notion of independence and self-determination. Yet one of the main aspects of the Christian life is yielding our will over to God's will. Satan uses our strong-willed nature to his advantage, to deceive our thinking and steal us into judgment and self-determination. There are good aspects of self-determination and it made our country great. For instance, the drive to go west, to colonize and form cities, build infrastructure, and pioneer the greatest country with honor. But don't confuse rugged independence with self-surrender. It is one thing to be a pioneer and have an adventure into the unknown; it is another thing to build and pioneer relationships, and not alienate and divide when it comes to people and the mission of the church. And most importantly is to be surrendered and poured out to our Lord, so He is the focus of will and not us!

So American Christians, (having the opportunity to travel around the world, Americans tend to have this attitude more than the rest of the world) tend to focus on themselves as the paramount of importance in their circles of influence. Thus anyone that does not conform to their perceptions of self-will is deemed inappropriate and less of a person; unworthy of interaction, but worthy of provocation. That is the rationalization for put-downs and judgments. Our rebellious nature rises against anyone not conforming to our needs and worldview. Worldview simply means how we view the world, based on our experience and limited knowledge. So when people fail us, or do not meet our expectations, we quickly judge them. Can you just picture Christ cheering us on, saying go for it, judge those people, you're better than they! Not the Christ of the Bible! Only the Christ we make up in our minds.

Self-righteousness

It's easy to consider ourselves better than everyone else. After all, we look at ourselves in the mirror and we see everything from our own eyes, in our own perspective. We have only our own experience and knowledge to go on, thus we're used to ourselves. Thus all of our knowledge and experience flows through our eyes, mind and then is re-compared to the previous knowledge and experience we have. Our entire existence is self-centered. Since we are the only source of primary information, we tend to filter out all of our incoming information through our self-notions. That is

again our worldview. This is a dangerous game, while we view our desires as the most important focus in life, even over Scripture. It's dangerous and deadly because it is counterproductive to the work of Christ. It's deadly because, in my experience, I see people actually kill themselves over issues of being judged. And it's deadly because of how it destroys the body of Christ; the church that was once in someone's corner with support and encouragement is no longer there. We must be aware of the self-righteous attitude, the tendency to push aside the work of our Lord and His righteousness and replace it with our perceived ability to save and control other people. Replacing them with our views, and our judgment, so we feel superior, even over God. We may not say it openly; but we will say it to ourselves, whisper it to each other, and display it in our actions.

Righteousness is peace with God, that God is our source in all aspects of our life. When we judge others based on our knowledge, we evaluate another person's behavior and actions without checking out the circumstances and facts behind it. Just like Pat Boone's experience. We do not know the heart of someone, only God does. We usually don't have all the facts because we are not omniscient or omnipresent. When we see someone, we get such a tiny spec of information, and from that tiny spec of information, we then come up with great pronouncements of righteousness on our behalf. We have to see how clearly wrong this is. There is no "Gospel of the self," rather just the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We cannot base credibility, respect, or value a person for such limited observations. Nor should we expect people to do it to us.

Hosea states, *"When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forget me."* (Hosea 13:6)

This is a passage that explains a step by step process of discontentment. We were given the gift of grace, yet we forget it. We put it off and replace it with our own efforts, and the result will be pride and a lack of morals and self respect.

A righteous attitude will manifest pride. And out of pride comes the rotten fruits of arrogance, apathy, envy, anger, lust, ambition, greed, aloofness, and ingratitude. Then when we become infected with these age-old diseases, it will barricade our relationship with Christ and cut us off from the character and reflection of Christ to the world. It has been said we cannot control our circumstance, but we can control our attitude. When we cannot control our pride, we cover ourselves from the call and blessings that Christ has for us. What in fact happens is we forget who we are, who we are in Christ, and who we are as spiritual beings. We actually dismiss God from our life and replace Him with the god of our self and the law from within. We become atheists, even though we go to church and even serve in leadership positions. An atheist has no practical use for God. Do you? The only thing that matters to God is us as His child, our love relationship with Him. Humbleness must be our character and not pride, or we will become a disgruntled Christian, which is not too far from a disgruntled postal worker. So remember who you are in Christ and put away the pride that blinds us and constrains us from the truth and love of Christ.

Real righteousness is finding our worth in what Jesus Christ has done for us, and recognizing that we are unworthy, our worthiness is only in the judgment that we should receive yet are mutated by Christ's righteousness. We must relinquish our need to be validated and to be the sole benefactors of worth and value. We must realize we are inter-linked to form the fabric that Christ uses to further His kingdom. Each one of us is a thread that intertwines into each other's thread; if you pull one of the threads out, it would affect the whole garment. However, one thread does not hold up the entire garment. Our Christian goal is not to sit up on a perch and judge, only to gain the upper hand; but, we are to simply trust and obey our Lord and engage in society with the purpose of Christ. When we realize our completeness is based and earned solely on what Christ has done for us, then the need to put others down should dissipate, and the less we need to defend or puff ourselves up.

What grace really is

Too many Christians dispense grace and mercy with a tiny spoon. Such as the decorative spoons you would collect on vacation and place up on a mantle, but this is not what Christ would have us do. Not the spoons, but the dispensing. We must learn that performance oriented Christianity has no basis in the kingdom of God. We cannot judge people on their ability to perform tasks. So that when they don't meet our expectations we write them off. Do not confuse this with job performance. A good work ethic is essential to be a good Christian witness. A staff member in the church has a job description that should be Biblically based and well thought out, and compared to others in the field. The staff member has an obligation to work hard and fulfill that job description. This is a different kind of performance.

The performance I speak of is when the rules of society are placed over against the rules of our Lord. To illustrate this, I was playing volleyball with a group of guys after church one Sunday, when they started to pick on another person because of his T-shirt. This was all in fun, but the person that they were picking on did not take it that way. He felt hurt and never came back. So one of the guys that picked on him, called him and went to apologize to him; this is an aspect of grace. The willingness to admit when we are wrong, and seek forgiveness. Grace is not judging someone for the superficial things such as outfits, especially to the non-Christians who are not used to Christian culture. When we pick on each other, we need to realize the magnitude of hurt this creates. There are times to have fun, tongue and cheek, but it always needs to be practiced with the attitude of love and care.

In Christian circles, we hear the phrase "we are not under law but under grace." Perhaps you may say this often, or hear it said to you with a flair of condescendment; but when this is said, do we say it in the truth that is meant, or as an excuse to do what ever we want. Is this a statement of expounding the greatest gift ever given in the history of the universe, or is it a sly attitude to excuse our deviant behaviors?

Christ gave us grace; He saved us when we totally did not deserve it. Most Christians cannot fathom the efforts and ordeal that God went through to secure our

salvation, thus we don't treat each other in the same characteristic. Christ has fulfilled the law in regards to the debt that we owe and the sin that we were cursed under. So where and when does responsibility comes into play?

Galatians 3 states, *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the spirit...no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case...”* (Galatians 3:13-15)

The Christian must have a healthy understanding of what grace is, so we can reciprocate it to those around us. That Christ paid our price of the broken covenant between us and God, a price that Christ did not owe. We deserved the wrath, punishment, and the condemnation but the curse was lifted, and lifted not by anything we had or could ever accomplish ourselves. Then we are filled with the promise and blessing of Abraham that all the world may know.

“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:3)

This is a preamble of the gospel, and what I believe is also one of the main themes of the Bible; that God will use us to spread His Word by our actions through his Grace and Spirit. Grace is a promise and a reality for the Christian, and it is also a responsibility. Grace is not a divine excuse for us to rationalize our will and desires', thinking it is a get out of jail free card. Christ delivered us from the curse not the responsibility.

“So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteousness and good.” (Romans 7:12)

The law reflects God's character, it is HOLY! And God is JUST. So our responsibility is for us to reflect this in our actions (yes this statement will be repeated many times, because most people just do not get it!). The law was not the curse, it was only the container for it, and the curse was for those who did not follow it. Yet God promised redemption, to which we have today in the person and work of Jesus Christ. God promised blessing to the people who followed Him, and a curse that was brought on themselves to those who would not follow. Today we Christians have the problem of accepting Grace with a shallow pan, which only holds the promise but will not hold the responsibility. We focus on the love and acceptance, yet we are not loving and accepting to others. We think we have a license to kill, with no contract or covenant to the provider of the Grace. When we do this, judgment will continue, and the loss of our culture will continue. When we know what Grace really is and submit to it, then our misplaced judgments and actions will be neutered. That there is room in our lives for something greater than us, which is binding and permanent. So are we focusing on ourselves or on what Christ has done? Are we following God's law or our own? The law

does not save us, but will point to our responsibility and to the Holiness of whom we serve. That we learn to submit to the authority of Christ with the attitude of trust and the gratitude of what He has done. And what becomes of us is growth and maturity. A life filled with blessings flowing and coming out from our walk with our Lord to those around us. That our fruit is love and care, if not what we will have is a life filled with unhappiness and contempt.

We must guard ourselves from the fallacy that we deserve more. This was the lie of the devil to Eve in the garden, that she deserved more than what God had already given her. When we have the idea of I do not have enough in my life, whether material possessions or blessings, our attitude becomes corrupt. And what flows from this corrupt attitude is discontent and self-pity. We need to protect our rights and especially the rights of those who cannot defend themselves, such as children. But what we are not to do is keep the focus on our rights over and against our responsibility. Our focus needs to be in the gratitude of the gift of grace, and not what we did not get, so we do not become consumed with ingratitude, and then let it turn into hostility. The ungrateful Christian will quickly turn to legalism and in turn produce the various forms of discontentment toward others. Because they are unwilling to see the love that Christ has for them, and then they are unable to give it out to others. They do not see the appreciation from others or even from God, so the focus is the poor me attitude. And this attitude will reciprocate discontentment in a very powerful and focused way.

When we fully recognize our dependence in Christ, and fully feel the love and acceptance we have from Him, then our spiritual walk will increase. When our walk increases then the flow of love and care will proceed from us in a powerful and focused way. Because then we will see that we already have all that we could ever want or need. All that we are, and all that we could ever be is found in Christ.

Rationalization

“In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.” (Psalm 10:4)

Remember Cognitive Dissidence a few chapters ago, where we perform one behavior while at the same time harboring a contradicting behavior. This is a common human characteristic that God desires us to root out. We cannot be healthy while at the same time harbor to contradictory views; this cannot be done. Psalm 10 tells us that we cannot have pride and God occupy the same heart, yet we keep trying! We cannot be a growing Christian practicing prayer and spiritual disciplines while at the same time making judgments on our neighbors and friends. To the non-Christian, as well as to the Christian, the pain that is caused by the judgments may never be repaired effectively. We Christians drive people away in droves from the church in hurt and disillusionment. While the people who drive the people away may feel they're in the right and acting God-like. We Christians never know the hearts of others, we are not impaths (the ability to read others emotions), and certainly we are not God. We do not know the pain and brokenness in someone, which may contribute to a certain behavior: Because someone

acts contrary to our standard. We must have a heart for people, even people who offend us, and do not pass our mustard test. We must not pass judgments and sentences on people, for we are not the court of law, we are to be the court of grace. When we do something and say “well everyone else is doing it,” we are rationalizing. Believing they are doing right and above reproach while spreading destruction, we are rationalizing. God does not want us to rationalize; He wants us to focus on Him.

Our society sees what we do for a living as a prominent aspect as our worth as a human being, and the status of our social hierarchy. But this must not be the perspective of the Christian. God does not see who we are by what we do. God sees us as who we are as...who we are in Him. Thus the key to the Christian life is not what we do, but who we are, our “being in Christ” as “abiding in Christ.” When we have a grasp on what God calls us to, then we do not have a need for the discontentment and the actions that flow from it. Like pride and defensiveness, workaholism, condescending actions, isolationism, and a stressed out nature. The hole in our soul is only filled by Christ, not by anything else, such as possessions and blessings. There is nothing we can do to fill that hole, yet people chase their tails all their lives, ending up only hurt and broken. People who chase wealth and blessings all their lives tend to be the most miserable people you will ever meet. Because being a saved person in Christ, yet living the life out of God’s will, will produce misery! It is great to have blessings and, if that is all your concentrated focus in life, you will be extremely discontent. However, a life as being in Christ by His grace will fill you with all the blessings you will need.

Questions we must ask ourselves

Do not see yourself as exempt from the daily concerns of life, thinking you are above it, you are not. We are all called to engage in life with our full endeavor, to guard yourself from rationalism. Try asking yourself these questions.

Q: Ask yourself am I too arrogant to see the adventure of normal daily life?

If so, then we will not have a grasp on the small things, and we will fail on the larger things of life. Life is not to be looked at as being mundane. Let us see ourselves as His children, embracing the small before we seize the large. That we become men and women of true faith, set apart for our Lord’s service regardless if the task is too small and insignificant for our ego and position that we alone perceive.

Q: Are you so eager to venture in new experiences of life that you ignore what is right in front of you?

If so you will not engage in the responsibilities that God calls us to. What are the responsibilities? This is found out by knowing your spiritual gifts and natural abilities, and growing in the maturity of our faith, through Scripture, biblical teaching, prayer, and worship.

Q: What are your priorities and motives? Are they Christ centered or self centered?

Q: If you are having success in your career or relationships, are you prideful of them? If so, why?

Q: Do you have a grasp on your personality and your areas of strength and weakness?

Q: Are you accountable to a group of people or person who knows you well?

If not, you will soon fall off the road of life, crash and burn.

Q: Is your head full of Scripture, and your heart full of sin and contempt?

Remember Psalm 10:4

Q: Knowledge puffs up, but love and care builds up; do you agree with this?

We must ask ourselves if our deepest desires in life and pleasure of living are dedicated to please Christ? Can we take a hard look at our life and see how others see us, how God sees us? Are our actions in life the result of our will, our desires, our inspirations, and our motivations; or are they the result of us living a life of pleasing God? Is there a distinguished reality of the Lordship of Christ, verses the menagerie of living the lie of our desires! We must be set apart to be promoters of our Lord's Kingdom and Grace, to live that life of distinction, a life that honors Christ and motivates and encourages others.

Chapter IV Understanding Conflict

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” (James 4:1-3)

The best way to destroy what God desires is to refocus our purpose as God's purpose. To push aside the truths of Scriptures and what a church is, and replace it with our own whims and reasoning. This is a favorite among the people who live to stir up dissension and strife. This may sound silly and stupid; you may ask who would do such a thing intentionally, but we seem to do this all the time. James is telling us that the root cause of conflict and division is envy. What we are in fact doing is changing the target that God has given us and replacing it with our own target. A target that we crafted ourselves out of our expectations and experience. Then we can argue that we are hitting the target, while Our Lord is trying to get our attention that we have the wrong target in our sights and the wrong trophies hanging on our walls.

The divisions are caused by our evil desires that come from our planning and scheming. We become blind to who we are in Christ, and blind to what the church is supposed to be. This is a sin that goes against God Himself. It flows from our evil nature that pushes aside the gratitude we should not have forgotten. As Christians saved by grace, we should be living our lives with the utmost of gratitude. The gratitude is our thanks for what Christ has done for us. But envy fights against gratitude and the gifts that God has given us. The result is that we fail to seek the gifts that God has given us; but, rather seek the desires of the world. This causes us to do whatever it takes to accomplish our goals. This is done by raising ourselves as sovereign over and against God, thinking we are in control.

“You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” (James 4:4)

James is not telling us to remove ourselves from non-Christians, nor is this a warning against sleeping around. There are numerous other passages that speak against adultery in marriage. Adultery here refers to us being adulterous towards God. If we claim to be a Christian yet behave in a contrary manner, then we are in an adulterous relationship with God! God sees us as His bride (Jer 31; Eph 5), so we must see the seriousness of our behaviors as going against Christ. The focus of desire and pleasure and the fighting against other people's desires and will tantalizes people in the world, just watch American daytime TV. This is absolutely wrong. Our spiritual identity becomes confused and distorted, so we accept the logic of the world and not of God's Word. Thus, what God desires for us becomes subverted or pushed aside and spiritual anarchy will take over! This passage should be a wake-up call to who we are, and what we can become when we go on fighting with each other.

We need to be aware that there are two possible avenues for our affections and passions in life: the world or God. The world is the domain controlled by Satan. This is the immorality, self-delusion, and pleasure seeking that is counter-productive and opposed to the will of God. This is actually a hateful attitude towards God, like a small child hating his parents, because he did not get what he wanted. Even though the parent loves and provides for all that the child needs, and more. The child, because of his immaturity, only sees what he does not have, and not the love and what is best for him. This is an undertaking we do ourselves, on our own free will to reject God. We see what we do not have, and we see what we want regardless if it is right for us. This is not the rejection of what the non-Christian does, but the rejection of truth by Christians who know better and then still choose to disobey God's sovereign plan. These are the behaviors that some Christians model that everyone hates because of the strife and conflict they provide. Because their focus is misplaced and not focused on love and maturity that God calls the church to.

Focusing in on our own will and desires over the mission of the church and God's purpose

For example, I was on staff at a church where one person was insistent that we have no praise music during worship. This person was adamant and very vocal to the leadership and staff. He was an elder and a wealthy contributor to the church; thus he had a lot of political clout. But he was one voice of dissent among the many wanting to upgrade our worship service. He had no Biblical grounds or logical argument for his desires, he just felt it was not right. His way of reasoning was to rant and rave emotionally, and to extort with his financial influence. Then he complained that no one ever listened to him, but in actuality, that church would jump to most of his whims.

There is nothing wrong with having praise choruses or not having praise choruses. I believe there are many ways we can truly worship the Lord with our spirit. The problem here was that this man was unwilling to listen to the committee's recommendations, the pastoral staff, or to the other members of the church wanting change. He was not concerned with the Biblical definition of worship or the purpose of it. He was only concerned about his view and his way, period. The main reason the church wanted change was to attract new and younger people. This man's focus was on his feelings and his fears. He made comments like, "well we've always done it this way."

The situation with this man, and many others in this position, is that they tend to elevate their personal convictions into law. Their views are absolute, and there can be no other decisions. Couple that with a strong-willed personality; a personality that's not surrendered to the person and work of Christ, then what you have is a loose cannon on deck that can fall over and fire. Thus causing the sinking of the ship, or in our case, the sinking of the church! When we insist on having our own way, and only our own way, and we refuse to surrender even to the Lordship of Christ, then what you have is not the church of Christ, but a church of dissent.

Leaders need to realize that any form of change can be hard for people to overcome. But if there is a plan, and if that plan is sound with the atmosphere of encouragement and love, then most of the people will follow it. People will follow a well planned out strategy that has purpose and meaning, and as a Christian, it must be Biblically sound too.

I have been on the other side of the coin on this issue. I was very active in my church growing up, and every year our youth group would help prepare and serve a formal all-church dinner in December. This was our church's big social and it was a lot of fun. The whole church would participate. Well, one year we had trouble getting people to help out, so the leadership cancelled it. I was furious. I could not believe they did that, I felt hurt and betrayed. At that time, I did not understand the mission of the church, for me it was a social outlet and they had just cancelled my favorite activity. If I knew what the church was about, I would have still been mildly upset, but the world was not ending like I felt it was. If the church leadership had tried to find a solution, instead of just canceling it after giving a deadline for sign-up, then I would have understood.

There are so many conflicts that divide us under this issue. It can be about preaching; should the pastor preach verse by verse or expository, or should he preach as proclamation? Should the church use the N.A.S.B. Bible, the King James Bible, or the N.I.V. Bible? Should we build a new building, or should we remodel our existing buildings? Should we change the carpet or should we hire a new staff member or should we fire a staff member? In a healthy church there should be the freedom to express ideas, for there is nothing wrong with different viewpoints on the issues that have nothing to do with doctrine or the basic beliefs of the Christian faith.

The problem is when we elevate our own desires over everyone else's, or we feel that our way is the only way, we become absolute about it. And it's when we insist on our own way that the conflict and strife take over. This will lead to pride and arrogance, which turns into legalism, judgmentalism and hypocrisy. These are the rocks that will break the stained glass windows, which will distort the church, and alienate the non-Christian.

Pastor and Elders not adhering to the purpose of the church Romans 12:1-3.

The focus is and always must be the mission that Christ called us to do. The mission to preach and worship the Word (Logos and Bible), to prayer, to being a positive personal witness, and to focus on personal holiness. Did I mention to be kind, loving, and caring to one another? When we focus on the mission and not just the perceived needs and methods, then we will see growth. God's purpose is for us to be living the walk to those around us, and this will make the church more attractive, not just techniques.

One of the major points I want to get across in this book, is that God works through people, He works through us. We must believe this and we must live our lives

doing this. Or we're just like the proverbial person who refuses to work and buys lottery tickets, hoping their ship will come in. Friends, your ship is not coming in, you have to build it yourself and God will empower you to do it. When we have the attitude in the church that we need to wait for our ship to come in, what we are in fact doing is making an excuse for not doing anything, like a kid trying to get out of their chores. We are just sitting on our rear ends accomplishing nothing for the Kingdom of God. We need to realize how much this grieves our Lord, just as a parent grieves for their child who refuses to go to school, refuses to work, or just sleeps all day and does nothing. That unfocused laziness and total lack of ambition becomes their child's life, not just for a short time, but for years. We must see the wondrous joy in serving the Lord, and the wonderful plan He has for us, it's a lot better than "pew sitting."

Churches are not following the Lord's Mandate!

"Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing to you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:14-15)

Passion is absent from a lot of our churches in a big way, we have lost that love of worship and service to our Lord, and have replaced it with the urgency of our needs; resulting in overwhelmed and stressed out lives. We no longer have that zeal and freshness to go out and be a positive witness to our friends and neighbors. We have lost the focus and importance of the church as the center of our lives; now the focus has shifted to our careers and various other perceived important agendas. We have lost the importance and urgency of Scripture as our primary guide and focus of learning.

This passage in 1 Timothy is a testimony to the importance of focusing ourselves, and our passions to the nature and purpose of the church. The church is the support structure to its own body and neighborhood, providing the care and the truth that the world needs. The support mechanism is the care and witness of its members! Not just the metaphysical nature of our faith! Yes, Jesus is the head, but the head is the brain and orders the body, us, what to do. The church is not to be a paraplegic, relying on the head only, while the body does nothing but atrophy. Nor are we to try to function without a head, because all we will do is wiggle around aimlessly and without purpose like a chicken with its head cut off.

Our strength comes from the head and the truth, but we are the means He uses. We are the support, the living example, modeling exemplary lives that point to His character. Thus, the outcome will be the great commission working out in our witness, with care and teaching, equipping and empowering each other and our neighbor to God's glory.

The church is God's household, where God dwells; out of this we will experience worship, and the non-believer will experience the Lord. The church is also the model for the kingdom of God, because God is residing there, amongst us. When we have a

healthy understanding of the purpose of the church, then we are opting to live it out as an example. We then should let the glory of our experience with the Lord flow out of us with passion and conviction to others. Our individual nature will fall aside to a cooperative venture with each other as the love of our Lord flows through us. We cannot function by ourselves; we need each other cooperatively. Christianity is not an individual sport, but a team effort, where everyone is important. We cannot have an effective relationship with Christ by ourselves, nor can we be a witness to the non-Christian as a solo effort. For us to know Christ and make Him known, we have to have a love for the church and its purpose. Not a love for just our whims and plans.

We cannot have a vital impact on our community without the connection with the body of Christ. You cannot do it alone. Billy Graham has a team of hundreds preparing for a crusade, with the cooperation of most of the local churches before the event is even advertised. If Billy Graham would just show up unannounced in a community without the cooperative efforts of other Christians, the attendance and impact would be minimal, even given the track record and greatness of Billy Graham. He cannot do it alone, so why do most Christians think they can?

The purpose of the Lay Person

The American President John F. Kennedy gave a speech early in his presidency that went something like this, *“ask not what your county can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”* This applies to the church greatly, because throughout church history, we have had a skewed idea of the role of the layperson. This is especially true in the liturgical churches. There is the mindset of that we have a priest, pastor, or minister to do this or that, so we do not have to. The typical “pew-sitter” sees their role as a spectator, thus they do not have to engage in an active role, and all they do is throw a few bucks in the plate, because they hired someone to do the ministry. I experienced this many times over the years in Youth Ministry. When I would try to recruit youth leaders, I would sometimes get the response “well I thought we paid you to do that.” The thinking is I do not need to do what I pay you to do.

First, Christianity is not a ranch where we hire hands to work the spread. Rather, Christianity is an action driven adventure of faith, where we each help and build each other up to cooperatively do the work that Christ gives us. Second, Christianity is not an individualistic organization, rather we are a team, a “co-op.” A football team cannot possibly score if only the quarterback plays while the rest of the team sits on the bench. But this is how most Christians play out their faith and walk. It also seems the age-old myths of division of work between clergy and the laity are confused. Such as, the thinking that the role of the clergy is to do the ministry, while the lay people help out if they can. Or the clergy takes care of the flock, period. Or that ministry only takes place in the church by the clergy and not by anyone, or anywhere, else. We must have a proper understanding from Scripture of the role for the people of God, and the offices we occupy. Ministry takes place by all Christians, as we are all called to do, and the ministry takes place wherever the Christian might be; home, work when appropriate, shopping, recreation, even at Taco Bell. The Christian is to engage the world, not sit in

a pew expecting a hired hand to serve them like a Texas rancher. We are not to accomplish ministry only if we get a paycheck; we are to accomplish ministry because this is what our Lord has called us to do. We can only accomplish this task with the understanding of what we are doing and why we are doing it.

Why? Because of the love we have received from Christ and the grace He has given us. We are to perform out of our gratitude and love, and let our faith and passion fuel our efforts, so that it does not become an exercise of obligation only. We need to understand our responsibility as believers; the great commission is not addressed to the clergy only, rather it is addressed to the whole body of Christ. The gifts we are given to build each other up and to serve, are not for the clergy only. Christianity is a cooperative effort in unity and togetherness. When we function within these parameters and purpose then the ministry will expand. We must be disciples on how we can use our gifts to better each other, and in more contexts, not expecting someone else to do it.

Our question should be how can I be more effective, not how can the pastor be more effective.

When we function as a body of Christ effectively, then we can break the bounds of dependency on professional ministers only. As a pastor, I see my role as recruiting and training people to do primary care and ministry, because I cannot do it all personally. In Youth Ministry, you need to have trained people to help in various roles, such as worship, personal contact, small group leaders, drivers, chaperones, activity planners, etc. I cannot be everywhere teaching all the small groups, but I can train other people to do it, and be their coach. Because the minister's role is to train and equip the lay person to do the bulk of the ministry. The pastor is normally considered a performer of the sacraments of baptism, marriage, funerals, and pronouncement of the Word, and this is true. The minister is also a trainer to the lay people and an equipper, not a solo act. He may need to perform the sacraments by himself, but the rest of the church functions must be a cooperation. If not, then we have a dysfunctional church that is going nowhere.

Churches are not reaching out to their own neighborhoods!

The problem in neighborhoods across America is that most people who live near churches have very little positive to say about them. The way to find this out for yourself, is to go around your church neighborhood with a friendly attitude and do your own survey. Ask what they think of your church. Ask what would it take to get them to visit. Ask them about their needs and desires. You will be amazed at the outcome. If you have the attitude that their opinion does not matter because they are not members, then think again. All people matter to Christ, not just members of a certain church. Their opinions will show the influence you have, and how the people perceive you. It should give you direction to work on reconciliation, and programs that meet their needs. For example, if there are a lot of single working moms, then consider starting a cooperative day care service at no, or very low, cost. If you scratch their itch, they may reciprocate.

The Excuse Factor

It is amazing the excuses Christians can come up with so they do not have to proceed with the call that Christ gives them. I was on staff at three churches that flatly refused to do any kind of evangelism or outreach. They had the mindset of this is our church and we do not want “those” people in our church. One church was an all-white upper middle class church in a predominately African-American neighborhood. Over the years the neighborhood had changed, and the members moved out of the area, and commuted to the church. The second church was in a similar predicament, but their neighborhood was predominately Hispanic. The third church was in an upper middle class neighborhood, and most of its members lived near by. Each church rationalized that they were better than their neighborhood, thus they did not have to reach out to it, after all, you do not have to reach someone you do not like, right? WRONG. Christ calls us all to reach the world. Christ does not see a distinction between cultures and colors of His people. We need to grow beyond our petty prejudices, and see people as Christ sees them.

Our programs must be inclusive to all people, and a considerable effort must be made to communicate to the community what the church offers. The church must have the desire to reach out and invite others out of their comfort zone. And we need to see people as opportunities, not enemies. If not, all that we will accomplish is a division of hurt and rejection to the community. The result of that hurt will be animosity and an attitude of hate for the church they live by, because that church does not want them. Again, Christ is not sitting on your church doorstep telling people, “get away, you do not belong here,” He is saying, “stop being idiots, and let the love that I fill you with, flow out to the people here.”

I visited one church recently that was a very conservative church, almost to the point of legalism, such as, its members are not allowed to go to restaurants or shop on the Sabbath, Sunday. But this church was very warm and inviting. And in 5 short years, it went from a few families to a few hundred families, because of the love and care they give to each other, and their willingness to reach out.

For outreach to work, we must realize the call Christ gives us, to grow beyond our perceived comfort zone, and see people as Christ sees them. The church must get involved in its community, especially the poor. One of those 3 churches started an outreach to the poor in the neighborhood, by giving out food twice a week, and offering medical clinics, drug rehabilitation, and a daily tutoring program for children. These programs were first rate and churches all over the state and country were emulating these cutting edge programs. Most of its members realized the call and responsibility that Christ gives, and were raised out of their comfort zone to the great commission.

The church must move beyond its cultural niche and racial barrier for it to be used by Christ effectively. People are people period; there is no distinction before God. Yes we have our differences and diversity, and these issues will make great potlucks! We need to see the potential in people and appreciate the differences, see the positive that will come out of them. After the Los Angeles riots a few years ago, some of the churches realized that they were just a ghostly presence and not effecting their

neighborhoods. So they stepped up their outreach efforts and brought healing and reconciliation to their community. Since then, the neighborhoods that had churches do these outreaches are a lot less tense, and the people are closer and cooperative with each other; this is what Christ calls us to do.

The church must be intergenerational too. Not isolating people from each other. Yes, we need life stage groups such as young marrieds or singles, but we need to be inclusive to the other generations too. Each generation brings different gifts that build up the other generations. The older generations bring stability, wisdom and experience. The younger generations bring enthusiasm and new ideas. The healthy church will have mentoring programs where younger people are being disciplined by older ones. Where people are listening to each other's needs, desires, and gifts; so that they are helping each other learn, grow, and serve. We are being the body of Christ, being tangible and effective with each other. And not a gap where each generation is spurious and condescending to the other, because as the body of Christ we all need each other, and the gifts, experience, and enthusiasm we all bring. The cooperation we have, coupled with the call and vision and passions, will enable us to be fully used by God, and impact our community in a positive direction and even bring the gospel.

When we are obedient to God's Word and follow through with our whole effort and passion, the very thing that drives us at the core of our being; then we will see great things for God. If not, we will only attempt great things, and miss the mark of the best that Christ has for us. God's truth is the foundation, but remember we still have to put our focused efforts in with all of our will. God uses us to accomplish His drama of redemption. The Bible is a collection of personal stories of various personalities that God has used and attempted to use to further His kingdom. He does not need us, yet He loves us, and still uses us to accomplish His will. The question is are you willing to surrender yourself to the will of God, so He can use you to further His kingdom, or are you only concerned with your purpose and concerns, and do not see what Christ has for you? One way will help the church grow in discipleship and make it a positive witness in the community, the other way will see a church focused on itself and ineffective to accomplish anything great. My suggestion to those who want to focus on themselves is to take the word "CHURCH" off your marquee, and replace it with the word "CLUB" because you do not have a church, you have an organization, a club, and nothing Godly.

What is Expected from Society

People expect Christians to behave to a certain standard, that is why Jimmy Swaggart and PTL were such big news. Christians are human and full of sin and frailty, and will mess up, I do this a lot, we all do if we are honest. But we are called to a higher standard, and are expected to behave to that standard. We are not expected to be perfect, and most people do not expect perfection from us. But, they do expect us to be real, reverent, and sensitive. And when the Christian is a listener and encourager, even though they mess up, people will forgive, because you are real. And if we are forgiving and inviting, we will have an impact on those around us. When we live in the world with

the modeling of Christ's character, but not partaking in the world's sin, then the impact will become real.

“ It is painful to see a happy group of Christians, born in simplicity and held together by bonds of heavenly love, slowly lose their simple character, begin to try to regulate every sweet impulse of the Spirit, and slowly die from within. Yet that is the direction almost all Christian Denominations have taken throughout history and, in spite of the warnings set out by the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures, the direction of almost all church groups are taking today. Churches and societies founded by saintly men with courage, faith, and sanctified imagination appear unable to propagate themselves on the same spiritual level beyond one or two generations.” (A.W. Tozer)

One thing I learned as a church growth consultant is when a person leaves the church, we have only a few weeks (4 to 8) to bring them back until the hurt becomes too much. When the hurt builds because it was not diffused by a simple effort of contact, they may never come back to their home church. The statistics tell us, this is true in any church! When we listen with compassion and care, when we keep better records of our people, noticing the multiple absences, then we start to create an atmosphere of care. When we give the proper care and love, then there is little need for rescuing the lost sheep. Hopefully then we may be better able to deal with Christ's children with the call He has given us!

When the person is being fed quality Bible teaching and in the care of a support structure, which we all need! Where there is a place that the Christian can go where “everybody knows your name,” actually where there is a group of friends who know more than your name. Where you are a part of something bigger than yourself, you are a part of the church, in its mission and vision: then, the likelihood of leaving or causing problems that cause others to leave are greatly diminished! The person who is under the care of committed Christians, and in turn caring for others in a committed church, they will remain with their church family. But when we miss the mark of caring for each other, then we will miss our members!

Our application is simple; we are to be involved in our church with passion and direction. We are to worship the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, and soul, and reciprocate this to each other and our neighbor. We are to be in self-surrendered prayer and Bible studies. We are to be accountable to each other, and spend quality time with each other with kindness and not out of obligation. We are to know what our gifts are and be disciplined in them and use them to further the kingdom. And we need to get away from the attitude of what can the church do for me, and replace it with what I can do for the church, the body of Christ. Because we are the church. Then we will see the changes in attitude and the passion to know the Lord and make Him known will permeate the body of Christ with joy. Then we will have the right target in our sites and the correct trophies on our wall.

Our lives must reflect what we really believe in our heart. If I claim Christ as Lord, what I am saying is I truly believe in Christ, trust Him and obey Him. Then we will live

the kind of life that will be pleasing to Him! We will reflect His Character and pour out His love to all those around us. We will receive His grace and model that grace to others. When we do this simple essential Christian act we will demonstrate our gratitude and dedication to Christ and what He has done for us! Then we will see more people being added into His presence by our efforts. (II Corinthians 6:3).

Conflict is caused by our assumptions and will colliding with others assumptions and will is a fog of pride. It is like driving a car down a road you feel you own, so there will be no other cars on it and you can drive as you please as fast as you want. But coming in the opposite direction is another car driving in the same way and mindset coming right at you. Since both of your sights are clouded by the fog of pride you will not see the other coming until the collision wrecks your car and perhaps takes your life. This is what conflict is all about, pride, presumptions and will converging onto others pride, assumptions and will.

A question we must ask ourselves is what kind of ammunition are we using? **The ammunition for our conflicts.** Is it manufactured out of our expectations, hurts, and grievances, or has it been given to us from our Creator and Savior? Ammunition is the abilities we have and how we use them. It can be the words of encouragement that lifts up a hurting soul. Or it can be the gossip of slander that takes that hurting person and drop kicks them down another notch. We have the power to be the influencer who attracts people to the Lord or distracts them from God's purpose. The ammunition is ours to use and the guide for its use is found in Scripture, yet, too often we resort to our ways and thinking first and Scripture last.

One of my favorite sections in the Bible is I Corinthians 13. This passage reflects what true love really is, better than any Shakespeare sonnet or love story that could be told. If you ever wonder what love is, how to love, how to feel love, or even how to be in love, all you need to do is read this section of Scripture. One aspect of love that God is telling us in this passage is "*love...it keeps no record of wrongs*" (vs. 5). The picture of this passage is Christ Himself, how Christ would behave and how Christ desires us to be. This passage projects how we as Christians must live our lives. Despite the problems that we may face, or the cost we may suffer, we must ask ourselves if we are willing to conduct our behavior for God's glory. Because when we do seek to live a Holy life, we will be filled with the fullness of the Holy Spirit, He will encompass us, motivate us, and lead us; and from these learnings we will become mature and God will be able to use us more powerfully. Would it not be better to be in a healthy community of support and nurture, and be a dramatic witness; than to rely on our own evil nature, which will always cause trouble? Wouldn't this be wonderful, to have a life filled with purpose, following a better plan out of Christ's love for us? Yes, it will cost greatly. But this is the better way.

The Cost of Ammunition

What love does cost is our will, because the first thing that we must do with true love is sacrifice our strong-willed, self-centered selves. And focus ourselves on the person and work of Christ, and what He has done for us. Once we realize that life is about sacrifice and costs as much as it is about the experience of love and relationships, then we will have a better understanding of life and how to live. The Bible tells us that love keeps no record of wrongs, and that Christ keeps no record of our wrongs. When we become a Christian, saved by Grace, our sinful nature is covered and hidden. God is not up there writing it all down, if we have repented we're clean. So what happens when we go around church and society with a little notebook writing down every single record of wrongdoing and harboring them, escalating them, and milking them to all of their worth? They become the bullets of destruction we carefully craft and hone for our targets of opportunity. But those opportunities become mixed up and confused as we skew the targets from glorifying God and expanding His kingdom to satisfying our lust for power and revenge. How does this effect our love relationship with Christ? Is this how we are to live? Is this the right way to use ammunition?

What about the focus of how Christians must behave collectively, as a unified force, so that we can be more effective to the people around us.

Churches are crippled because members go around harboring that list of wrongs. These lists of wrongs turn into resentment that grows and grows until you have a church filled with people harboring resentment, all attacking one another. As if they are soldiers of war with their guns of truth loaded with bullets, where each bullet is a record of the wrong they may have received. When I was with the church growth-consulting firm, I heard many stories of how churches were brought down, and I have seen some of these horror stories firsthand. This is why one of the major characteristics of the dying church is that its members are left so hurt, and most of them justifiably so; they are unable to function effectively. These pains blind the members from the church's true mission, and why they are to be a church in the first place. There are numerous stories of churches going to secular court because the fighting has gotten so out of hand that the denominations throws up their hands and give up in disgust. When you trace these fights, you will find stupid, insignificant origins that mushroom out of control like a malignant cancer that started as a small microbe then spreading and corrupting the whole body, the body of Christ.

What God Expects

The book of Hebrews tells us, “*make every effort to live in peace with all man and to be Holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.*” (Hebrews 12:14-15)

God calls us to pursue peace with all people despite the temptations we may face, or the evil that is done to us. As Christians, it is our duty to live in peace with everyone, other Christians, and non-Christians! Our human nature is focused on ourselves, with that selfish and abrasive nature. But this is not the path that the

Christian experience should take. We are to exemplify the peace that passes all understanding, and this is the focus that needs to be communicated constantly to each Christian, by each Christian; and then to the rest of the world. The peace and harmony in our fellowship depends on us, the believers, and the witness that we represent is our responsibility; because the non-Christian depends on us for their source code.

Source code is the basic program language and files that run various computer programs. The source code for the non-Christian is the Christian, and our source code are the Scriptures; what flows out of our source code is to be Holy for God. Our goal and pursuit of the Christian life is not putting our confidence in feelings and expectations; but, substituting confidence in ourselves for who Christ is. Christ is pure and guides and desires us to be pure also. Christ is the Christian's source code and confidence for all of life's problems and adventures. The goal of our salvation is to grow in Christ and holiness, to be like Him and to mirror Christ to the world. Then our confidence is viewed by who we are in Christ, and this becomes our primary witness to each other and the world.

"No bitter root" means a person who spreads deception and disloyalty to God and His covenant with His people. Our root is designed to bear fruit. So what happens when we harbor bitterness is that we become corrupt and unable to bear fruit, or we bear very slowly, and not up to our full potential. These are stern warnings from the author of Hebrews; that we are not to be defiled by these corruption's. When the root of bitterness grows in a body of believers, it spreads like a disease and starts to corrupt each other's roots. Then the disease spreads into our community outside the church, and there goes our witness and call. So the warning is that we do not cause the trouble that bitterness stirs up; rather, we are to sustain our faith by holiness and by doing right by Christ, so we encourage and influence each other.

What we must realize is that the essence of keeping no record of wrong is to give up our right of retaliation. What we must do when love tells us not to keep a record of wrongs is just that. And when someone does something against us, even out of malice, we are to let it go! This goes against our human nature, and definitely goes against my personal feelings, but God does not want us to live our lives by our nature and feelings. He wants us to live our lives by Him alone. This is holiness, to be set apart for God so He can use us in a higher standard. We are to live differently, not be infused by the world's morality; and be an example to the standard of Christ. If we are not an example of Christ, then no one will see Christ. We cannot do the work of God unless we are the people of God. We must give up our right of revenge, and when we do this, the grievances that we store up within us disappear; the hurts and resentments vanish. And then the body of believers will grow, and will be encouraged, and we will model the truth of Christ to each other and to our neighbors!

The opposite of holding grievances is the attitude of faithfulness. We must realize that God has done great things for us, every day we should live our life as an example of our God's greatness to those around us. We can do this by being faithful to who Christ is because of what He's done for us. The great reformational slogans of Guilt,

Grace, and Gratitude must be a primary focus for the Christian. We all have sinned and fall short, way short, of God's Holy standards. Thus we are all guilty and deserve punishment and annihilation by God. We have no deserving attributes or worth to receive redemption. It's only because of God's great eternal love and grace, that He first loved us and by that we have been saved; to those who put their faith and trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who He has chosen. Out of the realization of our fallen nature and the realization of what Christ has done for us, we should be compelled to an attitude of gratitude. And that gratitude will nullify the grievances and bitterness.

We should walk our faith and model it to those around us with the attitude of being thankful even in the midst of stressful and bad situations. God expects more from the Christian, especially the more we know of Him. We should be grateful in service and worship to God; out of a periodic grateful attitude will come faithfulness, and out of that faithfulness will come an important witness to the non-Christian. We live in a world that shows so little faithfulness, and so little compassion and caring. Being consistent with compassion and listening is what faithfulness is.

If you're in a dire situation, you must realize the hope that lies ahead. Being thankful and grateful will allow you to go through it smoother and better prepared to handle life's extreme moments.

If you're in a situation where you are feeling wonderful and things are going great, you need to beware, and not allow your good fortune to become a substitute for God. We cannot rely on success, because if we do, we are relying on nothing. I have seen too many Christians who are successful both financially and/or socially, lose it all. Because God seemingly turned their prosperity into desolation. The reason is to teach them a lesson of humbleness and faithfulness. I have seen this in my own life by gaining financial security only to lose it all because I started trusting and relying on the wealth and not on my Lord.

We should strive to learn the lesson first, so we do not have to go through a bad situation. It's easier to have a mother tell you the stove is hot, and you should not touch it, but it is our human nature to touch, so we get burned. Hopefully as we mature and grow, we stop touching things we're not supposed to; such things as greed, hypocrisy, un-faithfulness, and ingratitude because out of these come worldliness, not holiness. The Christian's mandate is to be an adequate witness to the world; we must model a thankful and faithful lifestyle, and put away our pride and thoughts of retaliation, and do whatever it takes to dissolve our grievances with each other!

The Unwillingness to Forgive One Another

This section flows right on the heels of storing up resentment. Stubbornness is human nature, we don't like to admit we are wrong and when someone wrongs us we naturally don't want him or her to forget it. Having spent years working with teenagers, a week does not go by without at least one teen coming to me explaining what their friend did to them and how they can never forgive that person. I try my best to explain that

Christ asked us to forgive our enemies regardless of what they did to us because we can never match the debt that we owe Christ for what He forgave us for. So since Christ forgives us, it should naturally be our duty to forgive others. After that short explanation, I get all kinds of “but, but, but, you don't understand, but, why should I forgive him, he never admitted that he's wrong, I should only forgive someone if they admit that they're wrong.” I go on to explain that it's not our obligation or concern that they admit that they're wrong, they're accountable to the Lord for that, not us. It's just our duty to forgive whether we like it not.

Forgiveness can be tough, especially for a teenager. It takes discipline and maturity to admit that we're wrong, and it takes someone rooted in Christ, modeling what Christ did for us, to truly forgive. We must have a grasp of the magnitude of what Christ forgave us for; of what Christ did on the cross on our behalf. Then we must realize that there's nothing in all of creation that we can do to right the wrong of sin that separates us from God the Father. Only Christ's death on the cross bridged that gap for us. So because of the ultimate forgiveness that Christ gave us, it should be our tendency, and our natural inclination, to forgive others.

Ammunition for Battle: “Keeping a careful list of grievances”

Romans chapter 12 tells us: “*do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: “it is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. And the Lord will reward you.*” (Romans 12:19-20; Proverbs 25: 21-22)

As Christians, we must purge ourselves of the desire to get even with each other. We must release ourselves from the shackles of revenge, because as believers, God will right all of the wrongs and bring His perfect judgment. We must also realize we are always under the scrutiny of others; each other, and especially non-Christians. We must not betray the standards of holiness for a cheap pay back.

The Call is Clear

“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.” (Colossians 4:5)

This is practical wisdom that needs to be applied daily. Every situation we may face holds the opportunity to be a positive, tactful witness. We must take careful note that a church that does not practice forgiveness cannot function, and will fail. Its people will leave, visitors will stop coming and definitely will not return, and its people will wither away spiritually, and accomplish nothing for the Kingdom of God.

We are to live in order to attract, not repel, we are to impress, not depress. We are to accept and buy into God's call wholeheartedly with all of our will, thoughts, and actions. It can be that a Christian in China is persecuted for his faith, or the Littleton

Colorado tragedy of Cassie Barnard who lost her young life because she said yes to her belief in God, as her fellow student shot and killed her. Most likely our situation is that someone is gossiping and we are unable to realize the situation from God's perspective, and our call for us to forgive and move on. We must always see beyond our situation to the hope that Christ gives us. Our human nature will not avail when confronted with bitterness, but through Christ we will prevail.

Scripture commands us to be patient with the wrongdoer and show grace to them. Yes, forgiveness is hard because it denies our rights as perceived by being American. Forgiveness also may cost us greatly and may even ruin our reputation to our peers. Forgiveness is not looking the other way when a wrong is being committed. Forgiveness is not winking at sin. Forgiveness is not a license to do evil, nor is forgiveness just being polite and tactful. When someone steals something from you, you are to forgive the person who stole it; but it doesn't nullify the law that was broken or the restitution that needs to be made.

The goal of forgiveness is overcoming the evil with good, and surrendering our rights of getting even over to God, because He is sovereign and vengeance belongs to Him. When we do this, it frees us out of the trap of shame and guilt, which burns like those heaps of coals. Because to the world's thinking they expect us to get revenge, and when we do not, then their own actions can turn against them. I had a fellow student in Junior High School who teased me relentlessly for years, to the point that I would get in fights with him. At the start of High School, I decided not to let him bother me, but rather be nice to him; advice from my pastor. So he started his teasing, and I retaliated with kindness, and soon we became friends. It was a tough lesson for me to learn and do, but it worked out better than my own plan of vengeance would have. The passage ends with the pronouncement that the Lord will reward you. And my reward was a friend who was once my enemy.

This subject is paramount in the life of a healthy church. We cannot be adequately used by God to further His kingdom, unless we learn what forgiveness is all about. We need to take the responsibility to live in peace, and take the responsibility to resolve the conflicts that come up to destroy the church. We may not be able to personally resolve it, but we can refuse to participate in its continuance and spread. God wants us to be the peacemakers, as the Sermon on the Mount urges us to do. Yes people will take advantage of you, but that too can be a witness, our call is clear, are you able and willing? Forgiveness as Christ forgave, is true forgiveness; that is how we are urged to forgive each other.

Chapter V Understanding Forgiveness

The Call of Forgiveness, is just that; it requires maturity, patience and tact. Forgiveness is also a mandate from our Lord. As a human being, we are prone to make mistakes, either intentional or unintentional. We all have hurt people or have been hurt; we are all in the same boat, so when we refuse to forgive it is like escaping a sinking ship in a lifeboat only to poke holes in it. Our escape from the sinking ship is our undeserved redemption. Everyone else in the lifeboat needs that lifeboat too, so why try to sink each other, if all we will accomplish is to sink ourselves. Refusing to forgive will cause bitterness, and bitterness focuses the situation onto ourselves and takes it away from God. Bitterness takes what belongs to God, which is the situation that caused the bitterness and places it where it must not go, and that is us! It is the refusal to trust and obey God!

Out of these mistakes come hurt and resentment; it is the call of the Christian to dispel these conflicts in order to be living in Christ with growth and maturity. We may suffer betrayal from friends, parents, church members, or coworkers. And we are called to forgive! Why? Because we need it! Because we are imperfect and fallen and full of sin. Even the Christian who is saved by grace is still in the process of growth and sanctification, thus is still imperfect, no matter what the level of maturity. Because God has forgiven us. If we don't, the resentment will build and build like battery acid that slowly eats away your car unless you fix it, until it destroys us. Even psychologists tell us that resentment is the most powerful self-destructive emotion in our arsenal.

God wants us to seek forgiveness because He is a God of relationships and committed to them. God knows our human weakness, our self-destructive nature, and that our relationships tend to be fragile. Broken relationships come out of our sinful nature, and our fallen world, which seeks itself over others. God's desire is to show the world our potential, because of what Christ has done for us. We should not take pleasure in destructive situations, which divide and draw relationships apart. Relationships are what life is all about. Satan's desire is to destroy relationships as he first attempted in the Garden of Eden, nearly defeating our relationship with God and each other. God's plan is to prove Satan wrong, and our call is to build each other up and not destroy each other.

The Betrayal

When we have been wronged, we have feelings of betrayal, and feel justified in our retaliation. God calls us out of retaliation and into reconciliation. When we fail to forgive, we ourselves suffer the most. Anger, resentment, shame, and bitterness build on top of one another so every aspect within us is held hostage with these emotions. Do not allow the bitterness to continue so that it festers and corrupts our whole being. The bitterness must not take hold of our lives, or it will block out the flow of the Holy Spirit and loving self-control. Or the festering will continue to the point that Christ cries out to us in the wilderness; yet we do not hear Him.

Our Lord is alerting us to the perils of un-forgiveness, as battleship's alarm warns its crew of impending danger. Our emotions will run away from us, and we will no longer have control or composure over who we are to Christ. Thus the anger no longer belongs to us, because it has been given over to Satan and our uncontrolled emotions (Matthew 18:21-35).

This passage in Matthew 18:21-35 is a story of a forgiving king and a wicked servant. The king forgave this servant's enormous debt, which is parallel to our enormous debt of sin that we have held until Christ forgave us. This servant represents the believer who, after the forgiveness of God, harbors bitterness to another and refuses to forgive their fellow Christian or non-Christian for the much, much smaller debt. So the king became furious and handed the servant over to be tortured. The Bible tells us that if we refuse to forgive each other, and harbor bitterness, we can be tortured too. My personal experience is when I have refused to forgive people in the past, I've become consumed by guilt and shame, and this is the torture I can do without. I feel much better and sleep much better with the attitude of forgiveness, I cannot think well and sleep well with the attitude of bitterness. Why would the Christian want to go through life with feelings of bitterness, that consume him with misery and unrest, instead of giving it to the Lord, with forgiveness and rest.

When we have the knowledge of God's mercy, then we have the responsibility of acting in mercy with each other. God calls Christians to operate in the parameters of forgiveness, love, and mercy. When we haven't been forgiving, we will have hearts filled with suffering and torment. How can we receive Christ's forgiveness and claim Christ as our Savior when we are unable to forgive each other? When we have a forgiving attitude, then we will have a heart at rest and in peace! When we have a forgiving attitude, we will have a worshipping attitude, because worship cannot occupy the same heart that has bitterness, there is simply no room for both!

What Forgiveness Looks Like

Taking our primary lead from Matthew 18 and various other Scriptures, we can see what God requires of us, and our response regarding the different categories of forgiveness.

Ephesians tells us, *“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”* (Ephesians 4:29-32)

We Christians must extend ourselves to other people with love. What flows out of love is forgiveness.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)

This should be clear to us. A healthy Christian is one who puts aside the malicious traits of our evil, sinful nature. Instead the Christian will model kindness, love, caring, compassion; out of these flow forgiveness. God wants us to get with it, to wake up and seize the opportunities He gives us.

Ask yourself this question; how do you handle forgiveness? How you respond when others forgive you? What do you do with opportunities that our Lord has for you? We must realize the generosity of grace, and being in Christ, that we do not deserve. Our Lord does not want us to forgive begrudgingly, because He did not forgive us with conditions and strings attached.

A Christian who does not forgive is like a small child who refuses to share a ball that they received as a gift. Thus the child will not be able to play with that ball as it is intended. That child will not be using the ball to its full potential. When the Christian does not forgive, our relationships are distorted, like a child not able to play a game because he refuses to share. And we are unable to "play," as being in relationships with others. We just end up cheating ourselves out of our potential and the best plan that Christ has for us.

First: Forgiveness is Hard

Isaiah tells us, *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."* (Isaiah 55:8-9)

True forgiveness is one of the hardest things to do in the human experience, this is still true to the mature Christian, yet this is our mandate and call. Forgiveness is hard because it demands a surrender of our rights to get even. Forgiveness even demands suffering from the person who was wronged and was the victim, where the suffering from our human perspective and reasoning should belong to the instigator of the wrong. Forgiveness is hard because we can easily avoid it, we can walk the other way in revenge and be just in the eyes of our friends and relatives, and especially society. We can receive some kind of medal for coming up with a good scheme of revenge. To get revenge on others is appealing; we feel others deserve our punishment and revenge. This appeals to our human nature, but God does not want us to rely on our human nature, but to rely on Him.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." This tells us that our way of thinking is wrong. If God is the creator of all things, including

truth, and He is all knowing and all-powerful, then His ways are better than ours. We may not be able to recognize it, because our perspective is limited as is our knowledge and insight. God is governed by righteousness, where we are driven by desires. God has a moral virtuous purpose, and our purpose is self-seeking. God's primary purpose in our lives is to bring us out of our self-destructive and self-seeking nature into the reclamation to Himself, this is the work of Christ. God's thoughts are beyond our comprehension and imagination, therefore we should trust and rely on Him, and not on ourselves.

Second: Forgiveness is Complete

Colossians tells us, *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."* (Colossians 3:12-14)

"The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt, and let him go." Forgiveness is actually canceling a debt. Just as someone owes you a \$1000, and he or she cannot pay you back, and you forgive the debt, so you do not expect to receive the money ever again. So the amount that is owed to us is no longer owed or expected. We give up our right to seek the repayment of that debt. Forgiveness is bankruptcy, once filed, the creditor may not retrieve the debt, it is wiped out. We need to see the cancellation of the debt as a write-off and not some form of embezzlement. When we forgive, we forget; we no longer have the desire for restitution or punishment.

A man at a church where I was on staff forgave an instance that I admire greatly, because I do not think I could ever do the same; yet with Christ I should. His wife was murdered indiscriminately, by a drive-by shooting in the Pasadena area; she died in his arms. He realized that for him to go on with his life and faith he needed to forgive that person, and he did. He did not tell the police to release him; forgiveness is not necessarily a release of the obligation, especially when a crime is committed. Rather we as Christians are released from our personal desire for retribution. This form of forgiveness even prevents us from the polite sly remarks and glances, our revenge is repudiated.

Forgiveness is so rare in our society, that it becomes such a powerful witnessing tool, it must be complete. Forgiveness does not make light of the wrong nor should it give a license for others to take advantage of us, though they may. Out of the completeness of forgiveness will come the forgetting. If we just try to forget and agonize over it then we will get nowhere, but through the process of surrender will come the forgetting. Forgetting is a process and we cannot expect it to come right away. Be patient and let the process unfold and embrace the forgiveness that Christ has given us.

Third: Forgiveness is Costly

Luke tells us, *“But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.”* (Luke 6:27-31)

When we forgive, we may incur a cost and we should realize and welcome it. This goes against our inclination and will, but remember that vengeance belongs to the Lord. When we forgive, we will be refocusing our plan into God’s plan and His ways. We need to base it not on our feelings and desires, but focus on what forgiveness is, as Christ gave us, as He was our example. John 3:16 is the example of what forgiveness cost our Lord. His undeserved, painful death and separation from the Father was a substitution for what we deserved. This was our Lord’s suffering and cost. For us, the cost will be minimal in comparison, and we need to keep this in mind as our strength to get through it. Our cost is to live with the consequence of the evil that was brought on us. We then take the responsibility of the hurt brought on to us.

Understandably this is hard for the mature Christian, and virtually impossible for the non-Christian, since it goes against the common sense of society; because the one who did the wrong should be suffering. Yet this is a beacon witness to the supremacy of Christ. This form of suffering we can normally avoid, but are called not to. We need to accept the consequences of the wrong, just as the parent forgives a child for breaking a priceless object. The parent bears the cost to replace it or suffers without it, and the child gets off free, (well, with some sort of punishment), this is the cost of suffering. For the case of the man who lost his wife to murder, his suffering is not being with his wife any more. Forgiveness chooses to suffer, it is very hard to make the volunteer choice that we do take on the suffering, even when we do not deserve it; yet we must make it to grow in our walk with our Lord and in our full potential.

Humanity owes a great deal to the Creator of the universe, and our willful disobedience to our Creator is a slap in His face. A debt we could never conceive of or repay. Yet most people live their life as an insult to what Christ has done, and Christ still pursues with ultimate love. Christ did not owe our debt, yet He paid it! Christ was our substitute for our deserving punishment, so is forgiveness. Forgiveness is substitutional too, since it requires a penalty to be paid, and that penalty is paid by the victim. This is the shadow of what Christ had done. We may not understand the mystery behind this, but we can trust in our Lord who will carry us through it. The relation of what Christ went through for us to be forgiven, and the call for us to take on the responsibility of the sin even though we did not do the sin, will give us a deeper understanding into the character and nature of God. From this we should mature to a deeper level and be used in a greater way to further the cause of Christ. When we respond to the evil with good and thus took the evil on to ourselves. Just as our Lord did. Then the result will be that Satan is defeated from the prize and his reward. This is why the cost brought on our Lord is the greatest cost of all. We need to realize this and respond accordingly to one another.

Fourth: Forgiveness Pursues

Hosea tells us, *“Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.”*(Hosea 2:14-15)

There is possibly nothing greater and more dramatic to a Christian, in regard to God’s character, than His capacity to forgive! The Christian has the obligation to actually pursue forgiveness. Forgiveness will end the vicious cycle of revenge and pay back. We may think it is not worth it, but God says otherwise. We may think it is unfair, but was it fair for our Lord to go to the cross? This may go against our pride, but this is what we are called to do. God expects us to actually go after and woo the forgiveness from the person we offend or the person who offends us. That is we are to offer it freely as I tried to with that elder I offended, even when we are not in the wrong. And out of our pursuit of forgiveness will come better relationships and reconciliation.

The typical response from society is “I could care less” or “up yours,” these are expressions of hurt, even though they verbally say otherwise. They do not see the cost that the Lord paid for them, so they are unwilling to respond to the gift of grace. Christ pursues them, and all they have to do is respond to His call. To the world, their desire is to tell the person off and seek revenge; to see this watch the daytime talk shows. As Christians, we should see the cost as our Lord did and respond as He did!

Fifth: Forgiveness is Continual

Luke tells us, *“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, I repent, forgive him.”* (Luke 17:3b-4)

Some translations say *“seventy times seven.”* In the Hebrew, 70 times 7 means infinity, not 490, because this has a limit. There is no point to Christ that our accumulation of sins becomes unforgivable. So our response is to forgive others, as there is no cap or limit or expiration to forgive. Neither the intensity nor the number of wrongs should have an impact on us as followers of Christ. If we were to place a limit, then our effect of building relationships would have a chain attached to it, and with a limit you cannot grow. We must have the realization, capacity, and understanding of how much we have been forgiven by Christ in order to forgive each other; this is crucial to the Christian experience.

God’s forgiveness is not some cheap markdown or bargain, His cost was immeasurable. Paul in Colossians 3:13 tells us to forgive freely, as Christ has forgiven us. We must be willing to forgive as Christ has forgiven us. We are to bear the cost just as our Lord did, forgiveness demands a substitution. So how could we ever back away from forgiving each other; if we do, it is a bigger insult to our Lord than for the non-

Christian to turn their backs on His grace; because we know better. We are to keep at it! Knowledge brings responsibility.

Sixth: What Forgiveness is Not

II Timothy tells us, *“Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.”* (II Timothy 4:14-15)

We know why we must forgive, so the question is, what must we forgive? I do not believe we need to forgive trivialities. Because forgiveness is not trivial, its cost is high. So things like typos and minor mistakes should not call us to forgive. And the person who was offended by an honest mistake, such as their name being misspelled in the church bulletin, should not expect forgiveness, because it was an honest, unintentional mistake with no malice intended.

Forgiveness does not minimize the offense. The offense does not need to be accepted, only the person who committed the offense is to be embraced. Forgiveness is not the approval of the wrong; it only offers the grace of love rather than vengeance. Forgiveness will not bring us to a level of trust, that we have not had before. Such as, if a spouse cheats on you, you are called to forgive and reconcile, but that trust will be eroded, and will take time to rebuild. Just forgiving the offender will not bring instant restitution of the relationship; perhaps the relationship will be severed completely. Such as a business partner who embezzles and caused you to lose the business, you are to forgive that person, as we previously discussed, but this does not mean you will enter into a new business relationship with that person again. Forgiveness is directed to people, not causes or institutions. Forgiveness will not erase the past. As that man who lost his wife, she will not be brought back to life; he will suffer greatly in her absence until they meet again in heaven. We are to forget the past so the resentment will not build up, but we need to realize the event will not be undone.

“Not just human fairness but excusing those things that could not be excused.”
(C.S. Lewis)

When we do not forgive, we will walk a path of self distraction, brought on by the build- up of resentment, and the unfulfilling nature of revenge. Nothing will wither our soul more than storing up this disease of unforgiveness. Because pride and arrogance will take over you, control you, and ruin you. The Chinese proverb says, first, before seeking revenge you must dig two graves. The cost and pain of forgiveness, even though we may be the victims, will be far easier than the path of not seeking forgiveness. Job 5:2 tells us, *“Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple.”* The goal of forgiveness is allowing Christ to transform us to our full potential. Because we may go through bad times in life that are not a personal attack but rather a strengthening of our character so we can be better used by our Lord. Christ has defeated Satan, so the sins we incur are turned around to His glory. Forgiveness will refocus God’s plan into our plan. So our sufferings will not be in vain, but can be turned

around to further the Kingdom of God. Then the joy and happiness of who we are in Christ will bubble over the pain and hurt.

Read this passage in Romans 8:28-39

When you feel compassion for the person who wronged you, then you can be assured you truly did forgive them. Let these Scriptures impact and change you to the core of your being, and let the power of prayer be your focus and the Scripture your heartbeat. Our standard is not the world's, but God's. We would not want to go through life in misery and bitterness with memories of who wronged us, harboring grudges and unhappiness. This is not the plan that Christ has for us! Bitter people have no impact on the Kingdom of God except division and distraction. They have the tenacity and drive to show everyone the hurts and wrongs they suffered, do not let this happen to you or those around you. Take your lead from this verse and not your inclinations,

“When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:23-24)

God does not ask us to minimize the wrong, but He does call us to forgive the person. We are not to repay evil for evil, rather evil for good; just as our Lord did for us.

The Biblical Steps of Forgiveness

Now that we have discussed the why and what of forgiveness, we need a practical way to apply it to our lives. Remember we need to have the Biblical mandates in mind, and be willing to surrender our desires for revenge and storage of the wrongs for future bitterness.

First: Know what Christ did for You

Romans tells us, *“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:22-24)*

For us to grasp the idea and call of forgiveness, we must have the deep sense of the price that Christ paid for us. Christ paid the ultimate price for us, and forgave us for acts that are unpardonable. When we have grasped what Christ has done for us, then it should motivate us in overdrive to be always seeking forgiveness. When we have the proper perspective of grace and what it cost and what it is, we should be enabled to reciprocate to others. God forgave us for our failures, so why not forgive others too? This realization must proceed any of our efforts to reconcile, because by knowing what and why we are forgiving we can follow the will of God, and actually forgive with a willing

and loving heart. We are not to let our emotions rule us or over-react and make the situation worse.

By having the understanding of what Christ did for us by forgiving our sins, it will allow us to put a bigger piece of trust and reliance in our Lord. We must be able to fully trust, rely, and surrender our control over to Christ. Thus our dependence is who we are in Christ, thus when we take the risk, we need not worry about the consequence of that action. We are to lean and trust in our Lord and allow His grace to flow through us to those around us, this is the mark of a healthy Christian.

Second: We must be willing to take the Risk

“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord.” (Romans 12:19)

“But a witless man can no more become wise than a wild donkey's colt can be born a man. Yet if you devote your heart to him and stretch out your hands to him, if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, then you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear.” (Job 11:12-14)

Forgiveness is a risky business. The person we forgive may not realize or admit to the wrong. Nor will they always accept our forgiveness. But their response is not our responsibility, we are only to be obedient to our Lord and forgive out of love, and not expect a warm response. The elder who refused to forgive me for a perceived wrong is responsible for his actions to the Lord, I'm not. I'm responsible for my response. So I sought the forgiveness and he refused, that is the risk we take. Also the person who we forgive may continue in the offense, such as the elder who kept spreading rumors about me. He refused to stop, but again this is not my responsibility. We are to allow the freedom to others to disappoint us and fail our expectations.

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this Godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. So even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong or of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. By all this we are encouraged.” (II Corinthians 7:11)

We need to be willing to put aside our fears that forgiveness minimizes the wrong brought against us. Sin is ugly and we should recognize that, and it's corrupting nature. But just forgiving someone does not make the sin go away. What forgiveness does is release the guilt.

Third: We need to Cancel the Betrayal

“Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs. He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.”
(Proverbs 10:12; 17:9)

We have to give up our perceived right of revenge and retaliation. This can be a tough process, but one we can accomplish through prayer and self surrender. Try to look at it this way; the offense against you is actually an offense against God. As God’s child, you are in His protection and care. When someone offends you, it then is also an offense against God himself. Thus we are to surrender our rights to revenge, and cancel the debt. Give it over as if it never happened. You will be surprised once you do this; you will feel the load lift off you and rest in the comfort of the Lord.

When you pray to God, actually request that He take the desire of revenge away, and relinquish your desires for revenge.

Fourth: We need to offer Personal Forgiveness

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:21)

We must be willing to go to the person who offended us, and verbally and non-verbally forgive them. And then seek the appropriate reconciliation to that individual. Offer the love and acceptance to the person, not necessarily for what they did. God desires us to be in growing, positive, and healthy relationships, as one of the primary purposes of our existence. This should be a driving force of who we are as a Christian, saved by grace. It is the responsibility of the person who did the wrong to repent, not the person offended, you cannot force repentance from someone, you can only pray for him or her and offer forgiveness. The relationship can only positively continue when repentance and forgiveness is pursued.

If the offender refuses to repent or refuses to accept forgiveness, then this means their nature is in denial, that they feel no wrong was committed or they see you as trying to manipulate their will. They may be a sociopath and may enjoy inflicting hurt and hardship on people. In any case it is not your problem. You are not responsible for their acceptance, our responsibility is only to genuinely present forgiveness. We need to accept the fact of human nature that some people just will not play ball God’s way, especially Christians. So if this is the case, your forgiveness is between you and Christ, as it is anyway, because we are God’s children.

“The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” (I Peter 4:7-8)

Fifth: We need to recognize what the result of Forgiveness looks like

The result of forgiveness is letting it go and wishing blessings and compassion to the person who wronged you. Repentance simply means Biblically to change ones

perspective. That is to turn from our way of thinking to God's way; to change our minds and hearts away from our desires to Christ's desires. When we do this, then we truly have forgiven that person. By leaving out any of the above steps, and only forcing your will onto the situation, you are deluding yourself into thinking that you have forgiven; you have not. Its not about us, it is about God, and His desire for us to live in peace and love.

We always need to remind ourselves of our status in Christ, as we previously discussed, as paramount to continuing to go on in our lives without the hurt and bitterness.

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

This does not mean that we will not feel the pain, or perhaps suffer the consequence from someone else's actions. What it means is we are saved by grace by what Christ has done, so we need to reciprocate grace and peace to those around us, even though we may not like it.

"This is what the LORD says: Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the LORD." (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

We need to keep ourselves tuned into God constantly and continually allow Him to carry us through.

If you are the offender

If you are the person who hurt someone, and that person is unwilling to forgive you, it's up to you to make it right. You may not receive that person's forgiveness, but that is between them and God, and not you. You need to go through the steps of forgiveness, but with the emphasis to earnestly repent and give restitution. Then you need to go to the person, which you may do first. You need to confess openly and publicly before the person you offended. Then do not rationalize what you did, or minimize it in anyway. Then go to Christ humbly and repent, which means you make a commitment to change your heart, mind, and actions.

If going to the person is impossible because of distance, death, or restraining order, then we need to totally rely on God. Take your lead from II Corinthians 7:8-11, allow Christ to be your mediator, and know you are not off the hook for truly seeking repentance.

When we refuse to forgive or refuse to repent, then we are concealing ourselves from God and His best for us. And we rationalize the reality of the infection of sin, and its destructive nature to our being, and to those around us. We create a wall to shut

ourselves off from God and each other. In so doing, we turn on ourselves with the consequence of our action or inaction and then we receive no reprieve or comfort. We then suffer from guilt and bitterness as our personal lives dissolve and our impact on the community becomes a hindrance instead of a blessing. Take a serious look at Psalm 32, meditate over it carefully, and then surrender yourselves over to the love of Christ. Allow the sin to be forgiven and released. Be courageous to seek out forgiveness, public confession, and reconciliation. Allow yourself to grow and mature to the best whole person that Christ has for you. There is simply no better way. This is liberation and true comfort:

Read Psalm 32

Chapter VI Understanding the Love of Christ

“Modeling the attitude of our Lord”

If you have not figured it out yet, you'll soon realize that each of these “forgotten opportunities” or “diseases” that our churches produce have a nasty habit of compiling synergistically. That is they build on top of each other. If you go to school playgrounds and watch kids play, you will see how much energy the average child puts into tearing their friends down with sly remarks and put downs. I am not a child psychologist, but my observations in working with youth for many years is that youth get this from their parents mostly, because they are being put down at home and so naturally reciprocate by putting each other down. This grows into adulthood and we have a tendency of first tearing each other apart, when God calls us to put each other together.

It is just like sin; when we do something wrong against God, it not only affects us, the individual, but it also affects everyone around us. Sin effects family, friends, and the body of Christ; even God Himself (who is hurt by this sin, because God is Holy and His character and who He is remains un-affected). Each one of these diseases build into each other just as cancer will start with a single cell that builds on itself, then that cell mutates until it starts spreading into the whole system and malignancy occurs when the spread is not reversible and soon effects the entire body. The body of Christ, the people who claim Jesus as Lord, are to be in fellowship together.

First Corinthians 13 states: *“ If I speak in the tongues of man and of Angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift or prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”* (1 Corinthians 13:1-8)

What Love is

This passage is our template of how we must behave towards one another. We can do our best at preaching the gospel with power and conviction, and have a church filled with wonderful programs and staffed with gifted people. We can be in a magnificent cathedral reaching upwards and manifesting and pointing to the glory of God; but, if we're doing it for ourselves and not out of love, we then accomplished nothing. We become just an annoying noise to our neighbors who we are called to reach.

The proper use of our abilities and gifts as a Christian is always within the parameters of love. When a computer is programmed, the program runs because the

language has instructed what the program is to do. Within this language of computers there are parameters, which tell the program what it can and can't do. Thus the program can only operate within its own guidelines, parameters. We must look at this passage as our parameter, as our guideline on how we must execute the gifts and exercise the passion and proclaim the truth.

What Love Means

This passage tells us the way of our Christian life and walk. As Christians, we imitate Christ, and work within His parameters of love. This passage is a character description of Christ, and must also be our character description of how we act and behave responsibly.

When God tells us that love is patient, He means we are to give others room to grow, and time to accomplish the work that God is doing in them. When someone is abrupt with us or someone treats us wrongly, we are called be patient, because we cannot have everything our way all the time, right now. We cannot allow ourselves to become angry when others fail our expectations. Because God is patient with us and loves us; we are to show patience with others. We need to be content and not become angry, for this is love: love never gives up.

When God tells us that love is kind, He means we are to look for the best in other people. We need to spend our energies and time encouraging and building up each other, not tearing them down. You see God takes our circumstances of life and builds them in a constructive way for personal growth and for the better, and then we can use the love toward each other. God is not treating us as an object to be manipulated and controlled because He has given us free will, so we should do the same with each other. Therefore we always need to be seeking the healing of relationships, and be cautious in our judgments toward others. Love cares more about others than it does for ourselves.

When God tells us that love does not envy, He means we need to be happy about who we are. When we hear that a friend receives a promotion before we do, we are to be happy for them. If we have a sibling who excels more than us, we should be happy with them. If our neighbor has a brand-new car, we should be happy for him, and be thankful for the old wreck that we drive. We are to be happy for someone else who has something we don't have, even if we don't like it. We do not become possessive and control freaks, especially in other peoples' situations, and our relationships. Being possessive and controlling of others will destroy a church very quickly, or at the very least neuter its effectiveness. Love does not desire that which it does not have.

When God tells us that love does not boast, He means we are not to go around bragging about our accomplishments and abilities. We are not to go around showing off our possessions, and being condescending to those who do not have such things. We are not to be so full of our accomplishments that we fail to see what others have

accomplished too. Because God loves us so much, we should have no need to impress each other, but allow God to impress us with His greatness because He is God and we are not. We can relax and enjoy who we are in Christ, that we do not have to be in control, or be the life of the party to feel secure. **Love does not strut around.**

When God tells us that love is not proud, He means we must be willing to be in relationships with all kinds of people, especially those outside our perceived culture and race. We do not let our fears hold us back from one of life's most precious gifts: friendship. Not being proud means that when we make a mistake, we own up to it and admit that we are wrong even when we feel we are not. Because God loves us, He is on our side, and wants us to grow and mature in His love. We do not have to have an inflated ego about the perceived importance of ourselves. We need to seek others first and their well being, and not our arrogance and egocentric mentality. **Love does not parade itself.**

When God tells us that love is not rude, He means that we treat others with the respect and dignity that we would like in return. Because God loves us, He sent his Son to cover us and protect us from His wrath, thus when we make the mistakes that we do, even the big mistakes, we are not zapped by lightning bolts. So in return, we should not go around zapping others with evil looks and condescending comments, thinking that we are high and mighty, and better than everyone else. Never think of yourself as the capstone and the most important piece of the puzzle, because you're not. We should be grateful that God uses us, and our goal is to work together; and not be little dictators. **Love does not force itself.**

When God tells us that love is not self-seeking, He means that we place others first and not ourselves. We are to be considerate and appreciative, not critical, and dignified as good manners would dictate to one another. Because God loves us so much, He did not have a self-seeking attitude, for if He did, He would never have sent His Son on our behalf. Every Christian must respect the rights and dignity of other people and never force our will and thoughtless behaviors on others. We need to be happy when others around us experience success and growth, and never be jealous. **Love does not have a "me first" attitude.**

When God tells us that love is not easily angered, He means just that, we are to be very slow to get angry, and we do not let little things cause us to fly off the handle. Because God loves us so much, He did not allow His anger to wipe us out of existence when we deserved it, instead He allowed His drama of redemption to unfold throughout history climaxing with Christ. We need to try to understand other people, and place ourselves in each other's shoes respectfully. We need to listen and not allow our hostile feelings to get the best of us. Since God is patiently working in us; we should reciprocate with the understanding of the debt we have to God and the unfathomable love and concern He has for us. **Love is not touchy and resentful and does not fly off the handle.**

When God tells us that love keeps no record of wrongs, He means we do not go around with a list writing down the faults of each other. Rather we are to look for the positive things that happen in our relationships and affirm people. We do not go around with a negative attitude; but with one that is positive and equipping to God's people. Because God loves us so much, He does not keep a scorecard of our sins as long as we honestly repent from them. We do not need to reflect and gossip about the flaws of other people so as to elevate ourselves, when God refuses to do it to us. Love does not keep a scorecard.

When God tells us that love does not delight in evil, He means we do not enjoy it when bad things happen to others. Not only do we not enjoy doing bad things to each other, but we refuse to allow evil to happen. We should feel bad when we see others being hurt. Compassion is one of God's great characteristics, and we should strive our fullest to model it to each other. Because God loves us so much, He is deeply grieved when we do not follow His example and His will. We are not to put others down to make us feel good about ourselves. Love does not delight in evil.

When God tells us that love rejoices in truth, He means when we see injustice corrected, and people treating others with respect, kindness, and honesty, we should feel wonderful. Because God loves us so much, we should live our lives so that it reflects a God of truth and justice. Thus, we should find delight when we see justice being played out in others. As Christians, we should get excited when justice prevails, and we should be mad and do something when injustice occurs and peoples rights being violated. We should realize how much God rejoices when we personally stand up to the pressures of life and prevail with integrity and truth. Love takes pleasure in truth.

When God tells us that love always protects, He means we should feel protected and in return protect those around us. This does not mean we become security guards, it means our actions and attitudes are such that they project protection, and not destruction. Because God loves us so much, He does not forsake us, even though others may. People will always disappoint us, and we will always be disappointing to those around us, but God will never disappoint us. Love perseveres, and is the easier route than running off and abandoning our relationship. We should realize how much God grieves when we fail to walk the life of His path, when we do not trust His protection. Love is always on the lookout and has staying power.

When God tells us that love always hopes, then we should be assured He will give us a future. We should be assured that when things are going bad, they will always get better, that there is hope because our circumstances will always change. We should never lose hope. Because God loves us so much, He always has hope for us. God is patiently working in us, and when we understand what God has truly done for us, then we should have as much hope as we could ever need. We should see the potential in other people, what they can accomplish and become, and not hold them back out of our jealousy. Love always is enduring and points to the future.

When God tells us that love always perseveres, He means for us to hang in there and keep going strong. Because God loves us so much, He will stand with us, and even carry us through our difficulties and strife. Even when we feel we reached rock bottom and have no hope, and are filled with despair, God is carrying us, because He loves us. This is the love that will destroy rumors and gossip and cause us to believe the best about each other until proven otherwise by facts. Love refuses to quit.

Practical Love

One of the big signs of an unhealthy church is when the teaching centers on one aspect of truth or one aspect of love, but the two are not taught together as the Bible calls us to. Some churches center around preaching the truth, and do a very good job of it, but they do not have love to balance it out. Some churches do not teach any truth but are filled with compassion and care. These churches are not modeling the characteristics of God: that God is a God of justice; but also mercy; the God of law is also a God of grace. We must have a healthy balance of the truth of God's Word and the love of our actions, without this balance the church becomes one-sided and ineffective.

There is a large church in Southern California with a great pastor who I admire very much. I attended this church many times and have had friends that have been on staff at this church. But this church has a fatal flaw, it is legalistic. Even though their teaching is correct and "hits the nail on the head," so to speak, it is not practicing the love of Christ, thus many people leave hurt and disillusioned because nobody cared for them there.

The other extreme is another large church in Southern California that has very poor teaching; I would go so far as to label that church a cult, theologically speaking. About 10 years ago, I interviewed there to be a youth pastor, and I was appalled by the questions the senior pastor was asking, and how he was ridiculing me because of my views that Christ was God and Lord. But to be honest, this was a very loving and caring church. I felt very comfortable there, and the people were wonderful, open, and accepting; characteristics that all Christians should have, but there was no truth being taught there.

We cannot be so concerned about offending people that we never give the truth, and we should never give the truth without the balance of love. Too many pastors want to be known as great communicators of love, or to be known as great communicators of truth. God calls us to proclaim truth and love. If your church emphasizes love and never speaks of truth, it will collapse, and if your church just teaches the truth without the companionship of love, then it will become legalistic. If there's one thing a non-Christian cannot stand besides hypocrisy and gossip - legalism! You will never reach your community for Christ with a legalistic attitude. Don't get me wrong, we are never to confuse legalism as correct theological teaching. Nor are we to compromise the gospel, absolutely not! We are to have a high view of Scripture and communicate God's Word

with truth and conviction. What we do not do is boil God's truth down to a list of “do's and don'ts.” What we are to do is live out God's love and God's grace, for this communicates the characteristics of Christ more powerfully than a how-to-list.

This is God's plan because God loves us, so we must follow the principles of Scripture as being lived out in our lives. Out of love, nurture and care, and not out of rules, regulations and hatred. Yes, we have a God of law as revealed to us throughout Scripture, especially in the Old Testament, and we are under a code, a covenant, a contract, and we need to communicate this effectively within the parameters of love. When we do this, Christianity becomes a big pill that can be swallowed and not a bad medicine to be avoided.

God's Word tells us, *“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supported ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”* (Ephesians 4:15-16)

The solution is simple, to follow God's Word, we need to take God's lead and do what He requires with truth, and do it with love, otherwise, you build yourself a house of cards that will soon fall. The aspects of love and the gifts that God gives us are not for our own private benefit, they are designed to be shared with one another. God has not called us to be in isolation from each other, but has called us to be in relationship to each other. And the driving force of our relationships is the love that passes all understanding that Christ gives to us, because He is the head; thus, we are to take that love and let it infect those around us. The Christ-affected Christian will model Christ and teach the truth in their actions, words, and deeds, because Christ first loved us.

God's Love is our Model

God's love must be our model for life. It must flow into us by who Christ is, and in return flow out of us to those around us. God's love is the ultimate power for the Christian. We are to be fueled and empowered by love through all situations. Because Christian love is the turning of our backs on our self-concerns, and then facing forward to our neighbors. If love does not take you beyond your self-interest, then what you have is lust and not love! Love is a principal, an action over against any emotion. Love is a choice, a lifestyle, a commitment, and a trust, love is not a fuzzy feeling in our tummy. Out of true love, God the Father gave us His Son, the Son gave us His life in replacement of our own. The Son sent the Spirit to save us, and we should be literally overwhelmed, and be consumed with extreme joy by what God has done for us.

The Bible tells us in Mark, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Mark 12:30-32)

There is no commandment greater than these. Love must unveil our true gratitude and faithfulness to what Christ has done, and in turn let that gratitude flows to

our friends, family, and neighbors. The mark of the Christian life is love, the love that Christ gave us and should be overflowing in us so that it overflows to those around us. The task of love is how we live our lives with trust and obedience modeling the character of Christ. And the manner of that love is how our neighbors view us and respond to us.

Chapter VII Picking on the Pastor *“Preventing the lost Focus”*

Two years ago *Christianity Today* magazine had a cover article that stated, “Pastors are overworked, underpaid, and face unrealistic expectations.”(C.T. 4/97) This is in the United States, imagine how much worse it is in other areas of the world. I do not have to imagine I have seen it firsthand! Pastors experience more stress than most of the members because of the intense care responsibility of pastors that they are continually dealing with, compared to a medical doctor who will see a terminally ill patient for an hour or so, then see them again in a few weeks. We need to set personal limits for ourselves to maintain balance, develop relationships outside of the church, and to be in a support group with other pastors.

Losing our Focus

I have worked with, and have known so many pastors over the years with such good hearts and great gifts, yet who seem to be taken advantage of and picked on for the most insignificant problems. One such pastor was ruthlessly chewed out by a parishioner who felt violated and grievously wronged because her name was misspelled in the bulletin. Now that was a simple typo from the church secretary, that anyone could have made. Yet this parishioner acted as if the world was coming to an end. He was very apologetic and made a retraction at the pulpit the very next Sunday. I went to him and asked why he was so apologetic to this lady, and why he made such a retraction when it was just a typo. God does ask us to forgive and take responsibility, but does forgiveness apply to simple mistakes? Why should a person such as this parishioner expect perfect bulletins; should she not be concerned with worship instead? The pastor did not know how to answer the question, and the bickering from this member and many others continued.

The problem is people lose focus on what the mission and central theme of the church is. So when there is no mission, and there are no goals; then, there's nothing really to do. Since the church has nothing to do, then all the energies are turned inward to attack one another. I guess it beats being bored.

There are many reasons why some churches grow, while others remain small. One of the main reasons a church does not grow is that the church does not want to. The church has little desire for change, and they tend not to take their pastors seriously. If a church does not like change, and calls a pastor into their fold who wants to change, the results will be two avenues. The first avenue is a church that captured a vision and surrendered themselves to the power of the Holy Spirit and they grow and will be blessed. But what mostly happens is avenue two, where the church gangs up against the pastor and forces him out. Usually this process is not overt, that is, they are not in his front yard burning down a cross or carrying torches. What a congregation tends to do is belittle the pastor, not respect him, therefore they do not have to hear what the pastor has to say, because it is irrelevant, after all you do not have to listen to someone

you do not respect. If you do not like the person, then obviously God is not going to use them to communicate the truth to you. Of course this is nonsense, but most people believe it in their hearts which undermines God being able to change our hearts, and use us because of our actions.

In the small church, a pastor's job is primarily shepherding, in the midst of power struggles from key individuals that act like matriarchs or patriarchs, and control the political power. These pastors face unrealistic expectations and are called on to be the primary caregiver. Which makes the pastor overworked, and leaves members of the congregation hurt because one person cannot take care of 50 to 100 people, it is just not possible. Not to mention much larger churches that are short staffed.

So there is always the person who does not get visited, or does not get called, or becomes sick and the pastor is the last one to find out about it. The ironic attitude of small churches is most of them, but not all, refuse to help out the pastor, as Christians are called to, because we are all ministers together. So when the pastor tries to train and release the lay people, he is confronted by frustrated and angry individuals who say, "we pay you to do that, why should we...?" The pastor's job is tough; he must be able to communicate with the key political movers and shakers the truth and wisdom of God's Word, and to transform their thinking from self-centered to God-centered. In addition, at the same time convincing the congregation that the Bible calls us to make disciples. A tough job indeed. It may sound easy, but most Christians are stubborn, and may verbalize acceptance, but will not practice it.

It's not so much that Christians are lazy, it is that we get comfortable and familiar with what we know. And the ability to go beyond our experiences and knowledge can be scary and disconcerting, so the Christian, or any person for that matter, will resist and fight change even though it's to their best interest, and even though this is what God calls us to do.

When I was with a church growth consulting firm, we did a major study of pastors; and came up with some startling statistics. We found that 90% of North American pastors work more than 50 hours a week. That one out of three pastor's state being in the ministry is clearly hazardous for their families. One out of three pastors feel totally burned up within the first five years of ministry. Over 70% of pastors do not have someone they would consider a friend, and hardly any pastors had any close friends. 90% of pastors feel they were not adequately trained to cope with ministry coordination and the demands of the congregation. 75% of pastors experience a significant crisis that they faced due to stress in the ministry. Hence why the divorce rate among pastors is rising, and pastor's children rarely stay in the church or keep their faith. 40% of the pastors reported serious conflicts with their parishioners every month.

The results of the survey are that pastors face more conflict, more anger, and more expectations, than ever before. While at the same time, working long hours and have little pay, little reward, and produce their own dysfunctional families because of their absence. I need to state clearly that this is not true of all pastors, there are many

who are excellent in obeying their call, and being there for their family. And as a pastor, I must be aware of this so do I do not fall in these traps. The statistics tell us that many more pastors have not learned to balance family and ministry, or can adequately deal with the immense struggles with the job. I totally sympathize with them, yet I call pastors to wake up to what they are doing, and why they are doing it.

A few years ago, I had lunch with a pastor who just fell from his pulpit because of sexual immorality a few months prior. This pastor was a head of one of the largest and best-known congregations in Southern California. You can hear his messages on the radio, and find his books in the bookstores; he was well loved and well received. And had a long-term affair. I asked him what happened, and how can I guard myself from doing the same thing. And he told me that he forgot who he was. He got so caught up in being a pastor, and a very successful pastor, that his personal relationship of growth and accountability that he needs to have; became less and less over time, until he was alone on the top. In effect working with no net. He felt he did not need accountability because of his position. And when you work long enough with no net, you will fall, and so he did. Most pastors neglect interpersonal relationships and accountability because they rationalize that they are too busy, and/or they are above it, thus do not need it.

Grounding Ourselves

Pastors should be grounded in a love relationship with Christ as their driving force in life. The pastor who does not have time for prayer, who does not have time for devotions, and only reads the Bible to prepare lessons, is a pastor who is bankrupt. It is imperative that all Christians be in devotions, study of God's Word, and prayer as their focus, and as their heartbeat. It is even more so for the pastor, because if the pastor is not growing and experiencing that love relationship with Christ, then that pastor will be as effective as a horse with no legs. Because you cannot lead where you have not been. We cannot be the people of God without what Christ did for us. We cannot do the work of God unless we are the people of God; this is paramount. Without this realization, the pastor cannot model effectively who Christ is in his life, the pastor will not build, or teach adequately. Because you cannot teach what you have not experienced and grown in. An effective chemistry teacher knows how to demonstrate chemical reactions, and explain them to the students. If the chemistry teacher just learned out of a book, but never mixed any chemicals in his life, how would he be able to explain it effectively to his students, he can't. Neither can the pastor experience the truth of God's Word unless he's living it, and growing in it. A leader cannot lead people where they have not been.

The Bible tells us, *"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings becoming like Him in his death, and so, somehow, attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."* (Phillipians 3:10-12)

I believe this passage is more than the realization of maturity. But rather outlines the critical and important aspects of our faith, Justification, Sanctification, and Glorification. These are foundational pillars that hold a pastor with their faith and practice and responsibility to the people that Christ has entrusted to them. Galatians 2 tells us that Christ is the object of our faith to whom we rely, not just in salvation; but are the driving force of who we are. Justification was given to us by faith by what Jesus Christ has done, these two work together climaxing to the first section of Philippians 3 “*I want to know him.*” This is perhaps Paul's most passionate statement in all of his writings, and is also my favorite verse.

Christ powers the Christian and manifests the leader to be identified in who Christ is, including the sufferings, in all aspects of our life and work. We depend on the Lord, and respond with the perseverance and the surrendering of our will to the sovereign work of our Lord. Then we are to share with others in proclamation, in teaching, and preaching; and for the Christian in witness and sharing. This does not mean we are perfect, but the saving process that Christ gave us should enfold us, and commit us to His purpose so that we cannot do anything on our own. Our walk starts here, our hearts are empowered here, our actions that model to the non-Christian starts here, and the “here” is what Christ has done for us.

When we become transformed and renewed by what Christ did, it enables us to be used by Christ and to be effective for Him, so that Christ will be able to take hold of me. In my experience, when pastors model this, the people want to be around them and want to be like them because the Lord is filling them and using them. When this happens, the target might be brighter but it is more protected. The conflicts and strife pastors take on will diminish greatly. This is accomplished by being more effective, stronger, more passionate, and more like Christ. So the blessings of the Lord are overflowing the pastor, leaking and spilling all over the congregation, all in the name of the Lord with peace, joy, and love.

Testimonies of Picking

When I first went on staff at a church in my very first ministry, within a year, the minister who had been disciplining became sick and had to resign. The denomination supplied an interim minister who was a retired bishop. Normally during interims, attendance drops and the people lose interest. The interim pastor spends most of his time resolving conflict, and preparing the congregation for the new pastor. But what happened at this church was remarkable. What was so remarkable is this bishop did not preach very well, in fact I cannot remember any of his sermons having to say anything relevant. The bishop worked only part-time and thus did no teaching. But the conflicts in the church between the various factions of charismatic vs. traditionalists, people wanting to reach out to youth vs. people who did not want the youth in the church, and so forth, it all dissipated. This bishop modeled Christ so well that he overflowed with Philippians 3, he was so overflowing with joy and love that we were all captivated to be around him. Because of his walk with Christ. He wasn't a very effective teacher to my recollection, but he was an incredible modeler, thus we learned how to build up one

another, and work with one another in our diversity. This made him a better teacher than any teaching or sermon could ever do.

After two years, he left and the permanent pastor came on board. Unfortunately, the new pastor had a very condescending and unloving attitude. I scratch my head to this day why the search committee came up with this guy, when we had some incredible candidates to choose from. Soon the church was back to the bickering, the fighting, and the strife. Never forget how important it is to model who Christ is in our lives, this shines brighter, and speaks louder than anything we can say or teach, and this is what the non-Christian is looking at, and this is what the Christian needs.

Over the years of being a pastor and observing other pastors, I realized that we all have target painted on our backs and chest. Every concern or criticism that a church faces is thrown and thrust into the pastor. Pastors become the main targets for anything that is wrong with the church. Christians need to realize their pastors and leaders are human, that we all make mistakes, and they cannot expect absolute perfection. The pastor is a shepherd of the flock, his job is to train, disciple, lead, and teach. Nowhere in Scripture does it say that pastors must be perfect, even Peter made a mistake, and had to be corrected by Paul.

Scripture tells us, “*Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*” (Hebrews 13:17)

The passage has two imperatives for the church. The first is that we Christians have the responsibility to respect our leaders and obey them with trust. Because the leaders are taking care of us; “*keep watch,*” as a term meaning the leader is diligent in their care, so it creates the atmosphere of trust and concern. Their concern is for the spiritual well being, and their needs. The second imperative is the leader has responsibility to lead with justice and truth. The leader is called to care for the people with a sense of joy, passion, and genuine sincerity. And the leader has to respond to the responsibility of their position, and give an account to the Lord. So that the leader is caring for the spiritual and deep needs of the people, for this is the call of the Lord. And this is to be completed in joy, and in thanksgiving to our Lord, for the privilege to serve. The alternative is for it to be a burden, and that only serves Satan, and the division and strife of the church.

When these two imperatives are working together, the church has a healthy, encouraging environment, and modeling what is effective to the world. If one these two are out of balance, then the witness that is representative becomes repugnant. Because the church will be full of strife and who would want to go there? The fruit of the pastor’s discipleship is joy; that joy will permeate the leaders and infect the people under their care. The leader is not a burden to the people, but rather a joy, as that bishop modeled to me years ago.

This passage comes out of the chapter expressing the importance of being loyal to Christ and to follow Him in all aspects of our life, especially when it comes to love, kindness, purity, and goodness, and most importantly prayer and faith in God. These aspects are paramount and must be portrayed and practiced with diligence and love. For the church to work effectively, we must be in submission and obedience to our Lord, to our leaders, and being encouraging to each other. The leaders must realize and surrender to the authority of Christ, so they may be effective authorities to the people that they are called to minister to.

If the church finds itself just wanting to pick at their pastor and find fault in everything he does and criticize each other and their leaders, all that they are doing is destroying the work that Christ is accomplishing through us. They're destroying themselves, their relationships, and their vitality and importance to their community. For the church to be effective, it must model positive, loving, and caring leadership. Leadership that is not constricting and condescending to the personal and spiritual needs of their people. The church must have a community attitude, cooperation, and encouragement in the leadership the Lord has given them. So that they are multiplying with joy, and reaching out to their neighborhoods with care. The church leadership must support the pastor, as the pastor must support the leaders, and the community of trust and encouragement will envelop everyone.

Guarding the Pastor: "The Dangers of paying no attention to good leadership"

The responsibilities of leadership and insights apply to all Christians on some level. It is the call of the pastor to teach and train the congregation and it is also the call and responsibility for the congregation to hear and respect the pastor, encourage him, and keep him in prayer. It is just that a leader has more responsibility and accountability to God than the rest of the congregation. They must take extra steps to protect themselves and the people under their care.

If you are a pastor, you must ask yourself this question, "Am I running on fumes? Is my tank empty?" I found several diseases among pastors and Christian workers that I have worked with and observed over the years; and each disease I have personally felt when I have gone unchecked. If we do not understand the dangerous traps we can fall into, or how to guard ourselves, then we will be totally ineffective to function in the body of Christ. Not to mention to be unable to lead it. This applies not only to pastors and leaders, but all Christians. Our tanks must be full to be effective in the kingdom of God. We are driven by joy and passion for what Christ has called us to do. If not, perhaps it is time for some self-examination and retrospection, and lots of prayer for what your call really is. You may just need to reprioritize your schedule and learn better people and administration skills; or maybe you just need to go to Disneyland. God's leaders must not go around frustrated and wounded, because this only serves our enemy, and the destruction of the church.

Anger

This disease is extremely dangerous and destructive to the body of Christ. It is dangerous to any person, especially the Christian, and doubly for the pastor and leader.

If we are wise and discerning of ourselves, we should realize what our limits are and what we are capable of doing. When we lose this control of who we are, and when we no longer feel in control of our circumstances, then the results are that we become angry and frustrated. Sometimes the anger turns within us, which is depression, because we lost control, and we no longer trust ourselves. In turn, the only recourse becomes our emotions, which are forced to strike out or strike within. We become distracted and distant from our relationship with God, therefore we become disillusioned with our role and ourselves in ministry. What happens is we lose our perspective of who we are to God, just as that pastor did that I had lunch with.

Anger is something I personally know very well. I'm the type of person that can go through a great crisis un-frayed, I can do many tasks at the same time, be in a lot of stress and handle it fairly well, until the one straw that breaks the camel's back. Usually it is something simple such as, I can't find my keys or I misplaced my meeting agenda; then, I lose it! Fortunately over the years I learned the warning signs, and I stop what I am doing and fall to my knees and pray, do a few breathing exercises and get control over myself.

A lot of people in full-time ministry have a problem with anger, because we are in very stressful situations, dealing with complicated issues and various personalities all striving for our attention. All too often the pastor becomes overwhelmed and blows. The Lord has personally shown me over the years, the destructive power of anger. I observed it many times in other people and have seen myself come very close to just teetering on the edge of my own personal destruction. Over the years, I learned to control this area, as God has graciously given me Scriptures, insights, and techniques to help me control the raging beast that dwells within all of us.

Anger is formed within us when we lose our perspective of ourselves, which indicates we are not happy and do not feel God's blessings. Some of the symptoms of this are when we burst out in anger over something significantly benign, which becomes directed at a family member, spouse, or child. What I used to do was be sarcastic, cynical, and even condescending to other people. I was not happy with myself in my situation, so I would cover my anger with inappropriate humor, which I considered being harmless, but it was not.

Anger turned inward becomes depression and many pastors suffer this riveting and paralyzing infection; that cuts us off from effective relationships, and prevents us from being effective for the kingdom of God. We lose perspective of God working in us, we lose the perspective of His grace and mercy and power that He gives us to overcome our situation, we lose perspective of hope, and therefore we do not communicate in our actions and deeds effectively. Pastors take on a lot of battle damage from churches, sometimes that damage seems irreversible and irreparable. So

then we justify our inability to pastor and blame those who cause the damage. One of the things I learned over the years was when we take on the damage and the destruction and the blows, we need to realize that our God is greater in us and will deflect those blows for us when we realize fully His presence working in us.

The pastor's responsibility is not the hurt that we may receive, or the suffering we go through; rather, our response must be what we give to the situation with our attitude. And to take our lead from how our Lord manifested the suffering and rejection He went through. Too often pastors forget the basics of the faith, and the responsibility we have to be above the pain, and surrender ourselves to Christ in any situation. For me, it is always an encouragement to hear the stories from missionaries and pastors overseas who go through immense situations that most of us in the States can only fathom. It is like going to Mexico and using the bathroom in a barrio, that is a very poor area. Where the local community bathroom is a "stink hole" in the ground; it gives us so much appreciation for the old run down bathroom we may have. If you cannot see beyond your situation and prayer is not helping, then look to others who have gone through so much more, it should give you a better perspective, and enrich your prayer life.

Ephesians tells us, *"In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the Devil a foothold...Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ- God forgave you."*(Ephesians 4:26-27; 29-31)

This passage is telling us that we must put off our old ways, get out of the shell of our old lives, and put on Christ. For pastors, it is imperative that we have a healthy understanding of Scripture and theology, of how God is working in people's lives. Because if we don't realize the power of our Lord who transforms us, then we will not be able to realize it for ourselves, and we will not be able to communicate it to our parishioners. The result of this lack of knowledge of who we are corrupts us and erodes our effectiveness, until there is nothing left of us but resentment and depression. Because there is nothing else, nothing for us to believe in because there is nothing to fill us and nothing to empower us, therefore we go through life and ministry like playing charades with the effect of anger and resentment. When we have a healthy understanding of who Christ is, and how He is working in us; then we will be able to guard ourselves by His power so that the Devil cannot get hold of us. There is nothing the Devil likes better than pulling the strings of empty pastors.

Losing control of our emotions

The pastor needs to have a healthy balance of composure, especially in public. I was picking up my clothes at the dry cleaner, when a fellow pastor was in the midst of yelling viciously at the dry cleaner for not taking a stain out of one of his suits, that

pastor lost it. The dry cleaner did his best to try to remove the stain, but he was unable to do what the pastor wanted. The pastor would not listen or understand the situation and he lost total control. Imagine what was going through the mind of that dry cleaner, being chewed out by a man representing God. Would that dry cleaner ever want to visit that pastor's church or any church for that matter? Probably not!

Pastors as well as Christians are human, and are prone to all kinds of emotions, and will and should experience all kinds of emotions. Emotions are wonderful, God created them for us to experience life, the relationship to Him, and to each other, and we cannot accomplish that without emotions. We are not to be Vulcan's, logical and cold all the time, we are to work on and experience life and the joy that comes from it. But with leadership, as well as with being a Christian, comes responsibility. We must compose ourselves, because we have a responsibility to be stable, as a representative of Christ: this means not only to refrain from yelling at the dry cleaner but modeling Christ with composure.

There are two passages that have ministered to me greatly over the years:

"A wise man fears the Lord and shuns evil, but a fool is hot headed and reckless. A quick-tempered man does foolish things, a crafty man is hated.... Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city."
(Proverbs 14:16-17; 16:32)

There's been a lot of news lately on political leaders who have lost control over their emotions and their lust, yet society sees a dualism in these leaders. A decade ago, such a discrepancy would have meant the certain ruin of a political leader. But today people have come to accept that a person's actions do not necessarily reflect their ability to perform their job. The Word of God is not in agreement with this assessment as you can see for yourself. The scary thing is that the church follows the trends of society throughout church history. When society's morals start to change, the churches will soon follow.

So it won't be too far down the road where the pastor has an affair and the congregation will quickly forgive and forget without the need of correction and discipline. I've actually seen this take place. A few chapters back, I mentioned a church I was on staff with when the senior pastor was having an affair and was ousted from the church. What I did not mention is right away he went on staff at another church without any discipline or correction from the denominational authorities, nor any admittance of wrongdoing on his behalf. This pastor left his wife and family, with the attitude of I deserve a better life and a change, with no apologies and no looking back. How soon will our Christian culture embrace such behavior as normative? Once we do, what is the difference between us and the world? What is it that we have to offer? Certainly not the gospel of Jesus Christ, and not the wisdom of the Bible.

Discipline

Discipline, according to God, is the mark of a wise person. As Christians, and especially as leaders of the church, we have an imperative to model Christ's character. We must realize the destructive nature of anger. I once worked with an elder who felt it was her duty to rant and rage and yell at the top of her voice at anyone she did not agree with. She was a person who loved conflict and thrived on it, it gave her the nourishment to her self-esteem, instead of receiving her nourishment from the disciplines of the faith. She firmly believed that the healthy way of dealing with a situation was to raise her voice and engage in uncontrolled emotionalism. Numerous times the pastor went to her with these passages, but she felt that she was right and it was healthy to "let it all out." Therefore she placed her trust on her feelings over what Scripture had to say.

It is not healthy to allow anger to blow up, or let it turn inward and destroy you. What is healthy and wise is to surrender our anger over to the Lordship of Christ. That is what wisdom is: controlling our emotions. Because if we do not, we will sit in an empty pew, preach to an empty church, stand in the unemployment line, and lonely wondering where everyone is. We must have a healthy self-assessment of our personality and how we deal with stress and overwhelming situations. If you feel you do not have a grasp on this, then it is time to seek a professional who can help you through it. There are many resources out there, don't be a fool and let it go unchecked; God's Word is clear and paramount on the subject. When we model James, what we are doing is modeling Christ.

James tells us: *"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you."*(James 1:19-20)

Ancient Greek culture placed a high regard on leaders who were elegant with speeches and proclamations. A Greek citizen can rise quickly in political circles and powers with well prepared speeches that tickle people's ears with quality and interest. The same applies today. God wants us to put our priorities on listening. God has given us two ears and one mouth, thus we need to spend more time listening to people, and not so much time on eloquent speech.

I had a friend several years ago who grew up in a very wealthy household, and just finished his college degree in English. So when he went to church, he had the attitude that he was better than the pastor, because he could enunciate words better and could structure grammar better too. He would always critique the pastor's sermons to his standard of speech eloquence. This particular pastor was a gifted communicator, and on occasion he would let a mispronounced word slip out, or speak in a run-on sentence. My friend would make fun of it, and rationalized he did not have to live the way the pastor was teaching. I tried to explain the message is not so much how it is said, but what it says; he would not listen.

If the pastor and Christian want to grow in godliness, then the fast track is learning to listen, especially listening to the Word of God. It is listening that will progress us in our relationship with Christ, our relationship to other Christians, and our relationships to people around us. When we listen, we are holding back our desires, and it motivates us to empathize with compassion and care. Thus the person feels listened to and ministered to. This is an essential call of our Lord, to which we must respond, especially the leader.

The Bible clearly tells us to be slow to anger, when we do this we embrace comfort and we bring calmness to the storm that we would normally start and escalate. Being calm in any given situation will bring sound judgment and stability to a crisis. Just as if you are in an earthquake; would you rather have a leader who is out of control with their motions screaming and bidding for themselves, or would you rather have a leader who is prepared, who stays calm and organizes everybody to safety? This is the job of the pastor, to be calm and collect and in control of their emotions, especially anger. Then they can lead effectively, and model the right path that God desires for us to follow.

One of the biggest problems with young adults is their need for intimacy and care. Not sexual intimacy, which is quickly substituted for the real need; rather the intimacy of listening and caring. Most young people feel they are not listened to. They feel they are not cared for and unloved, the results of that can be disastrous. Such as drugs, alcohol, and falling away from the Kingdom of God. When we do a better job of listening, then we will be doing a better job of reaching out to people around us. These people want to be listened to; they want to be cared for, and even ministered to, even though they may not admit it. So we must place our emphasis on our ears and not our mouths. A fruit of this will be a church free of conflict and anger, where people are growing in the Lord, loving and caring for one another!

The Chaos of Competition

Another aspect that pastors need to be on guard for is the competitive nature that dwells in the male Warrior heart. By the way, women are not immune to this. Pastors tend to be competitive with other pastors and miss the opportunities of cooperation, replacing it with pursuits of ambition. Most pastors can be task-oriented, evaluating their self worth based on the number of people attending their congregations, or the programs and accomplishments that they may perceive, often comparing themselves to the previous pastor, or the church down the street.

Yes, we need to do our best and give a 110% for the glory of God, but also we do not need to be obsessed with the tendency to measure up to the mega-church in the big city. We need to keep our focus on the big picture that Christ calls us to: Teaching, discipleship, and leading. The opposite of this is a maintenance mentality. Or the pastor is going through ministry in a mediocrity pattern, never really giving it their best shot because of the fear of failure. Or the 'why bother' attitude since no one appreciates me and nobody cares. Pastors must be careful where their motivation comes from, and

realize it must come from the passion, conviction, and the heart's desire to please God. We are not in the business of pleasing our peers, or grading accomplishments, nor should we be hiding in our closets too afraid to do anything.

Growth statistics are just one aspect of an indicator of a healthy church. True success is being obedient to what God has called us to do, and realizing we are responsible to serve, but are not responsible for the results. Our surrender to the will of God, over our will and desires, is success; to have the focus that God has, and the passion and prayer to follow through, is what we are called to do. These are the marks of a successful church leader.

I worked with a pastor once who was very ambitious. He worked 80 hours a week and enjoyed every single minute of it. He had to be in total control of the church and had the attitude of I'm the pastor and no one else can do this but me. This church had over 1,100 parishioners and the only ministry staff was a senior pastor and myself, the youth pastor. He flatly refused to hire any associates or directors to oversee ministries. His workaholic tendencies turned into alcoholism, then eventually the complete alienation of his family and congregation. This pastor ended up being driven out of ministry in disgrace. The last time I saw him, he was selling Bibles out of the trunk of his car like a scene in the movie "Paper Moon."

When pastors have the driving ambition and a 'win at all cost' attitude, it does nothing to glorify God, all it does is tear down each other and what God really wants us to accomplish. Egotism and a warrior nature must not consume us; rather, we must submit ourselves to the Lordship of Christ and His glory. We are to seek His love and His approval only. Ministers, pastors, priests, and clergymen must all come together and offer support and encouragement and bury the competition, replacing it with cooperation, to give God the glory. Yes, there are theological and ideological differences; yet, we can have the attitude of agreeing to disagree for the support and community building that the effective pastor needs. I'm not saying we should be in fellowship with cults or aberrant groups, but suggesting that Catholic and Protestant denominations can and should come together in prayer and support.

Beware of the trap of thinking your ministry is just a job

The pastor must not view his ministry as just a job. We must have a clear understanding of the call that God has given us as full-time Christian workers. The call for pastors is to be disciples and children of God, as well as leaders and shepherds of God's people. It's not a job, we're not selling slurpees at 7-11. If you think it's just a job, putting in your 40 hours and going through the motions, looking forward to your day off or retirement, you are not serving God, you are serving your paycheck. Yes, pastors are very underpaid and the church leadership must remedy this situation, so the workmen are worth their wages; pastors need to be paid the same level as a similar position in secular society. Pastors have families to provide for and should have a just income. But pastors are not there to earn a paycheck; but to serve the Lord. Ministry is not the occupation to be chosen by default or accidentally fall into.

Remember the Responsibility of Truth

When the pastor and leadership of the church spend all their time planning programs, building buildings, and solving interpersonal conflicts within the congregation, there is something wrong. We need buildings that can be used effectively, to house the programs. We need programs to reach out and engage people at all stages of life. But when this is our primary focus, then the main task falls to the side. We are first called to be disciplers and equippers of God's people. The point of the building and the purpose of the programs are facilities, instruments, and tools for discipleship! Growing people in maturity must be the driving force of the church, not the peripheral things. We are not to be distracted from the primary purpose. All that we will be doing is just tricking ourselves and fooling our flock, if we spend all of our time in trivialities and the busyness for the sake of being busy, and not producing for the Lordship of Christ. We must ask ourselves what we are doing. The pastor must be wise with his schedule and time, at the same time be open to anyone who needs to be loved, cared for, and listened to.

There was a poll taken by a sociologist named Jeffrey Haddan (Prayer Net Newsletter, Nov. 13, 1998); he polled over 7,400 Protestant ministers. He found that 13 to 51% of ministers, depending on their denomination, accepted Jesus' physical resurrection as a fact. His poll states between 19 and 60% of ministers believe in the virgin birth of Jesus. The poll goes on to say between 67 and 95 % of ministers believe that the Scriptures are true in faith, history, and practice. These statistics are extremely despairing. What do these ministers think they are doing? What is their purpose? And what are they trying to accomplish in God's Holy Church? If you are the church leadership and you do not believe in the tenets of Scripture, you have no business being in leadership and certainly no business being the Shepherd and teacher of the flock. What you are is a wolf in sheep's clothing, which will be harshly judged by God.

The pastor must be theologically sound. A pastor who does not have a good theology is like an engineer who does not know math; he would totally be unable to do his job of designing. A pastor that is not theologically sound is like a surgeon who does not know anatomy and physiology, would you want them to operate on you? When we are in the pulpit proclaiming the truth of Christ, it better be just that, the truth of Christ, not our inclinations or new ideas, or the latest trend in theological thinking. All these new waves of theology just confuse and alienate the body of Christ, which are the parishioners we serve and are called to protect from false doctrine, and lead to God's truth. Most of these new ideas keep changing and conflicting, and only last a few years until the latest theological fad comes into play. Why play with the fire of that game, when God's truth remains the same, only our creative thinking keeps changing? It's good to be creative, as long as it does not go against the teachings of Scripture.

The Bible is timeless and true, and a minister must have a high view of Scripture that is extremely high. If not, all we will do is elevate ourselves as the judge of God's Word and then God's Word becomes subordinate to our way of thinking. Then we become the Bible's judge, and thus do not have to follow its precepts. In other words,

without a healthy view of Scripture, we proclaim ourselves as god and this is a fatal mistake. The Bible is not a collection of mystical teachings that you can pick and choose from, it is not a smorgasbord. Do not fool yourselves that your new way of thinking is better than 1900 years of Christian doctrine and history. We must stick with the basics and offer deeper teaching and insights, with the challenge and application to promote the growth in Christ for the people we care for.

The pastor's job goes beyond just shepherding, teaching, and administering programs. The pastor as protector of the people of God must also protect them with the truth of God. Truth does not change, regardless of what we hear in our seminaries, on TV, and in some of the books that are coming out. Truth is not relative, it is not changing, and it remains the same. The pastor is the guardian of truth, and must have an understanding of this premise. If not, the fallout would be disastrous when we face false doctrines, because we would not be able to distinguish them, and that would lead people away from the truth of God. The people under our care will not be able to discern the difference of false teaching, because we would not know and thus would not properly teach them. We would be unable to protect them as pastors and leaders. Just as a bank teller would not be able to detect a phony dollar bill unless they know very well what a real dollar bill feels and looks like.

It's also imperative that the pastor makes stands on moral and value grounds, especially amongst their denomination. Too many pastors let things go, figuring someone else will say something or speak up; when in fact most pastors do not agree with some of the rulings of their denomination. Morals, values, and purity are virtues that need to be modeled and defended, because that is what we are offering the world alongside the person and work of Christ. Realizing these aspects is so important that there has to be a difference that sets aside the Christian church from the other religions and cults of the world. The gospel is our truth and our difference and it is that difference that models what is real to the non-Christian. This must be demonstrated effectively and be real and not phony. Because the phony Christian, and especially the phony leader, does more damage to the non-believer than just about anything else, besides gossip.

Make no mistake, pastors have a higher responsibility and a higher accounting to God with their actions, especially when it comes to teaching and modeling of the Word of God. The reason Moses did not go into the Promised Land is not just because he had a beef with a rock. Moses was not allowed to step foot in the promised land when he disobeyed God, because he knew better. We all disobey God at some point, I do not go through a day without disobeying God, maybe not intentionally or unintentionally, but just the fallacy of being human. Fortunately, we have grace, but we also have responsibility. So the more knowledge you have, the more responsibility you have. When you know God's Word, you have the responsibility to live it out. And when you are the pastor, you have the responsibility of teaching God's Word with truth, power, and conviction. If not, get another job, because that is what you have, a job, and not a ministry, and what you are doing is deceiving God's special people.

The pastor must be on the alert for false teachings as a pastor. A Shepherd of the flock is also a protector of the flock. You need to protect the flock from false doctrines from your own mouth as well as others. Never compromise or bend the Word of God because you feel it may offend someone. Of course the gospel is going to be offending, because it goes against our perceived sovereign view of ourselves. But nevertheless, we have a responsibility to teach effectively, to be studious, and to allow God's Word to nourish you, so we can nourish others. The pastor must be disciplined and a guardian of his studies. Get away for a few hours or days to write your sermons and lessons, do not do them Saturday evening.

The King and Loser Mentalities

Another problem people face in leadership, including pastors and elders, is despair. Self-pity rules the emotions and even the aspirations of the pastor or leader. We have the mentality that no one is going through what I'm going through, no one has it as bad as I do, poor me. I have been there many times over the years, party hats and all, throwing myself the biggest pity party the neighborhood has ever seen. About 10 years ago, I became physically sick with a lung infection, while I was ministering in an inner city outreach program. Around the same time, I lost my job, my grandparents (who were instrumental in raising me) died, and my fiancée left me. My physical self was paralyzed, and I felt that no one cared what I was going through. I would go out and lead my programs, and then I would go home and sit in utter despair and pain. The ironic part is I was living with 16 other Christians at the time in a community. Everyone at the time was dealing with his or her own problems and frustrations. The caring and nurturing that the community was built on broke down. I found myself a victim as well as the instigator of the community's breakdown. Even though I started a successful program that was reaching youth, I became paralyzed with the fear that I may not be able to reproduce it. Because of my personal losses, I thought there was something wrong with me.

All this was stemming from my distorted perceptions. I was convinced that no one could understand what I was going through, the demons I was struggling with were overwhelming at the time. Slowly friends talked to me and pointed out the deviations in my thinking and, at the same time, I was getting better medical help. I was able to reboot myself by the power of the Lord working in me, but it was too late for the community that I was in, it dissolved.

So many of us were hurting with personal problems that we were unable to see the problems in each other, therefore unable to use our resources collectively for healing and caring. The result was that most of us moved on in other areas of ministry and life. This was a sad thing; that after over two successful years of ministry together, and friendship, and care; we broke down and ran away from the very relationships that started and motivated us. I was just as much a part of the problem as I was a victim of it.

When we look at Scripture, we see many instances of Biblical characters struggling with the very same thing. We see Peter being disillusioned during Passion Week, and then we see David in the utter despair of depression on several occasions. What do we see through one of the greatest prophets, Elijah, after what I consider the greatest worship service in the history of ever: Mt. Carmel? (I Kings 18-21) Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal to prove to the people of Israel who is the one true God. Was it Baal or was it the God of Moses? So Elijah built an altar and 450 prophets of Baal built their altar, each with their bulls on it, and they laid wood on it. But placed no fire to consume the sacrifice. Instead Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to have the sacrifice be spontaneously consumed by the power of their God. Which God that consumes the sacrifice by fire would be worth worshipping, and be the one true God? And what I think is real historical humor is that Elijah mocks them and egged them on saying, "is your god busy, is he on a journey, is he sleeping?" When you take a look at the Hebrew text, it even says, "is your god busy on the Toilette?" Meanwhile, the prophets of Baal would cut themselves and bleed, but their god did not pay any attention, I guess he was on the potty! Then Elijah prayed, and a show of incredible proportions was unveiled to Israel and the pagans alike. The burst of flames came down from Heaven, an incredible display of consuming fire, destroying the sacrifice; wow, what a show.

What happens next is almost just as incredible too. After the triumphal victory over the prophets of Baal, after the drought that paralyzed Israel was at an end, Jezebel, Elijah's nemesis was not impressed. She calls for Elijah's extermination. It's one of those things where I have to wait to get to Heaven to ask why Elijah was not afraid of the 450 prophets with knives, yet was terrified of one woman who would eventually become dog food. Why could he not trust God to provide for him and give protection, as he saw so vividly demonstrated already?

I believe the only satisfactory answer for us now is depression. After such a great performance and basking in God's glory, Elijah runs away. God comes to him and asks him why he was basking in self-pity. God answered Elijah in his depression in an unexpected way. Then Elijah realized what he needed to do. Unfortunately for us, we do not get a personal wake-up call from God. More fortunate for us, we have God's Word to rely upon, something even Elijah did not have. We have the experiences of God's greatest people like David, Elijah, and Peter to help us see our own frailties and weakness, so we can overcome and give God His Glory.

Pastors and leaders must be on their guard against the onslaught of Satan, especially if they're prone to depression of any kind, a weakness that Satan will come and pick at like an open wound. If you think you are alone and no one cares or understands what you are going through, be assured that kind of thinking is dead wrong.

That is why it is so imperative that Christians, especially leaders, must be in healthy relationships where there are people in our lives that can confront us on these issues. Without these relationships, we stand alone. Yes, we have God, but remember

God works through people, and when we push other people aside, we end up working alone and we will fall. In our situations as well as with Elijah, God will eventually expose false teachings and our false way of thinking. It is a lot easier to get it right with God's Word before you go through life in despair.

I realized that I had to take the initiative before the Lord would start His work in me, just as Elijah had to learn when the attending Angel told him to rise and eat in I Kings 19:5. After Elijah's great victory on Mt. Carmel, he faced depression. But God did not create another great miracle to reboot Elijah; instead Elijah had to take the initiative. He had to overcome the depression. This applies to us; we need to take the initiative and overcome it ourselves with the help of the Lord. God may give us the power and plan, but we have to reach out and use it. To grab the brass ring from a merry-go-round, you first need to ride it, then stretch out your hand and grab it. Initiative is important in the life of a Christian, initiative that is focused on God's Word.

There are two errors that leaders often fall into in this situation. First, they rely on themselves and/or secular psychological help. At first this is good, we do need outside help at times and we do need to take the initiative. Just like the first step in overcoming substance abuse, you have to admit there is a problem and not be in denial before there can be any healing. However, if that is all we do, we will fail. The second error that Christians make is to lay on the couch and expect God to do a miracle. They may spend their time in prayer and devotions as well as in the study of the Word, expecting a miracle! And yes we need to be doing that seeking the face of God, seeking His miracles. But if that is all they do, it is like buying lottery tickets, hoping to get rich, yet never getting a job. Then they become disillusioned asking why God is not helping them.

The solution is simple; we are to do both, just as Elijah had to. We are to take the initiative first. Perhaps we may need to get outside help if needed, and allow God to create the work within us. Then we will arise and obey God with greater understanding and courage than we could have had before. Remember God will use our difficulties, pain, and suffering for His Glory. That means we may go through things in life that are not meant for us as a personal attack, but allow us to grow and become stronger so God can use us in other people's lives. That is why Paul states he rejoices in the sufferings for Christ, because Paul realizes God is using him through the suffering and pain. So if you struggle with a form of depression or suffering, then you should be rejoicing because it allows God to use you for His Glory. You do not want to be just like I was, sitting on the couch in darkness throwing your own pity party, a party of just one, hoping for a supernatural miracle.

The pastor must ask himself, is my role more important than the growth and well being of the church? I have been to churches where the pastor views himself as a king over his domain. Because their congregation gives them such lavish devotion, they take it seeing themselves as deserving. This is an extreme danger and a disease that will lead the congregation astray. What happens is a congregation puts all of their hopes

and trust in the pastor and not in the Person and Work of Christ. Usually the pastor does nothing to upset this balance, but allows it to empower their ego and self-esteem.

One such example is a church that a close relative goes to. Their pastor is young and inexperienced, ministering in an inner city church. This pastor does a wonderful job of reaching out to the community, and people come to know the Lord out of dire circumstances, so that they literally start to worship him, mostly out of gratitude. The problem he gets into is that he takes it personally that the people are lifting him up, and believes he deserves to be lifted up. This goes against the focus of Scripture and the redemption of the Cross. As workers, we have the responsibility to convey the message of the Gospel, but that we are not the message. We are performing a wedding where the bride and groom are to be focused on, not the minister. Leading the church is about leading people to Christ, not leading people to our personality or a person.

Pride takes over and does a very good job of keeping out the truth of Christ. The result is people become disillusioned when a pastor stumbles or they just wake up one day wondering why they are worshipping a personality and not the person of Christ, so they leave, perhaps not even going to another church. This does nothing to serve the Kingdom of God, it only serves ourselves. We must be focused on humbleness, righteousness, and a healthy concept of who we are in Christ. If not, we are modeling the wrong message to the Christians and non-Christians, and they will pick up on it very quickly.

The Dangers of Arrogance and Apathy

With all the stresses and struggles in ministry, it is very easy to shrug our shoulders and give up, yet still go through the motions; this is apathy. It is our human nature to consider comfort and security a primary concern. There is nothing wrong with that, as long as it does not make us complacent and take us away from the goals and reasons we are in the pulpit, or in leadership. If we are too comfortable, we become apathetic, not wanting to stretch ourselves in our personal walk. Then this falls into a slippery slope of not desiring to stretch the congregation, or being afraid of making any challenges that may offend someone's pride. We come up with the "do not rock the boat mentality" and do what is called maintenance ministry. That is no growth, no serious discipleship, no serious Bible studies, no serious teaching in the pulpit, just basic stuff to please and police people.

The pastor then starts to have an attitude of, "I'm doing the best I can, you do not understand what I'm facing." These people "don't wanna be challenged, they are used to doing it this particular way." Thus the pastor advocates his personal responsibility Christ gave him to make disciples, worrying instead that he may offend someone, such as some influential person, or that they will cause strife and division or someone will leave.

Friends, if you have people in your church that do not want to adhere to the vision and tenants of the faith, let them leave, all they are doing is keeping other people

from growing and preventing you from fulfilling your mission. Never allow an individual or individuals to control the focus of ministry when their focus is on their wishes and not on God's ordinances. A pastor must do just that, pastor, teach, and equip, and keep doing it in a creative, truthful, and creative way. But pastors are not allowed to have wolves in the flock, just because the wolves are giving money or holding high positions. The Bible speaks of tares in the wheat field, we are to expect that. Satan will place people in the church who go through the motions of the Christian life but never have been transformed by it; thus will cause divisions, gossip, and slander to destroy the confidence of the leadership, and neuter the effectiveness of the church's mission. *"But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat..."* (Matt. 13:25-26)

Thus, we need to be on our guard for stressful and overwhelming situations, for pride, as well as being too comfortable in our positions. When we are not growing, and not on our guard, then we will venture into the land of apathy, and that is one place that will not grow any fruit or give any glory to the Lord.

Another disease that strikes pastors and leaders is arrogance. This goes along with what I have written in the previous section on pride. This also effects pastors, but with greater destruction. When a pastor or leader is filled with the puffed-up image of himself and not the glorious image of our Lord, the result is darkness. The Lord will not bless a prideful Church, you may spin your wheels for awhile, but the house of cards you have built will blow down. Prideful pastors fall, they do not remain very long in leadership, and their congregations dissipate.

While I was in seminary, I had a roommate who was the music director for a well-known church, with a pastor who had a radio show, and was very popular. I had the opportunity to meet with him once, and I was amazed at how arrogant he was. Totally the opposite impression I received from listening to his show. He soon fell from grace with a money scandal; his 2000+ member church withered to less than 200. The congregation was following a personality, and not the person of Christ. The pastor was following himself and not the Lord.

This has a devastating impact on the community as the non-Christians view the situations with disgust and contempt. Meanwhile, the parishioners go away wounded and hurting, spreading their pain with their testimonies of how the church hurt them, instead of the testimony about how great our Lord is. When we base our church on the talents of its people, the wealth of our budget, and the respectability we have in our own circles, then we are treading in shark infested waters. Our only hope out of that situation is repentance, humbleness, public confession, and surrendering to the truth of God.

Handling Money

One of the things a pastor can do to protect themselves from arrogance and apathy is how they manage the stewardship and giving of the church. Stewardship is a reflection of what takes place in our hearts. God asked us to be cheerful givers, not to

give out of the “I have too’s” or out of “it’s my obligation,” but rather out of love. The pastor's response to this, in my opinion, is to present Biblical stewardship and love to the congregation in their personal walk as well as in teaching. During the same time, I believe the pastor should not know who in the congregation gives what moneys.

The responsibility of the financial management of the church should be handled by qualified elders, or an outside, reputable organization. The pastor can oversee and make sure they are trained and qualified to handle it with integrity and practical business sense. When a pastor knows who in the congregation is giving what amount, this will effect the decision processes of the pastor. Even the most guarded pastor and gifted heart will be influenced by someone who gives thousands of dollars over someone who gives very little, it is our human nature. I believe it is our responsibility to guard against that with integrity. So do not be concerned about who is giving what, but be concerned about how they are growing and being disciplined. One pastor told me recently that he needs to know who is giving what so he can determine their spiritual condition. Okay, giving is an indicator of spiritual health, but more so is Galatians 5!

Also, make sure your church has good financial guidelines. I was on staff at a church where the financial secretary took off with \$40,000 over a two-year period, and nobody knew about until it was too late. We must be wise, loving, and caring, and guard our Lord's resources from those who would misuse it and from ourselves who mistrust it.

When the pastor and leadership of a church are handling the financial aspects of the church with integrity; this has a very bright impact on the body of Christ, as well as to non-Christians. What they are modeling is integrity and that is appealing.

Be aware if your church is secretive about their finances, and a lot of them are, where a pastor’s salary is kept a secret, and the details of the monies are kept secret from the congregation. If you continue on this skewed steward path, you will soon be taking part in a prison ministry. Especially since the IRS is steeping up their efforts to go after churches and pastors.

The misuse of money, where it is going and how it is being used, must be handled legally, morally, and publicly, or it creates a very suspicious atmosphere even though the money may be handled correctly. In my experience and observations, more often than not, being secretive with the church finances is a sure sign of financial mishandling, and someone's hands are in the cookie jar. I have observed one church that was so bad that the pastor’s kids were all driving brand-new cars, expensive ones at that. I knew that pastor was drawing a salary of over \$40,000 a year, so how did three of his teenage children, who helped out in the church's accounting office, afford brand-new BMWs?

Money is alluring and a big temptation, even to the best intentioned person. There must be checks and balances and effective guidelines. I believe one of the most effective guidelines is for a pastor to keep his hands off the money. Don't handle it, don't

touch it, don't know who is giving what, and definitely have nothing to do with accounts receivable and payable; these matters must be handled by trained and qualified people. Even if the pastor is an accountant, stay away from the cookie jar! Without these guidelines, the church cannot function honestly, and soon its reputation will be tarnished, and a suspicious atmosphere will fill the void of integrity. The suspicious atmosphere can become a cancer of destruction and a very poor witness. Even if there is no wrongdoing.

Accountability to the Church

Another main aspect of responsibility of being a pastor is that we must be accountable. Too many pastors seem to think that since they are the senior pastor and chief executive officer of their domain, they see no need to be accountable to anyone. They give all kinds of excuses, such as not having the time, or just not feeling the need. If you do not feel the need, then you really need it! If you do not think you have the time, then it's time to re-prioritize your schedule.

One of the churches I was on staff with had a senior pastor who had what I would call a god complex. He confused the God of the Bible with the god of himself. Right after coming on staff, he dissolved all the authority of the board of elders. The elders remained in their positions and posts, but their authority had been neutered. This was an elder-driven church and the ruling elder presided over the leadership of the church. The pastor proclaimed himself to be that leader supreme with extreme arrogance of character, thus eliminating any accountability on his part. He quickly made major decisions on a weekly basis without relying on the elders or going through the channels of committees which was part of that church's order. He had such a driving, strong-willed personality, no one wanted to challenge him. The two elders that did challenge them were forced to resign.

This extreme illustration may seem harsh, but it is true and that church is now just a small controlled group of people who refuse to do any thing with their faith. Everyone there is controlled to the comfort level of the pastor and is put in their place. After talking to many pastors and other people in ministry over the years, this experience of mine was not too extreme after all, but rather common. The pastor must not be his own boss. And we must not rationalize that God is our boss, and no human is, because this is clearly non-Biblical.

The wise pastor would be in submission and have accountability to their board or some form of governing body or supervisors. To refuse accountability is certainly the red flag sign of the sin of pride. And remember pride is what caused Satan to fall, and our pride is what causes most pastors to fall because they forget who they are. When you forget who you are, then God is no longer your driving force and the temptations of the world will get the better of you, especially the temptation of control. The pastor must have a healthy, balancing, and working relationship with the elders and leadership as a team, performing and accomplishing ministry together. The pastor is responsible for the leadership's training, equipping, and teaching. The elders are responsible for their

positions respectfully. The pastor or the elders must not accomplish the tasks and ministry of the church alone; the driving force of personality must not be the driving force of the church. The call of the church leaders is to concentrate on our love relationship with Christ, and our healthy working relationships with each other. This is what accomplishes the work for the Kingdom of God. Not relying on our own efforts, rather working together in the body of Christ.

If you feel that your pastor is not being accountable or see a potential problem or a problem, then you need to respond. This is the job of the elders, if you are not one, then you need to go to them. The elders are to be in prayer and practice the principles in Matthew 18.

Remember a lack of accountability to the church and to others personally is the main factor that pastors fail and fall into sin. The pastor must have a web of relationships, so they have accountability on various levels from their family, board, denominational leaders, and friends. These are lairs of protection that synergistically combine with the 'Pastor's Prayer Primer,' in and what we will talk about in the section 'The Praying Church.' Then the pastor can be their best for God's glory! Accountability keeps the moral issues in check, as well as help prevent burnout and loneliness. It prevents to the strongest degree the pastor, their family, church and the community.

Protecting the Call

Those of us in pastoral ministry can see a pattern, a situation or experience that caused us to first think of entering the ministry as paid professionals. We received a call that went beyond what mere words could ever tell. We received a call so strong that nothing could ever replace it, in fact there was no other career or position that could ever take its place. We had virtually no desire to do anything else, but follow that call. As a homing pigeon returning to its destination, so was our drive to engage in that call. We received a most precious gift and opportunity to serve our Lord, and then we chose to respond and pursue it.

The decision to enter the pastoral life may have been received by friends and family as a stage they hopefully prayed we would soon pass. Thus, we had to swim against the flow of criticism and pessimism. We received warnings of an oppressed life with no social status, that we could do better, and we are wasting our lives. Yet we prevailed against the false warnings, entered a grueling time intensive educational process that took years. Then were the countless volunteering hours, the internships, the long drawn out process of ordination and finally our first call. We overcame so much, such as critical godless professors, church politics, ingratitude, unknown future destinations and poverty.

We may began the process with such enthusiasm that we were able to dodge the criticism from friends and family, and even the intensity and challenge of seminary. But some where on our pastoral journey we forgot what it was all about. We forgot what was important, and the reason and purpose of our call. We thought that since our call was a

tangible unyielding permeate position, we did not need more training or time with our Lord; we neglected the main thing. We thought we were protected, and since we are pastors, then the knowledge and intense training we gained will carry us through the ministry. But it did not. We lost site of our call because we lost site of the main thing. And we need to keep the main thing the main thing, and our main thing is our personal growing relationship with Christ. Church politics and countless crises have replaced prayer and devotions, so we dried up and burned out. Then we realize it is to late as we have fallen off the path our Lord had for us.

Most statistics say between 60% to 80% of those who enter the ministry will not be in it 10 years later, and only a fraction will stay in it as a lifetime career. Many pastors and I believe over 90percent start off right with a true call and the enthusiasm and moxy to make it, but something happens to derail their train of passion and love for the call.

Pastors and church leaders must be aware of what the pastor faces. They must realize the effects of the turmoil and stress of the office, so they can guard, encourage and hold accountable the person God gave them to lead. We have to see the factors we have already discussed such as our emotions, truth, responsibility, accountability, and most importantly our growing endeavor to be our best for our Lord. When leaders neglect the spiritual disciplines of the faith, the leader will suffer greatly and then so will the church. We need to see ourselves as a candle with not only both ends lit, but on a BBQ pit. We will not last there long. However, when our 'wax' is continually being replenished by our growth and walk in Christ, we will have more wax then the heat is able to dissolve. We cannot rely on just our moxy and strong willed determination, we have to be totally poured out and surrendered to the Lordship of Christ.

We have to pay attention of what the main thing is, and it is not church meetings, political battles, personality conflicts, the diseases of the church, unrealistic expectations, or even sermon preparation, it is our personal commitment to Christ. We have to concede to the Lordship of Christ before we can commit to His call, then we have to keep receiving Him to be able to keep serving Him.

"Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels". (Mark 8:34-38)

The pastor is not to be perfect, if so we would have never needed a Savior. Congregations as well as the pastors need to be centered on Christ and His purpose. That we are to deny ourselves and take up the cross. The cross may be 'ours', but it is from our Lord and not from others or ourselves. We cannot have unrealistic expectations, grandiose schemes while being negative and condescending, this is for the pastor and congregation. Ministry is a partnership between the church and God, the

action of ministry too is a partnership, between the ministry staff and the congregation taking up the cross. People, let us get with it and turn our churches around from the disease and self-centered interests to the church we are called to do. Let us take hold of the responsibility and opportunities we have. Let's protect that precious call!

Setting Boundaries

I cannot tell you how many countless times I will be on my way home to my family when someone just shows up at the office to talk. Sometimes it is a crisis, but most of the time it is loneliness. Some times they show up at my home or I meet them by chance at the grocery store. I love people and will naturally spend all of my time and efforts to be with them. This is one of the main areas I love about pastoral ministry. That was OK when I was single, but now as a married man I have other priorities that need my attention. As ministers of God, and as Christians we are all ministers, we need to be attentive to others, be listeners and encouragers. But we also are not to neglect our own web of relationships and family. We cannot trade the fracture of the family for poor management of His people, thinking we are doing our best for ministry. Poor ministry and misguided self-management will fracture your family and ministry more effectively than just about anything else. Thus, we need to set limits or boundaries.

A boundary is a fence to ward of potential problems and to protect those in its guardianship. It sets a parameter to be a guide, as in computer programming parameters keep the program in the right areas of operation. When we have those right areas of operation in our personal and ministerial lives we will be more effective for His service. And these principles are for all Christians; but, especially for pastors and leaders, because they have more responsibility.

Developing limits with your time and church relations will not happen overnight, as you have trained your church and self in patterns that are very much ingrained. Yet it is a must, we have to reform, before it is too late.

You need to ask yourself:

1. Do you spend adequate time with your family? Have a regular date night with your spouse and separate family night with the kids once a week!
2. Do you have a ministry that trains and equips others, or do you run the show?
3. Do you try to be too much to too many? That is do you not only train others but also delegate?
4. Do you have unrealistic expectations? With yourself as well as others? We need to have vision and passion, but also temperament, and allow God's timing.
5. Do you say no (with love and tact), and allow others to do ministry? Pastors cannot do everything, and be everywhere!
6. Do you have a system of time management? Even Jesus took time off!
7. Do you take regular time off? Pastors need at least two days off a week and 4 weeks off a year!
8. Do you take care of yourself physically, eat right and exercise? Remember your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, so do not defile it!
9. Do you have a good system to calendar and keep track of events and dates?

10. Most important, do you spend adequate time with our Lord? At the very least an hour a day?

These questions will determine how you manage yourself and the ministry God has entrusted to you. If any of the above areas are neglected you are possibly headed for breakdown and sin! Be encouraged that we are not to be perfect, but we do need to be the best as we can. Let these questions challenge you to spur you on to the right direction. Set up the boundaries. Boundaries are not a fence to keep others out, but are to keep good neighborly relations. They will not eliminate all of the interruptions, as a pastor or church leader interruption comes with the territory. We need to embrace and love our call and not be hermits to the people in our care. Boundaries create a healthier atmosphere with balance. A church that has leaders who love and care even more, because one person or group is not running the whole show.

The boundaries we set will enable us to put limits on ourselves from over working and not involving others in the ministry, thus enable us to guard ourselves from overwork to sexual sin. Leaders must have adequate time with their families. And if the leaders do not set limits, people will take advantage of them. Thus, leaving the pastors family out of the pastors life by being so busy with church problems they cannot take care of their own.

So what can we do?

First have trained deacons or ministry teams to respond to the needs of your congregation. One of the best organizations that train lay people for this is called "Steven Ministry," your denomination should have it as a resource for you. Whatever avenue you use and there are many good ones today, commit to it and do it! By having trained lay people to visit members and visitors on a semi-regular bases will give more care to your church. The pastor is not to be the primary caregiver, this is not Scriptural (Ephesians 4). A pastor is a trainer, a person who trains others to be leaders and ministers. When we do not do this function we become the only caregiver and create an over dependence on one person when we are all ministers together. This will rob the pastor of time away from their family and the proper training of the flock, not to mention teaching preparation. This misguided management philosophy will also rob others in the church of their gifts and abilities to be caregivers.

The second thing that is imperative is have a good system of time management. The ability to keep track of appointments, events with some form of guidelines to keep your time secure within a right sense of priorities. Such as make sure you have time planed with family before you schedule a visit or meeting. Make sure you keep your days off guarded as much as possible. Set office hours for 'drop ins', and let your congregation know your schedule, so they know when and how to get hold of you. And make sure you are doing the first thing.

Here are some more time-tested ideas to help you guard your time by setting boundaries to better care for your flock:

1. Have trained leaders visit everyone in the church twice a year. And extra visiting for shut ins, widows/ widowers, and those with special needs.
2. Have people trained to be ushers and greeters who also take care of the visitors.

The pastor can too visit them and send letters too.

3. Have a phone system, (cell, pager, number) whatever would work for you, set up as an emergency contact or chat line so people in need can get in touch with someone. So if a member needs to have someone to talk to or an emergency, they call that number and whoever is on duty will respond. This frees the pastor and gives that ministry to several different people that can be rotated. I have found that using a cell phone with an extra battery works best, and it is not that costly. So you can hand off the cell phone to whoever is on duty.
4. Make sure you have good ways to relax each day, to take your mind off the church, not just TV.
5. Have the attitude to release the laity to exercise their gifts and abilities. Don't just have a one person show mentality, be a team of caregivers. Such as, is there people under my care who can do some of the ministry tasks, perhaps even better than I?

Avoiding Burnout

Pastoral ministry and church leadership is a tiring task. It is filled with all kinds of responsibility and unexpected crises. I have had months where I was actually board, with hardly a sole to call on me for help. And I have had months where there was one crisis after another, where I could hardly take a breath. Sometimes we manage our time really good and are just tired, and sometime we do not manage ourselves well and we burnout. We will become tired from a big day at church, a big event, an intense program or a youth retreat. This is not ministry burnout. However, if we keep this up without checks and balance with boundaries we will burnout without the need for pride and sin. Our own mismanagement will lead us to ruin. I have found myself on this path to many times, until I surrendered not only to our Lord, but learned how to delegate and set those limits.

Life today produces far more stress than perhaps any other period of human history. We have more demands, more pressure, more tasks, more information, and more responsibility. While at the same time having less emotional energy, less support, less encouragement, less help from others, less people listening, and less focus on the 'main thing'. We get this way because we are a task oriented society and have misdirected thinking. Remember Elijah, what he went through and what he had to overcome. We have a God who loves and cares for us, thus we need to keep the right focus and perspective. Let our strength be drawn from Him, not our circumstances. We need to keep the focus off feelings and perception, and on who we are in Christ. We cannot be focused on the negative with a pessimistic outlook, which creates a bad situation worse or exaggerating a molehill into a mountain. We cannot be comparing ourselves to others and unrealistic expectations. Such thinking brings us down into a

performance trap that we may not be able to escape from. Thus, we will be unable to distinguish between our call, abilities, gifts and strengths and our misdirected focus, even when it is helping others. We are not all equal in ability, we all are unique and have a special place in the kingdom. We each have a special calling that no one else will have, learn it, embrace it, and live for it! Do not fall into the trap of blaming yourself and others, as Elijah did. Overcome and be your best for God's glory as Elijah was also able to do in a incredible spectacular fashion.

So how can we tell if I'm just tired or burnt? First we need to ask ourselves the questions from the previous section on setting boundaries, and if we are doing it, it is probably just exhaustion. However, if we find ourselves being apathetic and detached from our call and ministry we have a problem. We have to be on the watch for pride, which will produce a superiority complex. So we become careless towards others, then we will lose our perspective and what God has called us to do. And either the pride or the refusal to set boundaries or a combination of the two will cause us to fall into burnout and even sexual sin. It is up to the leader to determine if they need an overhaul or just a good night's sleep. And that leader needs to have others to be able to tell them if they see warning signs.

Here's what we can do to prevent burnout:

1. Pray, and pray a lot. Have others pray for you! Let God in what you are feeling, release your frustration to Him. You can't tell God anything new, He already knows.
2. Learn to delegate, remember boundaries and the diseases and dangerous we previously discussed.
3. Keep your attitude in check.
4. Stay healthy, get regular checkups, eat right, rest, exercise... Guard your time off. We are of little use to God if we are always sick and tired. We are on this earth for such a short bit of time, so keep your focus and your health in check. Don't be in a hurry to get to heaven, you will get there in due time, stay focused here on earth, and still keep your hope on our life in Heaven to come.
5. Have a support base to keep you accountable, people that you can go to be listened too.
6. Engage in other interests outside of the ministry, such as biking, hiking, civic events or a hobby.
7. Make sure you have the right focus and call in your life. A lot of people are in the wrong vocation, they are not utilizing their gifts, talent, and abilities. Pastors too can be in the wrong profession.
8. Realize that you are not God, He does not need you, He only chooses to use you out of grace. Therefore we are not the Savior to the church, we are the people He uses.
9. Be a learner, read, go to conferences and retreats where you are not the leader, so you can be refreshed.
10. Most importantly, be immersed into the Word and prayer.

Burnout means that our spiritual energies are totally exhausted, that we have no will or vitality to do ministry or whatever our task is. We are completely worn-out and spent. Thus, if we stay in our position without being refueled we will just be throwing a monkey wrench into vital components, causing it to break. When the leader is burned out, they are the monkey wrench that sabotages the machine of ministry. We may not even desire or be willing to do so. But because of our lack of availability due to the fact there is nothing left of us, we are of no service, and are in fact endangering others vitality and ministry. In John 21 Jesus asks Peter to “*feed My sheep,*” we through the power of the Holy Spirit are the feed, and as feed we need to be fed. People will depend on us to feed them, and they may drain us of our feed personally and spiritually, thus we have to be careful to replenish ourselves with the right feed. If not we endanger ourselves and the ministry entrusted to us.

As shepherds we are to teach others how to feed and be fed. In doing so we help others, so they are not dependent on us. Imagine burnout as an old oil lamp with a wick, as it is lit the wick burns until the oil runs out. As long as there is oil, the wick will not burnout. As long as we are living in dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit and not our own efforts, we too will not burnout. The question is: What is burning in you, and what is refueling you?

Rekindle, renew and refuel yourselves upon our Lord, who never is weak or weary (Psalm 87:7; Isaiah 40:28). Take a careful look into yourself and the reasons you were called, and the reasons you are there. Are you serving God or yourself? Is your fuel God or is it something else? Are you basing your ministry on your understanding or God's? Do not quench the Spirit by pride that says I have to be there, get rest and renewed so you can be your best for His Highest!

The Pastor's Personal Life

The healthy pastor should have a loving, encouraging, and equipping role to their family. That is, if they are married, there is nothing wrong with a single pastor or leader. The pastor's marriage must have the foundation of Christ and be an example to the congregation. When we are modeling Christ in our personal lives that will be our strongest witness over anything that is preached from the pulpit. The single pastor is called to model celibacy and integrity. The pastor whose family is in chaos is extremely destructive to the life and health of the body they are ministering to and to the witness of the world. If a pastor or Christian leader does not have it together in their home life, why would a non-Christian want to have what they have? Why would a non-Christian want to trade their life, which they see nothing wrong with, and substitute it with chaos and strife? Why would a congregation listen and respect the leader who has no observable love relationship with their own family? Families are not perfect and the pastor's family is no exception, because there is always conflict. But the pastor has a greater responsibility to make their marriage work out of love and gratitude to Christ.

The minister has greater responsibility in raising their children in Godliness with loving care and respect. That does not mean there will be no problems, but it does

mean there is something positive to model and to show other people who are looking. Too many pastors, in my experience, and the statistics back this up, tend to neglect their personal life. Don't be the pastor whose family feels they are in competition with the church. Ministry must not be a place for intimacy contests where the family is pitted against the church. In previous pages, I mention a pastor who worked 80 hours a week and neglected his family. I saw him 10 years later at a conference and he told me his kids will have nothing to do with him and none of them are following the Lord. He started to cry, asking why and how did this happen. Of course, I just wanted to blurt out 'you idiot,' that is what you get for working 80 hours a week and neglecting them. Thankfully, God did not let me say those words, and throw a knife into his wounds, I knew that he already knew that. Let this be a lesson for us all, pastors and lay people alike, don't neglect your family. The pastor's home too often becomes dead and not the refuge and haven of rest of love and care that it should be.

The pastor must pursue his marriage and family as the most important earthly matter, even over their call to ministry, and only second to their call of Christ, just as all Christians should. (Just so you are clear, God will never ask you to do something contrary to Scripture; such as, God would never ask you to leave your spouse. I knew a pastor who felt God was telling him to leave his wife and marry someone else. Only his lust was telling him that, not God!) The pastor's primary task is to his family, and to model the character of Christ through it.

When we acknowledge our families as a foundation in Christ, we will give proper perspective to the ministry. So we have the perspective of our first love is Christ, second is family, and third is the ministry or work for the lay person. When we reverse these priorities we reverse our call, and we become overwhelmed and frustrated. Remember God knows best, so follow His structure.

Another big aspect of a healthy pastor and mature Christian is the ability to express intimacy and love. We become too attached to a Victorian model of being detached from expressing simple love and affection for our family and misplace it to others in sin. We can work on this by regular one on one time with family members, communication, and seeking harmony. Having dinner together as often as possible is a big start, most pastors I know do not even do that, then they wonder why their kids are drifting off. Our kids will drift off if we drift off first. If you are not involved in their life, why should they desire to be involved with yours?

The church must not put unrealistic expectations on the pastor's spouse and family. When the church hires a minister, they are doing just that, hiring the minister, not a two-for-one deal. Pastors' wives must be allowed to follow their own call, leading, and spiritual gifts, and not be forced to attend all church functions and be involved in every ministry of the church. This puts too much strain on the family and will alienate their children from the church.

The pastor's family lives in a glass house, and the children will quickly pick up on this. The congregation needs to give the children respect and a wide berth or the

children will grow up hating Christians. I cannot tell you how many times I have run into pastor's kids who have no love for the church; and to hear their sad stories. Yes, the expectations of the pastor's family are higher than the average family or any family in the church. The pastor's family should rise to the occasion and support him and realize their responsibility of mirroring Christ. When the kids are loved, encouraged, and cared for, adequate time is spent with them; then they will normally rise to the occasion and take ownership of their own faith. You may be surprised at how mature and spiritually seeking they will get out of their own initiative (and the work of the Holy Spirit). God's will is that we first love Him out of trust and obedience, and out of that, the family will be together, in love, modeling the person and work of Christ, and be a viable witness to people around them.

I Timothy 3, is clear on the qualifications of leadership: *"Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap."* (I Timothy 3:1-7)

God calls leaders to be blameless, that does not mean we are to be without sin, because we all have fallen short of God's glory. But what it does mean is that we go through our life above reproach, a strong moral standing of values based on God's Word with integrity and consistency. Give close notice to verse 6 of this chapter and the danger of pride. The Bible makes it clear that the leader must place their families at the highest level of priority, and would be considered unqualified for ministry otherwise. And remember this passage follows on the heels of the end of chapter 2 that states to continue in faith, love, holiness, and self-control. Remember the parameters of love. The aspects of pride have no business in the leadership of God's people.

Pastors are missing fellowships and friendships in a big way. Congregations have a tendency to isolate their pastors as either being on a pedestal that you do not reach personally. Or they ignore them and treat them as they do teachers (which is wrong too). Thinking they are not good enough to have a 'real' job. Thus, the congregation is not willing to socialize with their pastors and paid ministry leaders because they are beneath them. And I have seen pastors too engage in this behavior. Possibly it is a fear to get too close, or a fear of being convicted. So they kill the messenger in different ways with isolation or over praise. So the pastor is out of the loop of needed relationships and it causes the balance of their personal life to be off. Then pastors are unable to have regular friendships, so they have a higher propensity to fall to immoral activities.

I have heard from Focus on the Family that we in the United States lose a pastor a day from seeking an immoral path verses God's. Seeking intimacy where it must not be found. F.O.F. statistics state that 70% of pastors do not have good personal friends, and no one to confide with. They also said about 35% of pastor's deal with sexual sin personally. And that 25% of pastors are divorced. The statistics I had with church growth resources is even higher. Pastors who tend to be very educated and have the ability to embark in sin on Saturday and preach the Word on Sunday without thinking anything is wrong. This is again called 'cognitive dissidence,' harboring two compliantly different ways of thinking and behaving and rationalizing that the two are OK together. As they are two 'worlds' with such a distance that they do not effect each other. Some pastors even rationalize it that it is theologically OK. You will even let yourself believe it is OK. An Episcopal Bishop even wrote a book on that sexual sin is not sin, but is a healthy life style! The cost is not counted before the entry into sin: The cost to the church, to the spouse, to the children, and even to the unbeliever.

Remember Arrogance will be the diving board that will spring the pastor into the pool of sin. We can never use the excuse to rationalize sin because of our circumstance. Remember Joseph, he did not cave to sin, when he had ample opportunities and reasons to rationalize doing so.

Seek out connectivity that is positive for the pastor. If you are a pastor you may even have to seek it outside of your church. Join a Bible study in another church, you need to be fed too. Seek joining a secular organization, such as a biking club or civic club. Be grateful to your families, value them and love them. Never let the busyness of church life to take you away from them. Your family is more important than the meeting at church! Get involved in your community. If you are not the pastor, then get to know them. They may need encouragement and friendship more than anyone else in the church.

Be careful who you share and what you share as a pastor or leader. It has been my misfortunate experience that misguided Christians will use it as a guise to manipulate and control you. So be very discerning what you share, you need to ask:

How vulnerable are you?

How are your current relationships?

What should you share and not?

Are the people you share too able to keep confidences without question?

If I share will I still be respected?

Is the church mature enough not to spread gossip?

These will be the determining questions weather you need to be in a small group outside of your church or within it. And how and what to share personally, what to share to those in your care and at what level to those in your church. I have found it best personally to seek friendships in my church, and small groups of accountability outside with other pastors in the area.

“There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. “For whom am I toiling,” he asked, “and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?” This too is meaningless--a miserable business! Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!” (Ecclesiastes 4:8-10)

Being Accountable Personally

He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair--every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways. It will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life. (Proverbs 2:7-19)

I have seen to many good pastors fall away from ministry. In fact I was seeking a new pastoral position no to long ago and was looking up old pastoral friends for references that I have lost touch with. I was shocked to find that out 4 of the 5 senior pastors I have worked with several years ago are no longer in ministry. In fact they even have left the faith, and want nothing to do with Christians and the church. 3 of the 4 did it to themselves through not being accountable and fell into sexual sin. The other was a victim of the diseases we previously mentioned.

I mentioned what happened to those other pastors to the 5th pastor and he said it is very important to him that he stays accountable. He is in a small group of men who hold him up in prayer and in solid relationships. This pastor has friends and someone he can call when he is dazed and confused with life and ministry. He has a net of relationships that protect him from the lure of sexual sin as well as pride, jealous and loneliness.

It is a very pathetic fact that too many pastors have no system of accountability. Some may do this out of pride. But more often it is because the increasing over expectations of church boards and competition with the church down the street that keeps the pastor to busy. So busy that they are not able to take a breath in a stormed tossed sea. They are so busy paddling to tread the waters that they do not grab onto the raft next to them. They are so busy they cannot find the time for accountability and relationships. Most pastors will not confront their board (because a lot of churches will just get rid of them for someone ‘more to their liking’), or their board will not listen. So the pastor burns out or falls into seduction.

Pastors must have someone they can turn too in times of stress and hurt. Pastors must have friends. These relationships are not to replace the family. Nor are they to be a source of control. One pastor I know of was forced into a small group by his church so they can keep him in tight control, like a puppet on a string. The people in his small group were manipulative and just darn right mean. Their goal was to micro manage him, so they held the control. They did this out of the refusal to grow in the Lord and respond to His call. They replaced ministry and solid teaching with relentless control.

The pastor's friends must be genuine and real. They need to be strong enough to hold them accountable at the same time be affirming and encouraging. Be willing to ask the upcoming 8 questions in love, while being compelling enough to hold them accountable. This has to be done in an atmosphere of love and care. There cannot be judgmentalism, control freaks with personal agendas who love manipulation. True friendship is accepting strength and weakness, being able to share in confidentiality. So the pastor or anyone can share without fear of reprisal and condemnation. Good relationships build the pastor and Christian into maturity. A place to reconcile issues, bounce ideas off, and examine the life experiences we all face. So we are facing them together. We then can face our congregations and community with renewed strength instead of avoiding them and finding sinful alternatives. True friendships are a place of affirmation and expectancy with honesty and the freedom to share. The Christian who want to be their best for God's glory must seek solid relationships, there can be no substitute!

So what else can we do? Have a small group or mentor ask the pastor these 8 questions on a regular bases:

Have you spent time alone with God, is He your driving force?
How is your prayer and devotional life?
Have you made your family a priority?
Have you filled the mandates of your call, being the best as you can be for His glory?
Have you been alone in a compromising situation?
Have your financial dealings been questionable?
Have you exposed yourself to sexually oriented material?
Have you lied about any of the above questions?

"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long".
(Psalm 32:3)

If you fall away from these questions or refuse to have someone hold you to them, then Satan will have a foothold in your life. These questions are not just for the pastor or church leader, they are for all Christians who want to live a life of integrity. The failure to have no accountability will produce sin. Then it is not a question of if you may fall, but when you will engage in sin and destroy everything. The ministry God has given

you and your family, your self and those around you for generations to come will be destroyed. Yes there can be restitution and restoration, but the cost can never be completely repaid. Just look at King David, his sin had dire consequences that we still live with.

We need to be careful as a pastor and with our pastors. We cannot be too shy as not to seek relationships, and not be prideful to think we do not need them. We cannot let the past hurts of confidence breaches and gossip to neuter our effectiveness and call. If we are weak in the friendship making department as I once was, we need to learn and not be afraid to try. Being a growing person of God, we need relationships, because God created us relational beings. Relation to Himself and each other, the fall wrecked it, but Christ fixed it, so let us embrace it!

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load”. (Galatians 6:2-5)

There are some things we need to bear alone, but most things need to be shared with others, be discerning and strong enough to go for it. You may be hurt, and so was our Lord.

The pastor, as well as the Christian, must be in control of his faculties, that is, their emotions, actions, and deeds. We must have a healthy understanding of our emotions, what we are capable of, or what will set us off so we can avoid and side-step situations that can blow up out of control and hurt not only ourselves, but those around us. Never forget the responsibility you have as a Christian, and never forget the even greater responsibility of a leader. It is not very politically correct to talk about the judgment of Christ, but be assured, we will all face judgment, the Bible is clear on that.

Fortunately we have protection and covering that Christ gave us because of the redemption of the cross. Make no mistake; we still have the responsibility and accountability to do our best for His glory. So do not go through life thinking, well I will be forgiven, and I will do what I want. Do not do that, this is not what our Lord Christ wants us to do. Yes, you may be forgiven, but you will be called on to make an accounting of your actions. Wouldn't it be great to hear, “ well done, good and faithful servant,” instead of “well here is a consolation prize, you can have the board game, 'How to be a Christian'” instead of the grand prize that awaits us. None of us, I would hope, want to go to Heaven just by the skin of their teeth, and hear Jesus say “I'm so disappointed in you, I have given you great gifts, and you could have done so much more.” Can you imagine a greater hurt then hearing those words, and looking back on our lives saying, “oh I should have, oh I should have, oh I should have?” Like the scene at the end of the movie “Schindlers List” where Schindler looks at his ring and realized how much more he could have done, even though he did do a great job. We can always be better; there is always room for growth. Friends, let us not say those words, “I wish I could have done better,” rather let us live our lives the way Christ wants us to.

Chapter VIII How To Stop the Disease of Rebellion

Recent news broadcasts have been emphasizing “Ethnic Cleansing” as a major problem in the world today. Governments led by dictators have put a strangle hold around their own people. This has become an almost unprecedented tragedy in the twentieth century. Hence the reason the US government and NATO entered into military conflict with Kosovo. People have been systematically slaughtered in our century to the point that more people have been killed by the arms of their own government, than all the wars put together, making the twentieth century the bloodiest in recorded history.

There are all kinds of reasons why governments kill their own people. Hitler saw the Jews as a threat to his vision of world dominance. Stalin saw educated people as the biggest threat to his new government, so he put to death over 50 million of his own people, mostly scientists, farmers, the educated, and all those who professed religious beliefs. And Hitler had over 10 million people exterminated, who were mostly Jews, along with Gypsies and Christians.

The dictators today see their power as absolute; thus they will force their power and will onto others by force, with the goal of eliminating cultures different from their own, because of the fear of losing their power. But sociologists tell us this is counter productive to the very government committing the genocide. For example, if Hitler had left the Jews alone, we in the United States would be eating bratwurst for lunch, and dining at sushi bars for dinner. Because he would have had the atomic bomb and other various scientific advances he lost to the Jews' murder and defection. The Soviet Union would still be in power because they would be able to offer their people a high standard of living. With the execution of the farmers and scientists, the USSR was not able to grow the crops that they needed or fix and build the infrastructure. Instead, all the educated people left or were forced into slave labor to build the military machine that bankrupted the country, and threw its people into poverty. The same with China who killed off over 35 million of its people. Meanwhile, Hong Kong with the same resources and people culturally, managed to become a major city with a high standard of living, a place of culture and power in the world. Most of China is in poverty.

Sociologists say that countries that kill their own are on the average 20% poorer. I was on staff at a church where our “sexton,” that is janitor, was a high ranking military officer who fled Marcos' reign of terror in the Philippines. He said that his country was growing economically ever since WWII, and the people were gaining a high standard of living, when Marcos took over, the country dropped into poverty and disease, until his forced departure. Since Aquino took over the country, it has prospered greatly, with a regime of cooperation and positive vision.

So what does this have to do with the problems of the church? A lot! Because the same motives and inspirations that drive the power plays in ruling nations, and the mass genocide of people comes into play in the local church. Well, maybe not the physical killing, but we can be very effective in the spiritual killing. It is our human nature to take

something good and ruin it. Now do not get me wrong, I'm not talking about mass murder, but mass exodus. The misdirected passions and power plays of individuals and leaders are driving people, who have the gifts to build the body of Christ up, to leave or be in conflict. Because they are driven out, the people with the necessary gifts and abilities are no longer in our body or able to exercise them for God's glory. Thus we are unable to be our best for the furthering of God's Kingdom. The church can have the attitude of the dictators and drive people away, or we can have the vision of the visionary leader, who promotes reconciliation and cooperation. The results will be up to us; as being churches that are torn apart, or having the joy of serving our Lord.

The Disease of Dissension

The disease that gets us in this predicament is concentrating our efforts and desires, and focusing away from the call of the Lord. We have the attitude of win at all cost, and put away the true mission of the church and replace it with our personal vision that does not have the precepts of God's will in mind. Just like Desert Storm, where a coalition of nations led by the US used a majority of its war machines to take out Saddam Hussein and restore peace in the Middle East. President Bush called this "Total War," as a term to distance it from the strategy of the Vietnam conflict, of limited resources and hit and run tactics.

Too many Christians have this mentality in the church, total take over, totally my way or else. They will use every resource to win, regardless of right or wrong, whether it is moral or immoral, whether it is Godly or ungodly. It amazes me how people justify themselves in their action with Scripture out of context, and rationalizing the 'I'm right' attitude. A story in point is when that elder had a 'win at all cost' attitude to expel me from the church. She resorted to all kinds of tactics, including rumors, and calling the parents of the youth to say their youth were in danger and I could not be trusted. She continued her "total war" campaign against me for nearly 5 years. She tried everything, including accusing me of sexual misconduct and fornication. The ironic thing is she was the one who was living the life of sexual misconduct and putting others in danger. So she took on this total war strategy to throw people off from herself and to project the conflict on someone else.

When I was in college, I was on the other side of the coin. We received a new pastor who was very obtuse and, from our perspective, totally ineffective to serve as a pastor. So after a year of trying to work with him, a strong faction of the church turned viciously against him. At first, I was against this move, since I was on staff and trying my best to work with this guy. But after listening to the complaints, such as no relational skills, a refusal to preach the Word of God, and a passionate hatred of the tenets of the faith, I decided to join in. We had the 'win at all cost' mentality, after all it was "our church" and he was an outsider who did not belong. We circulated petitions for his removal and exaggerated the problems to convince people. I feel ashamed about what I participated in. He was a terrible pastor, and was fragmenting our church, but we could have handed it in a more Godly manner. The end result was he left, along with half the congregation, who were fed up with the fighting.

We must recognize our personal motivation as it is: personal, and recognize the purpose of the church as Christ calls us to. Our motives need to be centered on the person and work of Christ and not our desires, no matter how right we may think we are. And with this out of control sense of mission, we convince ourselves the opposition is evil and we are on the side of good. We get so engrossed in our fights, we confuse our desires as a mission from God, but in fact we are only serving Satan. The end result is we become our own worst enemy, because we become the antagonists being counterproductive to the mission of Christ.

The final nail in the coffin of the church is when we take the extreme position that God told me to. I'm not saying God does or does not speak to us today. I believe He does give clear direction through His Word and through a deep prayer life. But I'm suspicious of people who say, "God told me to..." especially when it is counter to the truths of Scripture. This mentality is very dangerous to the church, as it creates the illusion that the deceiver and conflict provider is the savior. This is a clear delusion that must be met and confronted by the truth of God's Word, (see chapter on conflict resolution).

To the deceiver, their mental illusion convinces them to do whatever it takes to win, even with actions and passions that are normally conceived as inappropriate and misleading. Such as starting untrue rumors; after all you do not need facts and evidence to back you up when immature Christians will gobble up every morsel of gossip, regardless of it's validity. When we say God told me, how could the average person stand up to that? I observed one church where a lot of members were always hearing what they perceived as "words of knowledge" that God was directly speaking to them. Now, I'm in no position to test the validity of their claim, I do not know what is in a person's heart, or what went on metaphysically. But what I can do is test what they say against Scripture, using some common sense logic and reasoning to determine the validity. And if their word of knowledge is counter to the Word of God, then you can rest assured that it is not from above, it is from within, or below.

They were seemingly using the emotion of shame to get others in the church to bend to their will, with the manipulation of saying they were representing God. The new Christians could not discern, and were confused, so they would go with the flow, and the mature Christians would leave in disgust.

The result was a lot of people left and formed a new church, which has grown to over 600 people in two years, neglecting the immature rhetoric. The home church withered to under 200. The majority of the growth of the new church was not sheep stealing, but rather, new converts. Remember people are always attracted to love and care over strife and conflict!

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve. Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did

not lay is the man who gains riches by unjust means. When his life is half gone, they will desert him, and in the end he will prove to be a fool.” (Jeremiah 17:9-11)

How much easier it is to hear the desires and wickedness of our hearts, than to hear the voice of our Lord. It is not that our God is silent or whispers below our ability to hear, but rather our hearts are so consumed with our own will, we cannot hear God over our own noise level from our desires. The heart in this passage is not the organ that pumps our blood, but is the very character that represents who we are. Our mind and will are governed by the character of who we are. We, as human beings, have free will. We have a free agency over the decisions we make and the life we choose to live. We have free reign over our thoughts and the choices we make. Because of the fall, we are also in bondage to sin and separation from God. Because of the redemption of the cross, we have escaped the punishment of sin and are transformed by our new identity in Christ.

But the Christian still faces the dilemma of the moral options we face, and the evil desires of our nature that basically remain the same. We are still sinners and have the evil nature we were born with; only now we are saved from the punishment for it. So we need to grow in maturity to learn how to surrender our will over to God's. And thus be able to make the correct choices based on God's Word and our growing devotional life. If you are not growing, then you will be unable to make the correct moral decisions, thus the “me centered” reasoning will take over and hinder the “God centered” reasoning.

When we set our will free by giving it over to Christ, we will notice a significant change in our attitudes and compassion level, and the work of the Lord will grow in our presence. The alternative is the desires of our will, will rule the roost and we will have a church filled with conflict, not with God's people.

It is interesting to note that a partridge will steal other partridge's eggs, and claim them as their own. But instantly the new birdies, after hatching, will still return to their original parents. The partridge that committed the theft gained nothing but the humiliation of an empty nest. It is the same way with us non-feathered followers of Christ. When we center on our policies of war with our fellow Christians and neighbors, all it will do is give us an empty nest. An empty church that cannot be used by our Lord forHis glory, but rest assured, Satan will be quite happy with you!

Jesus tells us, *“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:7-9)*

We can model the character of Christ by the faith we show in our obedience to His Word. What we see in Christ is our model of how we integrate in our relationships, that is relate to other people. Being a peacemaker may not stop a war between nations, but it will stop the wars in our churches. We may not stop the violence in the streets, but we can create the environment of love and care that can provide the environment of cooperation and care that will lead to a non-violent neighborhood. We have the God-

given ability to be peacemakers to those around us. This is not a special spiritual gift or ability, although some people are naturally better at it. But all Christians have this ability and call. The prerequisite is to have personally made peace with Christ and peace in our inner turmoil. When we have the composure of our emotions and the passion to follow Christ, the fruit of this will be a peacemaker. This ability will nullify the war-torn church, to a God-centered church that beacons to its neighbors.

We have to remember God does not take sides in a congregation where one side wants a beige covered hymnbook and the other a blue cover. God does not care if we have carpet or tile in the narthex. God does not take sides; He only grieves when we engage in hostile actions against each other. What God wants is clearly stated in Ephesians 4:1-6, what God does not want is our feeble wars with each other. We must center ourselves on God's desires and not our own!

The Christian must not be the type of person who has to have things their way all the time. As Christians, we must be in submission to the authority of Christ. When we do this, the natural inclination to be driven by our self-fulfilling disillusion will fall off. The constant prowling to get what we want, when we want it, our way is disintegrating the call. Because the result of this attitude is a reckless rudeness to others, that destroys relationships and inhibits the spread of the Gospel. God calls us out of disintegration and into reconciliation.

We need to identify our desires and compare them to the Word of God by having a life that is centered on devotion and prayer. By having a prayer centered life, we have a life that can mend the brokenness by the fruits we create by a renewed character.

The total war policy can be quickly neutralized by surrendering to these Scriptures, and fully realizing what we are doing and how contrary it is to the love that Christ taught. Our efforts must be strong and consumed with following Christ and not ourselves. Our reasoning and agendas must be God-centered not self-centered. Our need to be in control must give way to the Creator and King of the universe, and guess what, you ain't it! This may sound funny, and I tend to say it a lot, there is one God and we are not it. It is funny because most people do not get it, especially Christians.

It is to be expected for a non-Christian to behave contrary to the teachings of Christ, and wage war with each other, so why do Christians do it? All too often, the Christian will rationalize they are on a mission from God and throw out the Bible and replace it with their quest. Just as in the middle ages, where the Crusades had nothing to do with the teachings of Christ, but everything to do with the futile desires of the Kings and Popes, their lust for power and glory. Just like the thieving partridge, no one remembers them, only their dastardly deeds.

Jesus tells us, *"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, Let me take the speck out of your eye, when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?"*

You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.” (Matthew 7:3-52)

This normally goes under the category of judgmentalism, but the desire to be on top and control others with our war-like mentality gives credence to this passage. Condemning others for their faults or ideas that do not match our own is foolish because of our own faults and sins.

I was appointed to an elder position when I was in High School. I sat on a church council with people 3 and 4 times my age, yet I was enthusiastic and was about to change the world. After my first meeting, I sat in my car in shock and dismay. I could not believe what just happened. Having grown up in the church, I witnessed all kinds of conflicts and disagreements between the members, but what I had just witnessed and participated in, all my past experiences could have never prepared me for.

After we opened with a very short prayer, the moderator explained the agenda, and on the top of the list was a petition for the removal of the grounds keeper. I felt he was doing a good job and so did a lot of the people in the church. But there was one key leader who just did not like him, so he wanted the grounds keeper out. The committee quickly became divided, half supported the leader who wanted him out, and the rest of us wanted to hear the reasons for the dismissal. The leader just used his personality to bully us and would not give a clear reason for it.

I was on the Academic Debate Team in High School and was trained to follow logic and clear reasoning for any argument, so in my youthful enthusiasm, I confronted the leader asking him not to give us his emotional reasons, but a clear logical argument backed up with facts. He hit the roof, and yelled at me that I was a stupid kid and did not know what I was talking about. Several others joined him criticizing me. I was, at that time, a little bit conceited and cocky, so my attitude probably ticked him off, because I gave him zero respect, I considered him to be quite a jerk, but I did mean well. Everybody liked the grounds keeper, except this one leader and a few other older people. They voted to terminate him, and censored me from voting.

The following Sunday, the pastor took me aside, because he quickly found out what happened. He told me and encouraged me that sometimes Christians fight viciously and have no concern for the facts and logic that I want to bring. He told me to keep a low profile and listen and learn how things were run. I remember asking him why the groundskeeper was fired, he said it was probably because he did not fit in at our church. I still did not understand. He went on to say he found the grounds keeper a better job at our school. Later I realized the grounds keeper was Hispanic and most of our church were from upper-class, well to do families who were uncomfortable with his presence. Our next grounds keeper “sexton” was the Filipino high ranking military officer, and to keep him was a fight too. It is sad how we humans feed on one another viciously and with contempt.

When we go into battle with each other and argue over a budget with a feverish pitch, we must realize how much this hurts our Lord. And we all end up looking foolish,

just as I did for ousting a pastor and acting cocky, even though we all at the time thought it was necessary. It was not the removal of the pastor that was wrong, it was the war we caused in the process, it was not what we did, but how we did it. We must not let our emotions get a hold of our reasoning, we cannot allow decisions that effect the body of Christ to be made with fighting and conflict.

Our beliefs must be communicated in our actions and deeds, not in emotional out of control bullying of our personality. Touchy heartfelt appeals or angry rhetoric cannot be the vehicle to communicate the gospel or be the agenda of a meeting. Rather, use clear reasoning with love and passion for who Christ is, and a spirit of gratitude. Our attitudes reflect our heart; our actions reflect the maturity of our walk. Our skill in loving people is more important than our skill of rhetoric and scholarly explanations. We need not be manipulating people's emotions, when we have a better job to do, the call to make disciples.

There are times when a Christian has to take a stand, and there are times when we need to yield. Growth and maturity will make the difference between foolishness and wise action. *"By their fruit you will recognize them."* Verse 16 of that chapter gives the answer to our arguments. There is a big difference between discernment and judgment. We do need, at times, to draw a line with such issues as doctrine that is Bible centered, and the call of obedience to His Word. Political compromise and pure emotionalism do not belong in the House of God. Nor does the power of wealth and influence other than Scripture.

"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God-- having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them."
(II Timothy 3:1-5)

These last days must not be the refection of how the local church functions. This passage is not our template and structure to form our agendas and meetings, rather this is a warning on what not to do. We are not to appear as Christians, we are to be Christians, we are to be living examples of Christ, not creators and molders of discontent. As leaders, we need to understand that people under our care are vulnerable to misinformation and miss- reflection of Christianity. We are not called to deceive, but to receive the Holy Spirit and further the Kingdom of God.

We have a responsibility not to fall in the same trap that captured Eve. The serpent basically told her she did not have enough in life, that she deserved more. This lie leads to discontentment that catapults us to focus on ourselves, our needs, and rights and not on what Christ calls us to. Becoming a Christian and being a disciple does not nullify the pains and frustrations you may experience in life, what it means is you are free to become your fullest to glorify God, regardless of your circumstances. We gain our freedom from the bondage of sin, and what needs to come out of this is

gratitude. When we focus on gratitude then we take the focus off ourselves and onto Christ. So the result is not seeking the power and glory for ourselves, but place the focus on God's interests instead.

Being an ungrateful person will lead you to dominate and bully others to follow your way, regardless of the tenets of Scripture. This is one of the main reasons for the fights in the church boardroom. There are just too many people with their agenda and desires and not enough Godly people with Christ's interests and a love for His people. We become too ingrown in our own merits and do not see the call of our Lord, nor do we see the good blessings that God has given us. When we seek to desire more, which there is nothing wrong with on the face of it, but when it gets away from our purpose as Christians, then we have a big problem. You will be ruled by discontentment and not by contentment by God's grace. We need to realize our thanks and dependence on our Lord to carry us to the boardroom and through life.

Following Christ may not get us what we want, but to find true contentment, we need to trust in His saving work, and obey the call He has given. Who we are in Christ is what He has done for us, and our response is gratitude and passion for His will. This is what's going to fuel your mature walk with Christ. Then we can reflect and teach with our love and actions to our neighbors, and be a reminder and encourager to the Christians around us. All we want and need is what Christ has done, so that should be the principle direction of our committees and boards, and outside and inside walk with Christ. Outside to the non-Christian, and inside to our fellow Christian.

Fighting in the church has been going on since the advent of the church and the first various conflicts spawned the Epistles and the call that Christ has for us. We must realize the disease we spread by our miss-directed actions and quests to be in control. We need to surrender on our knees to our holy God, and realize our unworthiness and the grace He gave us that we did not deserve. Our conflicts blind us from our purpose in life and prevent us from serving God effectively. We cannot see the call of our Lord with the plank in our eyes. We must remove our evil desires so the discernment of the truth will not be clouded with the gloom of self-desires. Pride and hostility must not get in the way of serving our call. The need for control must die, so we can submit to the Cross.

We need to know that change will bring problems and emotions to not only the boardroom, but the coffee hour as well. Stability is very appealing to people, especially the older generation. They value a stable environment, so when you want to switch from hymnals to overheads or "PowerPoint," then you will have conflict. Yet the younger generations desire change, and the new worship formats are very appealing. So you have one side who says they will leave if you do not change, and the other side pretty much says the same if you do change. This is a typical problem leaders deal with.

The solution may not be easy, because you cannot please everyone. What we need to do is focus on the essentials, such as what worship is, and what God requires of us in His presence. Do not fight for the sake of fighting, and realize that some things cannot change, and some things have to change.

Try to get on the same page in purpose and unity, what is it that our end goal is, and make sure it is based on God's Word. The church must have core values that it stands for based on Scripture that are as specific as possible. These will spell out the method for your mission and vision. We will talk more on this in the chapter on leadership. Change is always inevitable as we look to church history; it is how we deal with it that will show our character as total war or total Christ.

“Overcoming Spiritual Deadness”

One of the things I liked to do when I was a youth pastor was take youth to rest homes, have them pick an elderly person, and spend at least an hour with them and get their life story and listen. Then we would meet and discuss each person's experience, what we could learn from their experience, and how we can apply it to ourselves. After the “I do not want to's,” the youth really got into it and realized the choices they make in their lives now will be with them when they are in a rest home. One of the recurring themes we run into is the dying mentality, a person who just sleeps and sits there waiting to die. Usually their families do not visit them or they do not have any, there is no hope in their lives and nothing for them to do, so they wait to die. The other group of people we see have family and friends and see a hope, if only to see their grand and great grand kids grow up. They have a sense of hope and vitality, and see a purpose for their existence.

In my experience in pastoral visitation, if an elderly person sees no hope and has no family to look to, they die quickly. They literally die of despair. No matter how much encouragement I would give them, they give up, unless I can get people in their life on a regular basis, such as to adopt a grandparent. I have observed, over the years, the same with churches. When a church body sees no hope for themselves, they give up their call, wither, and die. I have seen this trend over and over again, especially while on staff at a church growth firm, we saw this almost epidemically, and we would receive last ditch efforts by pastors and leaders gasping for a midnight reprieve out of their situation. But by the time we get the call, there is little we can do when the ship is almost at the bottom of the ocean. I usually recommend to these callers to see it as a new church start and re-boot.

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Revelations 3:1-6)

A dead church is something our Lord just cannot stand, because it is a slap in His face. We must not be the church is in name only, and have no yearning or passion to follow what is on the sign outside that says “church”. Sardis was a fortress that historians tell us was conquered at least twice by complete surprise. So our Lord uses this imagery to make a point that they need to wake up or a similar experience will befall them. At the time of this letter, Sardis was a once great city that was living in the past with its memories of what it used to accomplish, as one commentator describes as “lethargy”, living in past dreams. The only major industry left was clothing, which is probably why Christ used it as a reference to what will fall next. The same disease that effected the city has gotten into the church. Apathy is thinking the greatness is in the past, and that past is then worshipped and adored. Their service and passions to Christ are rooted in the past, but the vine is now withered.

Those of us Christians in a dead church must see the seriousness of the situation. Christ is literally telling us to “wake up,” because our complacency to do nothing to serve the Lord is an offense to God Himself. But, though the situation may be dire, it is not hopeless, if the church is willing to repent and change; to be totally surrendered and poured out with commitment to our Lord through prayer. We must be willing and courageous to change our direction to our Lord and away from ourselves. If not, judgment is not a fairy tale, but a sure reality. Would it not be healthier to serve out of love instead of sitting in contempt? The church of Sardis knew better, they were instructed by the Apostles themselves, and we know better because we have God’s Word. We have no excuse to just sit in the glory of the past and make up excuses as to why we cannot serve the Lord now! Repentance is the door that will lead us out of our decay and into the life of Christ.

Over the years, I kept this church in Los Angeles in the back of my mind and the reasons the pastor and members gave me for why they gave up and what they saw in their position as being hopeless. I clearly saw the great need amidst the apathy, I saw the potential of opportunities, and it was not just me; others too would see the remnants of need that was in their own backyard. From my research and experience on why churches fail because of this dying mentality, I have observed four mentalities in the dying church.

Spiritual Deadness

The dying church is suffering because of a disease that infected it. The church did not always have this disease. The church did not wake up one Sunday to find its pews empty. A process took place to bring it from a new church plant with energy and vitality, through its “middle ages” and finally to its grave. When a church is started and grows, one of the primary growing factors is enthusiasm, and the joy and vigor that its new members have and spread to their friends and neighbors. They see the joy of serving the Lord and the growth they are experiencing must be shared with those around them, so they do, and the church grows. When a new church is started and its members lack enthusiasm then it will wither quickly, they will give up, and close. There

are many other factors that cause a church to grow or to die, but a big player in it all is enthusiasm. Without the enthusiasm, it is an uphill battle that cannot be won.

Enthusiasm plays a big part in our personal spiritual growth, and without it we are not motivated to read our Bible and spend time in prayer. What happens is we do our spiritual disciplines out of obligation and we become dry and do not absorb what we are to learn, or we give it up with all kinds of excuses, such as lack of time or fatigue. When our spiritual lives suffer, so does our ability to relate our Christian experience to others, and to be effective leaders and partakers in the building of the Kingdom of God. When the leaders are not experiencing the wonders of the spiritual life and Christian experience, then it trickles down to the rest of the body and spreads like malignant cancer. We as fallen human beings are always looking for excuses not to put in the necessary effort for spiritual growth. I know I can get that way, and every pastor I have ever met also feels that way sometimes. Just like we make excuses for not eating right or exercising. As not eating right and exercising may endanger our health, not following the spiritual life will endanger our spiritual health, and infect the rest of the congregation because it is tempting and contagious.

The church must be careful not to replace rituals with relationships. Worship and rituals are very important to the call of the church, but they must not take the place of personal growth and spiritual disciplines. When the motions of a church is the only spiritual life in the church, then you will not grow in Christ effectively. We must not be just hearers of the Word, but doers of the Word. We must have passion for Christ because of what He has done for us, it must transform our very nature of who we are and how we act, then we will see ourselves grow and our churches will grow.

When the congregation is not experiencing spiritual growth then it will experience the reverse of people growth. They will just be living in the past with their memories of what they did in the past. They become comfortable in their “walk” as it has become a “sit,” and no attempt to revitalize their spiritual growth is in the works. With no enthusiasm or spiritual growth in the church, then you will have no one witnessing and no one visiting due to no invites. With no spiritual growth, you will not have programs with challenging and in-depth Bible studies and prayer groups. Just apathy of, “well, we used to do that, but we just can't do that anymore.” With no desire to impact yourself with Christ, then there will be no effort to impact others as well, so the church will stagnate and eventually die.

Poor Leadership

All too often in a dying church, there is a tendency for the leaders not to surrender to any new ideas that might help them, such as having Bible studies, or focusing on prayer. They also will not relinquish their positions to new leadership. The majority of them have held the positions for years as a place to have power and control, and are unwilling to give them up. It is important for a church to rotate leadership. Most denominations have policies on this, such as a 3 or 4 year term, only 1 re-election option, and a mandatory 1 year off. This is so they can rest and recharge, and that the

leadership does not become stagnant. When the leaders refuse to rotate, mistrust develops between the members of the congregation and the leadership. The members see no chance is being given to them for key positions in the church. They don't see themselves as being trusted or their gifts being used. Since they are not in the control clique, they will leave the church for another. And when the people with the enthusiasm and ideas leave, then you are left with decay.

The holders of leadership see others as a threat, so they tighten their reign, this is where no new ideas come in, because they are a threat. You can have the greatest plan in the world that will bring the church back to its prime, but if the leadership sees it as a threat, it will never see the light of day, thus the church continues to wither away. People do not like to see themselves as an obstacle; they will turn the obstacle into a guard as the rationalization for their decision.

The leadership fears change because it requires them to grow beyond their comfort level. And without change comes the prerequisite of an unwilling and unyielding heart to the Lord's. Then an absence of a take charge leadership comes into play. It is the "do not upset me" mentality; people who are comfortable do not want to get up, so it is with lazy leaders who are filled with apathy. They do not have the will or the energy to follow Christ; all they have is excuses not to. So the church no longer has a positive direction to follow, they left the spiritual highway and are driving without any plan or direction. The church just exists to exist, and has no role in its community or in the redemption plan of our Lord.

Focusing on the Past

The dying church has all its energies in the past; their focus of who they are is by what they once did. I was on staff at a church where I proposed to have a family night at the church. Every Wednesday all the groups of the church would meet for worship and dinner, then each season of life would venture into their own group. Such as women's and men's Bible studies, children's and youth ministries. It was met with a lot of hostility, because I did not know they used to do that on a regular basis 10 to 15 years ago when it was a church of over 800. Now the church dwindled down to less than 300. They could not get past the fact that they lived in the glory of the past, and could not envision redoing the anchor program that brought the church together. Their glory was anchored in the past and they had no passion for what could lay ahead. So any idea that could spur them on was met with hostility, because that would bring them out of their comfort zone and into action, just what they did not want to do.

The glue that holds the dying church together is the "well we used to do that" mentality, to the point they have given each other medals for their past service, and this is the only life of that church. The status quo is the reason of its existence, and the hope of the future only exists in the past. The new idea of starting a family night at that church was a threat to their status quo, because that would mean the past seekers would not have their anchor, and their security. So the leaders saw a new program as a threat

even though they sing its praises from the past. Not wanting to reach out and grow both spiritually or numerically is a callous disregard to the call of our Lord.

The Survival mentality

The final characteristic of a dying church is that they spend all of their time and effort just to stay afloat. The first things to go off the budget are the programs that provide the ministry opportunities, such as youth, evangelism, and missions. When these programs are diminished then the vehicle of service to God is neutered. And the opportunity to spread the gospel and to reach out is closed, and all the resources are focused on just staying alive as a church. I look to this as intensive care in an isolation ward, where the patient can have no contact with the outside world, and to take it a step further, no contact with the doctor who can help. Thus the patient will have no hope of recovery. So the church, unable to reach out, and unable to offer programs for growth and nurture, stagnates.

When a new visitor comes, they will quickly leave because there is nothing there in the way of service or opportunities. If they have kids and a church offers no programs for them, then why bother when you can go down the street to a church that does? A church that has a vision just unto itself is not an attractive option to a growing Christian, or to a person seeking a church home. What is left is a comfortable small group of parishioners who see themselves as the focus of the mission of the church. They have cut off any opportunity to serve the Lord, or to reach out to others. A church that has nothing flowing in or out is a cesspool that is to itself, like the Dead Sea, with nothing living in it, and with no way to be used by Christ for His glory. It has no passion to be a force in the building of the Kingdom, just a self-centered neutered force unto itself that is dead.

Remember people are important, they are not just a list in the directory or in the database, but people created by our Lord, empowered with the necessary gifts to build the church. Give respect and undivided attention, so they feel they are special, not out of obligation, but from your transformed and renewed heart. Do not be afraid to hear what they have to say, even though it may hurt. None of us like to take criticism, but we need it to grow beyond where we are at.

Once you start cutting programs and the elimination of outreach opportunities, you will be on the slippery slope to the death of a church. There are always alternatives and ideas; we have a host of resources that 1900 years of Christianity did not have before us, so let's use them. You may need to get outside help, perhaps from your denomination or a consulting firm. Do not be afraid to take risks and ask for help, at the same time be sensitive to the budget you need to work with. I'm always amazed when I travel to Mexico, and other poor countries, and see the wondrous programs they have with a fraction of the resources that a poor church in the United States has to work with.

Be creative, and if your church is dying there is hope! Money is not the answer, relationships are!!! Look at it like a church plant, and start over; it may actually be easier

since you probably already have the facilities and resources. Make sure your pastor and leadership have a passion for the Lord and are willing to surrender themselves to His Lordship as a primary factor to re-boot the church, this is the first step in revival. You may have to cut expenditures and staff, but there are ways to keep programs running if they are needed and functional. When in doubt concentrate on the children's ministry, this always works well. Remember there is always an alternative.

We need to admit our fears and be willing to change. Yes, we will feel out of our element, but with the power of the Holy Spirit, we are able. You can do it! Do not be ashamed of your past failures, we have a God who forgives as long as we are willing to repent and grow from our failing, He will be able to use us even more powerfully. So confront your fears with the power of our Lord, and change your problem into an opportunity.

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see." (Revelations 3:14-18)

The city of Laodicea's water supply was brought to them by an early wonder of the world, an aqueduct system. It originally flowed from hot springs but by the time it reached the city, it was lukewarm. Each of the neighboring cities had hot water from underground springs and cool water from mountain springs. Quite a contrast that our Lord uses to illustrate their situation. Our Lord does not want us to be unto ourselves with nothing flowing in or out. We are not to be lukewarm and 'undrinkable' to the fellow Christian and the non-Christian. Christ wants us to be refreshingly cold and medicinally hot, when we are neither, we are of no use to Him.

The bottom line is it does not matter what we know, how we do our meetings, and what we teach, if we do not have a heart bought by Christ. What counts is what's behind our motivations and in our heart, not just our actions. Our church is based on the foundation of what Christ did and framed and finished by His Word. Our actions will be the fruit of who we are. You cannot force yourself to revive your spiritual life and your church unless you are willing to be stretched and used by God, and surrender your will to Him. Paul tells us he came in fear and trembling, that he should rejoice because he was rebuking the church, but also was seeking their best for God's glory. Paul had their best interests in mind, and so should we!

"I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you." (II Corinthians 2:3-4)

The relationships with Christians are sometimes the only glances of the love of Christ that a non-believer may receive. Where Christians are practicing healthy relationships to people, especially non-believers, then what they are in fact practicing is the love of the Lord and when the love of the Lord is practiced, the non-believer has a clearer and better opportunity to accept Christ. Now keep in mind healthy theology, that is Biblical theology as stated in Romans chapters 6, 9 & 10, as well as the books of Ephesians and Colossians, clearly state that the Holy Spirit is the instigator of salvation here God's predestined plan for God's glory. But humans cannot thwart God's plan. The logical conclusion of this theology of predestination and election is that God does all the work for salvation, thus we don't have to. Basically that is correct, we are not involved in the saving process; that is the redemption of Jesus Christ, and the role of the Holy Spirit. But as humans, we are God's instruments and tools in society; therefore, it is our responsibility to model Christ in all that we do and proclaim the message of Christ. We are not responsible for the results of the message; we are only responsible to give the message. It is double predestination that gets us in trouble; that's the extra human inspired logical conclusion of predestination since God does all the work, then we don't have to. This is the battle flag of a dead church. In their view, there's no need for evangelism or for the proper witness since it is on God's shoulders only. Not the fact that God uses people in His plan of redemption, hence what the Bible uses to communicate and illustrate God's truth to us. This inspires the mentality to say things such as, "we do not evangelize, because people know we are here and they can just come if they want too."

Most people do not subscribe to this brand of theology; however it is practiced vividly in churches across America, usually through the laziness of it's members or the excuses of not having the time, or just not knowing what to do or how to do it. This is not the Biblical mandate of Matthew 28 that states, "go therefore and make disciples," this is an imperative that commands us to evangelism. A lifestyle of personal witness and evangelism is the fruit of the Christian life and the gratitude that we show our Lord. This command is not an option for Christians, it is our call and God's will. This will not effect our salvation or our place in Heaven; just as a child that disobeys their parents when told to go to bed, take out the garbage, or feed the cat, this is not going to effect a child's status to their parents. Nevertheless, we all have the responsibility to do the chores, we have a responsibility to mirror Christ, and this is our purpose of our Christian walk, to grow in sanctification and let the personal growth infect others around us.

The most important thing about life is the love-relationship to Christ, second are our relationships to each other and to the world. These are the calls from God's Word. Don't mess up on these priorities of life, or one day you will find yourself in a rest home all alone, thinking I wish I had spent more precious time hurting people, more precious time being condescending - NOT! You'll be in tears and lonely unto utter despair passing the time by wondering where you went wrong. Don't go through life like a pitbull; rather go through life by Christ's example. We represent ourselves not as 'know it all,' but as a work in progress, as Paul did, "the chief of sinners."

The dying church is a patient that needs care and patience, and a leadership willing to obey the call of our Lord and the truth of His Word. We must know the call of our Lord as the pattern to follow. We need to be patient because change against the grain of the established church will take time. Time for the people to renew and catch a vision and passion, that may have left years ago. I'm not saying to trash the history and traditions. No, we are to celebrate them, but not worship them. By knowing the history, it will allow you to move ahead by focusing the people on the past passions as a model for the new ones, and the mission of the church. We cannot afford to look at the church with just a negative bent, but we need to see beyond the failing, and see the positive future it may bring. The worst case scenario is you may have to close the doors, but the ministry can go on by making a partnership with another church, or have a new church plant take over your facilities, but focus on the hope that Christ brings.

Chapter IX Issues That Keep People Away from the Church

We must be aware of the arrogance of our human nature. We will spin our wheels to the very last moment to try to flee from God's presence and control, saying we can do better on our own. Our innate ability to ignore our situation with the busyness of our life is what usually leads people to Hell. People will more likely desire to take their chances; too many people throughout history would rather take their own chances than surrender themselves to the will of the Lord.

People will place their trust in anything that is not God, such as their money, their career, and the high standard of living we enjoy in the United States. Most people cannot see the peril that was right in front of them. Just click on the evening news and you will be inundated by the moral erosion of our culture, and the flight from Godly values.

“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” (II Timothy 3:1-4)

People like to see themselves as a god, that their will is a protected castle, and will not bow to the sedge of anything against it even that of Christ. Even though Christ has a plan of love that feeds us, not a sedge that will starve us (A sedge is when an army surrounds a castle before they storm it. At first, it may take days and even months to starve the people into submission, if the army cannot get past its defenses, the walls or mote). Yet too many ignore the call, and refuse to give up their will. The walk of the Christian faith flies in the face of our individualistic culture that says we can do it our way, and we can have it our way. We do not have to be perfect or even fundamentally good. All we need to do is be who we are. Just watch the biographies on cable TV of famous people, and how they lived their lives chasing drugs, pleasures, and wealth, only to find despair, and sometimes death. Thinking they had everything, only to find nothing in their lives.

The idea that we do not need Christ is not a new late twentieth century phenomena, but is stated by Christ Himself, *“A certain ruler asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Why do you call me good? Jesus answered. No one is good--except God alone.” (Luke 18:18-19)*

The ruler, who was some kind of leader, was flattering Jesus, and assumed his deeds would bring him eternal life. Jesus quickly responded that goodness is found in God alone, and his flattery was not sincere. Even if we are sincere, we will be sincerely wrong. The leader failed to do what was required, and his good deeds amounted to

nothing. So why do we call ourselves good? Why do we go through life with a mentality like a Frank Sinatra song, "I'll do it my way?" And all the members of the rat pack died meaningless and lonely, alcoholic lives. "Doing it my way" did not work for them, and, yet, they had the wealth and power to make it work.

When we think we are a god to ourselves, we have a very exaggerated view of ourselves. Even if you are a model citizen and live your life to help others, it will not bring you any closer to godhood. Jesus knew the leader lived for his possessions, and would miss the Kingdom of God because of his own efforts. It is the righteousness of Christ alone that gives us the hope of salvation, our only effort is the acceptance and trust of what was done on our behalf. Of course, if you are perfect and born perfect, then you do not need to worry; however, no one has ever been perfect except Christ. But too many of us do think we are perfect, and boy, will we be surprised in the end! We all need help because we are not perfect. Fortunately for us, Christ was perfect on our behalf, He was our substitution, He is perfect, all we need to do is respond in gratitude and be our best for His glory.

The bottom line is most people do not want to be bothered by religious things, yet the purpose of our existence is to find God and be reconciled to Him. The biggest problem is to know that we are indeed in need, and we have to surrender ourselves to God's providence. If we dare to despise God and His offer, then we are damned; not a pleasant future, but it will be by our design and desire, and our blame alone. Just like the arrogant passengers on the Titanic who thought they had it made, while their ship was sinking right under their feet. If we choose ourselves over God, then we will lose everything!

"Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God." (Psalm 90:1-2)

This Psalm was possibly the only one written by Moses, thus perhaps the oldest in the book of Psalms. This Psalm answers the question from a child who asserts who is God, and who made God. But we know from this Psalm, and many other Scriptures, that God has always existed and directed His creation and provided a plan for us. God is eternal, He has always been and will always be, and we are not. There is one God and we are not it! Yes, I keep saying this because it is paramount for us to understand to begin our walk with Christ.

If an evangelist simply stated that Christ was a great moral teacher, he would get no reprisal. If you were to witness to your neighbor boldly that Christ was a great philosopher, they would invite you to tea. If a billboard stated that Christ was a great example, the non-Christian would not complain. But Christ is and is not. Our Lord is not just a great moral philosopher, teacher, and example, He does not stop there. He is also eternal and Lord over all. The American culture and world at large are greatly offended by the inclination that Christ is God, thus anything but God is okay. Because if Christ is

God, then our self-directed destiny would be in error, and our will needs to be subjected, and we just do not want to be lorded over.

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” (John 3:18-21)

Not believing in God is not the source for judgment and being condemned; it is not believing what Christ is and has done. The demons believe, they just do not trust and surrender to Him. It is the rebellion that our human nature constitutes against God that gives us over to damnation. Jesus comes perfectly to us who are condemned with an offer of hope and salvation. We see that hope and put it off saying, I do not need it, I can do it alone. Jesus goes on to say that the evil nature of ours is the cause of our condemnation, and He is the source of our hope. When we love ourselves and our deeds more than we love our Lord, then we are in trouble, not of God’s doing but of our own will and choices.

Our lives would be a lot easier as Christians, if we did not teach these truths, and this is a big reason why most Christians just sit in their pews and do nothing. It is easier to sit and believe, than to walk and obey what we believe. But God calls us out of the darkness and into the light, that as Christians we need to know our neighbor and their objections, but not let that detour us from His plan. We cannot just take our beliefs and keep them in a secret huddle. A football team that wants to win does not hold a huddle so the quarterback can get some sleep, so he can say and do nothing; no the huddle is the plan of action that the coach has called them to do. Our Christian faith is based on the cross of Christ, but it does not stop there, as the start of a football game does not stop at the toss of the coin. We are called to do and obey with the gifts and abilities that our Lord has given us.

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” (1 Peter 3:15)

God calls us to respond! This was one of my mentor’s favorite passages, and this passage calls us to respond! It must be an action that we are encouraged to respond with passion, boldness, compassion, and tact. Just as the Roman Empire persecuted the Christians because the faith went against their beliefs, even though their philosophy had an ‘almost anything goes’ attitude. Because with Christ anything does not go, and without Christ we do not go.

We will run into people who are offended, but we need to take heed and comfort from the Lord through His Word. Christ says we are sinful, and He is the only way;

people say no, “I’m my own way.” So we are causing conflict and strife, not the same as previously mentioned, as caused by Christians with bad motives. So accept it as a challenge and as the call it is.

Peter says we can do it, “*do this with gentleness and respect.*” This is our call. Being ready is a big part of the Christian life, and the defense is to know what you believe and why, thus our passion will be to lovingly give a response, even out of hostile reactions and the threat of persecution.

Common Objections

There have been numerous quality books written on evangelism and apologetics, so I won’t spend too much time on it here. But, what I want to do is get at the root cause of the common objections, so we know how people respond, and why they respond the way they do. There are countless objections that people give and many different categories they can go into. But from my experience in youth and evangelism work, over 90% of the objections you will run into fall into 7 main categories.

First: The problem of Trustworthiness. People tend to object to the reliability of the Bible and even God. This attack and objection is rooted in the will of our nature, as most objections are. People do not want to acknowledge a prime source that they need to submit to. So they will grasp at anything to make a blanket to protect them from the truth, and to give them comfort for their reasons. People will attack the faith to give themselves protection in their beliefs. If a seemingly logical reason can be assured, then they will use it. They may say the Bible is a myth and full of contradictions, but they probably have never read it, and are only repeating what they heard from others who have not read or researched the Scriptures either.

Before I was a Christian, I would say almost anything, and argue with anyone to try to prove the errors and contradictions of the Bible that I got from reading anti-Christian books, but I rarely went to the prime source. As I came to be a Christian, I learned over the years that the reality of God is found in our experience of Him, and being obedient to His will. I know that God exists because I know Him personally. We also know by the trustworthiness of history and even science that apologetics expounds.

So credibility will be at stake for you in witnessing. People may not want to acknowledge a god who they are accountable to, so they will say there is no God, as a protection from responsibility and accountability they do not want to take on. Now we know the truth, and science and history back us up, but most people, even Christians, know little about apologetics. So do a little research, there are a lot of Christian websites and resources that are of great help. You do not need to know all the answers, but you should know where to find the answers.

Second: The problem of Pluralism. We live in a politically correct culture, where offense of some belief is a cardinal sin, unless Christianity is the target. People

want to believe that all religions are the same, and all roads lead to God. One of my majors in college was Comparative Religions, where most of my professors would argue that all religions are the same and valid, except Christianity which has no place or benefit in our modern culture. They would teach the wonders of eastern mysticism, and even aberrant groups, and new philosophies, but constantly put down Christianity's claim as being exclusive.

People will respond in a way such as, "why does it matter what I believe?" They say it is arrogant and narrow minded to believe that Christianity is the only way. This objection usually gives the most passionate negative responses. Because people want to believe what they want, and do not want to be dictated to. The arrogance is in us, and our determined will to go our own way; and the refusal to surrender our arrogance is the ultimate pride and condescension; not Christianity which is the true and only way that God provides us out of His love and grace.

It is our human nature to strive to be on top. Two kids will argue over who gets the bigger piece of cake; so it is with adults who argue their right to themselves. We are always involved in our tasks to prove our value and worth.

You will also get, "what happens to the person who never heard the gospel, like those tribal people in Africa?" The fact is, most people cannot fathom that God is in control and sovereign, because it interferes with their comfort level. If they can rationalize that God is not sovereign and there are people not in His control then they themselves are off the hook.

Third: The problem of Need. People do not want to admit to a need for something outside themselves. Just like the folks on the Titanic, most people cannot see the need and urgency of their plight. So you may get responses like, "It is okay for you but I do not need it," or "Christianity is just a crutch for weak people." People get so entwined in their lives, they never look up; all they see is their busyness and accomplishments like the Titanic crew in the radio room. They may see religion in general as a pacifier to the masses as communism did. And that people should be in control of their own destinies, and we are a god to ourselves.

People get themselves into all kinds of addictions to be a substitute for a God. Then there is the fear of loneliness, which is a deep yearning for companionship that people cannot provide. So they get involved in perverted activities as a substitute, only to have it not fulfilled.

They see religion as a barrier to science and rational thought, when in fact it is the opposite. Christianity is based on solid, rational, logical and consistent reason. The will to reject the truth is like the Titanic passengers not getting into the lifeboats, blinded to their situation. They may also see religion in general as a reaction to a fear complex, that religion is a unenlightened way to view the universe, yet science has never given an answer to the basic beginnings and reasons of existence. God is our reason, our meaning, and purpose in life, not being unto ourselves.

Fourth: The problem of Suffering. As human beings, we are corporal in nature. That means we have a physical body with nerves and fragility. So suffering is a very negative aspect to our nature. After all who likes to suffer? So when they take a look around the world, and even in their own lives and see suffering, the question that rises is why would a loving God allow suffering and evil into the world? Thus, when they see suffering they assume that if there is a God, then He does not care. And since He does not care, then it does not matter how they live or what they do.

What the non-Christian may not understand is suffering is a result of our evil nature and arrogance against God. Suffering is not from God, it is from us. God is the one who offers an undeserved plan of redemption to bring us out of it. When we accuse God of allowing evil, it is like accusing a bank teller of robbery because they handled the money, while the real robber gets away. Suffering is the result of our choosing to disobey God, not a result of God, who does not have a malicious nature.

Fifth: The problem of Death. The non-Christian may not want to admit to a death in their past, or their impending demise, so two objections come out of it. First, they may deny death altogether, that is the afterlife part. Since there is no afterlife, there is no God, and since there is no God, there are no moral absolutes. Thus people are in charge and in control of our environment, and again have no need for accountability or responsibility. So the individual can rationalize their own fate and values and do what they want without fear of reprisal from a Holy God. The other possibility is a denial of death, usually stemming from an earlier loss, or the inability to recognize our immortal nature. Out of this view can come the reckless endangerment of the self by thrill seekers who take unrealistic, unsafe challenges.

Sixth: The problem of Spiritual Warfare. We need to know we have an enemy who will do whatever it takes to destroy our relationship with the Lord. Our enemy will prevent others from gaining access to God, access that was lost out of pride. Our enemy is the Devil. We have an enemy who uses our conflicts against us, and tricks our will and desires away from God's. Satan's strategy is that he joins the church and does not fight against it. Satan is at his best, his strongest, and most powerful in the church, because as Christians we let him. He causes more distraction by using Christians against each other, than any occult practice could ever do. To use a Biblical illustration, Satan spends more time watering and fertilizing the tares/weeds, than he does in cutting down the wheat.

Satan is the angel of light, God has not taken his glory away, he is not a goat-headed monster. Thus he deceives us with a little of the truth, and a lot of misdirected imitation of the Christian life. Satan accomplishes his task by manipulating us to focus on our desires and be in conflict with each other. Satan spends little time in what we see in the movies, that is an outright attack on us.

We need not blame all of our problems on the devil, as so many Christians do to take the responsibility away from themselves. Walter Martin, "The Bible Answer Man"

used to say we have enough evil in ourselves to send us to Hell 200 times over; thus, we need not focus all the blame on Satan. But, we do need to take precautions and actions to avoid his influence on you and your neighbor. See chapter XX on prayer.

Seventh: The underlying problem of Fear. Stemming from most of these objections, is the underlying fear of the unknown and unexplainable. Most people, Christians included, do not have an accurate view of theology. They base their beliefs on irrational, preconceived ideas that they pick up from a smorgasbord of places.

People fear being convicted. I had a friend several years ago that refused to ever go and hear a missionary speak. He was a leader of the church and a growing Christian, so one day I asked him why. His response was very honest and to the point; he said he did not want to be convicted, and leave for a foreign destination to be a missionary. This for some reason really scared him; maybe it was something to do with his parents being missionaries and the problems they dealt with, that he did not want to face. I explained to him that God would not call him to anything he was not gifted to do, or had the desire to do, so quit worrying. I guess he got over it, because he spent a summer in Russia a few years ago.

This fear grips Christians from growing because they do not want to be convicted. And it is a very powerful motivator to the non-Christian who does not want to give up their perceived lifestyle, out of fear that the Christian life is boring. They may feel like my friend who was afraid to go overseas. They may think they have to be some kind of monk, or have some perverted Christian view they got from TV or from misdirected Christians.

The non-Christian may fear God in a vengeful way, thinking their sins and deeds are not forgivable and they would be rejected. It is a basic misunderstanding of the Gospel message; since they do not understand it, they reject it.

I believe the biggest barrier is the surrender of the will. People just do not want to give themselves up, thinking being a Christian is a sign of weakness that they do not want to be known for.

Thus not all of the problems have to do with Christians acting stupid, but this is not a license to do what we want while blaming society, or the Devil.

The passage, 1 Peter 3:15, is as clear for us today as it was for Paul, and even as it was for the passengers of the Titanic. Too many people rely on themselves to get through life while giving God the raspberry. We as Christians need to wake up at the peril that the world is in, that our very friends, family, and neighbors are in. We are in a ship that is sinking from under our feet, yet we live our lives as if nothing were happening, just "partying on dudes."

We need to communicate the need for Christ, and realize the objections we may face. People do not see the need, and Christians are too busy in their lifeboats ignoring the cries, afraid of being swamped.

Our Motives

One of the main problems of why Christians go bad in their motives and behaviors is that they forget who they are. Too many people who go to church do not have a clue of what it is about. Perhaps they once did when the excitement of their new birth in Christ was new and they were growing, but now the noise and busyness of life took over the time-slot that was originally reserved for God. So our time and excitement for church becomes clouded, preventing us from remembering what it is supposed to be about. So we forget who we are and what we are called to do.

Thus, week by week we hurry ourselves and drag the family to church, through the tyranny of the daily grind and sit in our pews, trying to recover from the exhaustion, hoping our struggle is not in vain. Thus we give little effort to what the words mean when we sing a hymn, what the pastor is talking about at the pulpit, or the beauty of the liturgy and the power and conviction of the words. We are just playing a part in a play without allowing the character to become who we are. Without allowing the purpose of what is going on, the meaning of the service, and the application we are called to respond to get in us. So then church becomes just a routine and not the church that Christ created for us to be.

There are times when courage is called for, when we need to go beyond ourselves in an extraordinary fashion, and a leap of faith. Most acts of courage have been associated with military feats, or with acts of persecution. But God calls us, average Christians to courage. Courage (Deuteronomy 31:6; Josh. 1:9; Psalm 23:4; 31:24; Proverbs 28:1; Phil. 4:13; 2 Tim. 1:7; 1 John 4:4; 18) realizes that God has given us the strength to face any situation, trial, or peril. It is the ability to react, knowing that God is in control, that He who is in me is greater than he who is against me. Fear and Cowardice are the opposites. Running from our call because we get some resistance, whether it is sharing the faith or exercising our gifts, dishonors our Lord Jesus Christ!

We may not have to give our physical lives, but we are expected to give ourselves fully to the Lordship of Christ. Too many Christians forget we have been enlisted in an army, and are called to defend the fort. We may not be using guns and artillery, but we have the biggest weapon of all, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the model of love and care to be shown to the world. We are to prevail no matter what the odds may be or the circumstances we may face, because our hope and courage comes directly from our Lord. He arms us with His presence, and empowers us with His Spirit.

There may be times when we are called to take a stand and be persecuted, and even physically die. Most Christians will never see such persecution; what we will see are our family, friends, and neighbors in distress who need to be protected and saved. When we sit in our pews and do nothing, it is a slap in the face of our loving and

gracious Lord! Too many Christians have decided to make their stand in the pews, with their rear ends firmly planted, complaining that the morals of our society have gone awry. Our society has gone awry because we have gone awry. The troops of the opposition have overrun our country and world, because we decided to leave the fort, and have forsaken our call. Just take a trip to Europe and see all the empty, magnificent churches, and the decadent and lost societies, whose people find no meaning in life, and perhaps America will be just like Europe in a generation; lost.

Responding to the Call of the Church

“Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help.” (Judges 6:1-6)

The question is how do we respond to the call of the church, and the walk of our faith? The people of Israel, when occupied after Joshua’s death, hid in caves, because they forgot they were the people of God, and forgot the power of their God. Since they forgot God, they disobeyed their covenant and did evil. So an invading army took over their land, with one of the most graphic descriptions in the Bible. They neglected their responsibility and then suffered the consequence. Not because of a vengeful God, but because they did not follow God’s instructions on how to build their country, and thus defend it, and most important to rely and trust on their God, and not themselves and false idols.

So God sent them a prophet, and told the people of Israel not to fear, but to trust in the Lord. He reminded them where they came from and how their God brought them out of Egypt, and out of slavery into a land filled with homes, farm lands, orchards, vineyards, and even cities ready for them to move into. Their only call was to respond out of gratitude, trust, and honor and obey the Lord their God. The people needed to wake up and see their situation and the history that brought them there. The fear they had for the Midians was misplaced, and they needed to fear the Lord. A fear of respect, and a fear of judgment if they did not yield to the obedience of the Lord.

We need to be careful that we do not forget who we are, and what God calls us to do. We should take careful notice from this passage and to the situation in the church. Hiding in caves or sitting in pews in fear of whatever it may be is not the obedience that Christ paid for. Gideon was hiding his wheat in a winepress so the invading armies could not find it until an angel came to him. This Angel gave him orders to be a warrior, but Gideon gave all kinds of objections and excuses why he could not

undertake the call. We too give God all kinds of excuses why we cannot serve Him, and as God was patient with Gideon, He is also patient with us. Nevertheless, we have the call and the ability to respond; this is what we must do.

God does not promise us peace, wealth and prosperity, this is not found in Scripture, only in the minds of false teachers. What God does promise us is Himself. God's promise is His presence and His power; our peace and prosperity will come in the life after. We have the ability to succeed and overcome if only we obey and respond to Him. When we really believe that God is with us, then the church will become relevant to the culture in which it lives and the reason to go will be powerful and compelling. We need to get over our fears of what may happen, and respond to build a church for what will happen from His promises, so people do want to come to it. God does not call us to be the church of obnoxiousness, but the church militant. We are called to care and love with passion and fervor, not be a church of cowards who do nothing but cause strife.

We cannot compromise our values and teaching because we are afraid to offend. And we cannot practice the truth without love and care. We are not to be the offenders, only the Gospel may offend. Our job is to show the courage and the battle cry of Gideon. Just as Gideon woke up to his situation and call, so must we. For us to succeed, we must respond to the glory of our Lord, put off the fear, and put on the courage to serve. Remember Jesus Himself tells us not to fear numerous times in Scripture, and it is always an imperative, that is a command!

Why some people go to church

A lot of people go to church just to feel good about themselves. They go for the sake of appearance and for the prestige it may bring, but it is not a place of conviction. They may go to pretend that they are good people so they do not have to be good people. This turns into the Christian who has all the wonderful appearances in church, but on Monday it is a different story. Thus, their coworkers know they are a Christian because they talk about their church, yet they go on to treat everyone with condescending contempt and malicious mistreatment, giving a contradictory picture of a church. This is the Christian, by the eyes of the average person, whether Christian or non-Christian, that sees the hypocrisy and suffers from it. The person is a fraud, just faking that they are a good person when in fact they are not, because the transformation and renewing of the mind by the Holy Spirit was never received or accepted. So the Christian life and walk is a role-playing game where they make up the rules.

Christians that go through the motions of the worship experience and role-play through church will not impact the people around them where they live and work positively. Or we sit in the pews, bored, hoping they have refreshments at coffee hour. The meaning and disposition of what it means to actually be a Christian, besides out of name only, becomes corrupted. The reason for our existence becomes mute, and what replaces it are the "diseases," because the made up rules have no basis, and the Word is not the guide. God calls us to Him, not to feel good about ourselves. When we are

growing Christians, then the fruit of it should be a high level of esteem that is based on Christ. So we feel good by who we are in Christ, striving to live our lives as an example of His character. Then we are not living to fulfill our needs and ambitions only, while giving a contradictory testimony.

A means of social interaction is also a common reason to attend a church.

Having been on staff at a large church doing singles' ministries, I have seen a lot of people go just to find a husband or wife, or some other personal agenda. They participate in the fun, and turn off the teaching, only to leave in frustration because they did not succeed in their quest. Their motivations were to fill their needs only, and had no care about the call of the Lord. Sometimes they do get convicted and become transformed, but usually they leave in disillusionment from not finding the fulfillment they sought, because they were looking in the wrong area. The place of the quest was their will and perceived need, and not the real need that they have, so the frustration leads them to turn off the church, instead of turning it on the right channel.

Maybe it is a place to take the children so they do not turn out like themselves; this is a good reason at the start. But, if all they do is sit in the pew and never allow what is said or sang to get inside themselves, they will be disillusioned and find no meaning. Without meaning for what we are doing and why, it will not develop into conviction and the transformation of the Christian call. Without meaning, you cannot have the passion and excitement that God uses to further His Kingdom by our witness. Christians who do not witness, who are not excited about the faith, and who do not allow the transformation by the Holy Spirit will not last long and will not find any fulfillment. The result will be Christians who do not treat each other with love and respect, unless they are in growth in the Lord and feel the wonder of His presence.

A place to feel good by being encouraged by the pastor and each other is also a common reason for church attendance. Also because their infrastructure of family and networks are there, and their support is the sole reason they go to a church. Church can be a good place to be lifted up, which we all need, especially in a harsh time-consumed world. But if that is all there is then you have nothing. Church is not just a place for a pat on the back or to network for business reasons; it is a place to surrender to the Lord and to grow in discipleship. Out of the discipleship will come the earnest desire to encourage one another, encouragement comes from a heart bought by Christ that flows with love and care. Encouragement does not come from a sense of obligation, because it is artificial and meaningless.

A place of power to control the lives and decisions of others, is a prominent reason why some people go to church. This is a very pathetic and sad reason. The other reasons have ulterior motives too, but can be turned around as a tool for evangelism. Such as having an excellent children and youth program that will attract families to your church, then the power of the Holy Spirit, the love and encouragement, and teaching can work together to convict and challenge them.

The motive to just have control is perhaps the most self-seeking and destructive motive, and is the underlying reason for a lot of the conflict and strife in churches. People, who may not have received the power they felt they deserved in the workplace or in their family situation, may strike out in a force of personality or money to seize control, to be a big fish in a little pond. Some people are used to being in control in all their situations, so they naturally continue it in the church. I'm speaking about the malicious, condescending, power trip to control other people and force them to bend to their will and desires. Such as the story of the "pastor's wife," "church administrator," and the "elder" in the chapters on Gossip and Hypocrisy. These illustrate the common motives and drive that people take to be in control in the local church and denominational leadership, regardless of the purpose and reason for the church in the first place.

A story in point: I was briefly on staff at a church, where there was a lot of power plays by elders who had no business being in leadership because they did not have any of the Biblical qualifications. I soon realized, I made a big mistake because I was not discerning during the interview process and did not see the problems until I went on staff. My first sermon was met with a lot of pats on the back, because the congregation was not used to being taught. The last pastor just read out of a book and the new senior pastor did not believe in conviction or application because he was afraid to offend anybody. But one of the leaders (the ruling elder), who was also a General at the local military base, was assisting me. He exploded in anger, and said "how dare you try to convict me, you are nothing! Just the Youth Pastor!" He had the typical 'had to be in control,' 'I do not care what the Bible says' mentality. His actions, by the force of who he was in his occupation, controlled that church. The congregation feared him and did not respect him, only what he wanted; it was just not what the Lord wanted.

The New Testament Church Model

"Peter replied, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call. With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, Save yourselves from this corrupt generation. Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:38-47)

It all starts with the saving redemptive work of our Lord, what He has done for us; then we respond by turning to God for the removal of our sins. When we are genuinely

sorry for our sins then we can begin the process of repentance. Baptism is the outward sign of our repentance and the spiritual seal of our cleansing because of the forgiveness we received which we did not deserve. Forgiveness is the gift we received by the work of the Holy Spirit, as well as His presence at our disposal. We become empowered by that presence with the gifts and abilities to carry out the work of our Lord.

The fruit of our relationship to our Lord is reflected by the way that we carry ourselves through life and our character. The true fruit of our redemptive work is clearly laid out in Galatians, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”* (Galatians 5:22-23) The Holy Spirit is the power of who we are as a Christian, and the role we are to play in society.

Peter’s sermon tells us the start of the work of salvation spread to the Jews first, then, as we learn further in Acts, progressively to the Samaritans and then the Gentiles. All by God’s choosing for His glory. What follows are the essential elements of the church, and the responsibility of discipleship. Teaching is essential for us to want to learn, yearn, and thirst for it, for without proper teaching we cannot grow in our faith and be our best for service. Too many Christians and churches throw out good teaching and replace it with false doctrines or nothing at all.

We must take the Lord’s Supper/Communion seriously. Remember it is a covenant ceremony of us going before the presence of the Lord to renew our faith and our covenant with God. It is a profession of faith, a sacred vow before a Holy God. God demands our allegiance. Both Calvin and Luther taught that the Lord’s Supper was a critical aspect of the Christian life. Communion was a place of grace and the testimony to the work of our Lord, and what He finished on the cross on our behalf. Our Lord gives us the strength by showing us the role of salvation and His finished work. He sealed us as being His people as we have been redeemed, justified, and sanctified.

We must beware not to enter into the Lord’s Supper with careless ease. Through the Lord’s Supper, we have a tangible presence of the Lord, a fellowship as we receive His presence through the elements of the bread and wine as the body and blood of our Lord. Calvin even taught that it should be taken once a week and the worship service should be centered around it, along with a sermon and prayer.

This is not a trivial matter, or an obligation that we do once a month or once a week. This is a Holy act we do in the remembrance of what Christ has done. The church that does not take a very high view of the Lord’s Supper is slapping our Lord in the face with contempt. The act in itself does not redeem us, but we have to come to terms with the character of God. We must come to grips with the awesome nature and responsibility we have before a Holy God, and enjoy the opportunity we have to partake in His presence.

What follows next is the communication we have to our redeemer, prayer. We are called to not only pray for ourselves, as most Christians do, and only do, but uplift

and keep each other in prayer too. The Christian walk is not a solo adventure by our own choosing, it is a group endeavor. The effort requires us to be in fellowship together, and unless we are together, the next step will not come about.

The natural desire to share and encourage comes from the previous efforts of learning, prayer, and the Lord's Supper. As we learn and grow in the Lord, our growth becomes progressive and builds from what we have learned before. Then we become in tune to one another's needs, and we respond collectively, according to our gifts and abilities, and even beyond. Such as we see a need and even do not have the spiritual gift to go ahead and respond to it, and call others to it as well.

Peter's sermon gives a lot of credence to the progressive work of our Lord, and how we respond progressively. What we give out to others is reflected in the build up of our discipleship and growth. Out of the discipleship comes the desire to continue and persevere and be filled with joy as we attend our church home.

We need to notice that last on the list from Acts 2 is the Lord added to their number, that is our responsibility comes first, and when we follow His mandates. Christ is the one by the power of the Holy Spirit who adds to our fellowship, we are to follow through with the care He calls us to. Too many churches just want to fix the cosmetic appearances without fixing the depth and who we are to Christ. When I was with a church growth firm, we would receive clients who wanted to make all kinds of external changes, such as the format of worship, the advertisement and marketing, or the use of multimedia. But they would hesitate to institute the needed changes that promote the essence of what Peter talked about. And as the body of Christ, we are called to be and receive the fullness of His presence, He is our all in all.

“And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” (Ephesians 1:22-23)

The church is not a political organization, a social club, or a place to join to be anonymous and not convicted. The church is the body of Christ, our living Lord working and living in our individual selves, at the same time working collectively and cooperatively for His purpose and glory. The church is not a building, which is described by the dictionary definition. The church is us, the people of God who are called to do the work of God. When we are at our place of worship, then it is the church, when we are at work then we are at church too, because we are the church. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation to our building, the cornerstone to our collective selves, all intertwined with each other with various gifts, complimenting and benefiting one another. So our lead, and call to arms and action come from our leader our Lord, not the personalities in political positions of power, but from the living Word. Of course if Christianity is illegal where you are, you must take safeguards to protect your family and church and think of ways to evangelize and worship without becoming targets of opportunity for the government.

The church is our place of mutual empowerment and encouragement to one another and the place we learn and grow together. The life and power is drawn from the person and work of our Lord.

Why we should go to church

It can be easy to just give it all up and fall back into the world. There is so much conflict and disillusionment, I am surprised that more people do not drop out. Statistics from Barna Research reported recently that perhaps 50% of American people who go to a church are not even Christians. I first heard of this statistic when I was in seminary, and even from my “hero” J. Vernon McGee, who I would visit as often as possible, he often said he believed a strong percentage of people in the church were not Christians! At first I did not believe it, but after years of pastoral experience, I now know this to be almost fact.

The early church, that is the period in Christian history right after our Lord's ascension, up until the 4th century when Christianity became legal, was a period of wide growth and geographic expansion, even in the face of extreme persecution. The Bible describes many instances of spectacular growth, starting at Pentecost. But for the most part, most people came to faith in a slow process. Justin Martyr, a man who exhibited extraordinary faith and was persecuted and killed for it, became the name we use for experiencing persecution; Martyr. He did not come to the Lord by a sudden, emotional experience, but a long, slow process that most people did at that time. He says he first heard about the faith from an elderly stranger who engaged him in a philosophical conversation, common in that day. But this elderly man planted a seed that grew over time. And Justin Martyr saw the faith by observing Christians and was stirred by what he saw.

Most of the early Christians went through a several year process where they were discipled, instructed and encouraged before they even were baptized and received the Lord's Supper. This was called “Catechumen,” where we get our word catechism. Today, in most churches, we have a tamer process of confirmation, membership, and so forth. Others may receive Christ at an evangelistic event and just go through a short membership class. The difference is without a process where the person new to the faith can be properly instructed and discipled, they may not take a deeper ownership of the faith and be totally transformed by it. By not taking total ownership, we are unable to know about our Lord so He can transform our minds as well as our emotions. In the face of persecution, a deeper ownership of the faith enabled the Christians to thrive and grow in the face of death.

We need to be drawn to the church for a deeper reason than the promise of child-care or eternal life. A deeper reason than to find excitement out of our boredom. Having events to attract people to the church is essential, but we must have a discipleship and equipping process too. We must have a passion that comes from the very core of who we are as human beings, Christian beings, who have surrendered to the person, work, truth, and character of Christ. If not, we will be unable to survive the

pressures of life and the persecution we may receive. The early Christians would never have grown or have shown courage in the face of persecution, and the tiny sect of Christianity would have never survived a generation, let alone two thousand years.

We need to go to a local church for the express reason of our spiritual benefit, and when we have benefited, so will others. Because of what Christ has done to give us saving grace and regeneration that we did not deserve, so we must respond with a great deal of gratitude. The reformational slogans of “guilt,” “grace,” and “gratitude” show the process of our walk. The process starts with our fall and sinful nature, which is our “guilt.” Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, saves us for His glory and purpose, which is “grace.” Then we respond by modeling the love and care of our Lord, which is “gratitude.”

Let us gain our composure and confidence regardless on how many true believers are in the church, and live as His disciples!

The Call of Commitment to the Church of Christ

I often hear from Christians that they do not have to go to church to worship God; this is a fallacy. We do need to go so we can be recharged and refreshed to do the work of our Lord. Worship gives us the glimpse of Heaven, and the rest and future we are to look to. We need a place where we can grow and be encouraged so we can be filled with the power to go out and do. Christians I have met who say they do not need to go to church are lethargic and do little to nothing for either the Lord or anything for their own personal growth. They just wallow through the self-pity and lick their wounds from the past. This is sad that they were “spiritually abused” by the diseases of the church, but we need to reboot ourselves, or we will accomplish nothing in our lives and service to our Lord.

We need to take the words of Paul in Ephesians as a battle line for a stand and commitment to the call of our Lord. We must fight the urge to be to ourselves in the hurried lifestyle that goes nowhere, where we try to escape the responsibility and the promise of life for the here and now, and the world to come. Too many Christians and non-Christians try to escape His call, and replace it with anything. Extra sleep becomes the urgent need, then the yard must be taken care of, then we have to work on Sunday, or we must be entertained and take the kids to their sporting events, and the list goes on. Even the once-committed Christian who was damaged by some of the “diseases” will yield to the other things that need to be taken care of. Church becomes downgraded to the dreaded trip to visit grandma in the rest home, or the school trip to the museum. We may have the intention and desire to go, but all these other things have a greater urgency and need. So our grandma remains lonely, and we miss the splendor of the wisdom and the relationship of family. When we miss out in church, we miss the splendor of what Christ has to offer us.

If we are not committed to a church home then there is no one to keep us accountable, or miss us when we do not attend worship. If no one is expecting us, then

we will come up with all those excuses of why we need not go. Then a trickle down effect will occur. When we neglect church, then our spiritual disciplines will fall one by one. Prayer will fall to the side; if we have time we may pray. The same it will be with the reading of Scripture, and so forth. The growth of ourselves to Christ will lose the stability and the routine that keeps us booting up, and will fall to laziness and other commitments.

Being committed to the church is more than a gold star for attendance, it is a commitment to the work of our Lord. It requires the submission to its authority, and active participation to be used with the full abilities that we can offer with our gifts and talents. It means giving of ourselves, and it means receiving the grace and love without the hindrance of our will. It means we are not only to give of ourselves, but also freely receive the gifts and love and care from others without our pride getting in the way.

Too many of us want to go it ourselves, and the desire to be independent is the focus of life. I felt this way when I was called to a wonderful church. The church exhibited an over-abundance of hospitality, so that my wife and I felt suspicious, as well as grateful, because we were not used to it. After a considerate amount of prayer, we realized the call of the church is to be supportive and caring. We just left a church that exhibited the opposite and were hurt and confused when confronted with the true call of the church. Thus my pride got in the way when this new position included a new house for my family and the generosity of the people provided our every need. So we must not allow the past hurts or the self-directed will to get in the way of receiving gifts from others. We all have gifts to be used, and to be used means they need to be received.

Being committed means we are not to shop for months and years for a church home, where we become so picky not even the perfect church will satisfy us. We need to be discerning, and make sure it is grounded in correct theology and practices the art of caring, that it offers the ministry we may need, but not have such high expectations that no one can meet it. Remember the church is an imperfect institution that is in the process of sanctification. So do not expect perfection, but expect the willingness to be growing to the goal of sanctification, that is perfection in Christ. Our new committed church home should compel us to be public about our faith and commitment to others with the character of our Lord. We are supportive, not just financially, but wholeheartedly and passionately.

Too many Christians have given up on the church, and this is too bad. Yes, it is not perfect and full of problems, but we can overcome them and grow to what Christ has called us to do.

The challenge for us is to be committed to the purpose of our being; who we are in Christ, what He has done for us, and respond to Him with passion and conviction, and let go of the fear that hinders us. We must be excited so when the alarm clock buzzes early Sunday morning, we jump up excited for what lays ahead. When the adults are excited usually it is contagious to the kids, then the tyranny of the morning becomes a bounding and fun time looking to the worship, learning and relationships

ahead. The early church gives us a map on what we can do even in the face of tremendous odds. We have the god given ability to shake our fear off as Gideon did and the mundane will fall to excitement, boringness will yield to fun, and dreading will turn into service. Then we can go beyond our pedestrian level of the Christian walk into a transformation that infects those around us, and then the disease that causes division will cease.

Chapter X The Responsibility of the Church “God’s Call for the Church vs. Ours”

Churches are composed of people, that is what the church is about. These people are either attending or not attending. They are either worshiping and praising God, or conniving with their political agenda and practicing deceit. They are either coming or they are leaving. They are either visiting or becoming members. They are either becoming more active, or they are fed up and are leaving! It is the reason for their leaving that concerns us here, and how we can avoid this exodus.

For us to further understand the reasons for people leaving God’s house, we not only need to know why they left, as we previously discussed; but, what is our call in regards to the purpose of the church. We need to know God’s desire for us to undertake, the how and the why to build His church: not a building, a program, or a vision, but the people of God, the body of Christ who claim Jesus as Lord and God of their lives.

What Went Wrong

“For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices, but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you. But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward.” (Jeremiah 7:22-24)

Sacrifices without any love for the Lord and any obedience to Him were worthless then, just as they are today. If all we do is sit in a pew, then we are just like a dog chasing its own tail. Going to church for a long period of time, but not knowing what it is about is like a farmer not knowing what he is planting. The farmer would not know how to water, fertilize, cultivate, harvest, or how to take the produce to the market. A Christian who does not have a heart for the Lord and a passion for His church is like a farmer who does not know what is planted. How can the Christian grow or be used if they do not know their own potential and the plan of God?

Empty ritual was detestable before a Holy God in Jeremiah’s time, and since God does not change, we should take careful heed from this passage. God desires us to be in a relationship to Him with obedience, and this is the top priority over any external notion we may have, even sacrifice. Even in the Old Testament’s sacrifice system, obedience was the main concern for the people of God. When they turned from obedience to a false idol, the wrath of God occurred, not because they missed a sacrifice, but because they missed the point of who their God was. God desires morals over ritual, our devotion over our motions, God desires us over what we do.

Just as the early Jews negated their obedience to their Lord, so have many Christians today! We have a God who personally delivered us out of our sin and out of our punishment. He gave us Himself, this is His promise and His fact. The question is what are we to do with it? What will be our response, and what will be our action to His call and to our responsibility?

The Call for the Church

The Church exists by what Christ has done for us in His glory and the production of His work. The church exists for us to be in Christ our Lord, to be His people, and His hands and feet. It may have started with the promise to Abraham:

"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:2-3)

The covenant to Abraham represents one of the main themes of the Bible, that God fills and blesses us so we are not to ourselves, but are called to share it as the primary purpose for our existence, blessed to be a blessing! It started with Israel, and continues through us today. The church is born and continues to live by the people God chooses, and the response we give: *"I will be your God and you will be my people,"* this is the relationship God calls us to, to Himself and then to others. God is our God and we are called to be His people, so let's do this.

What started as a system of sacrifices performed by a specific chosen tribe of priests, which were the primary teachers and caregivers, moved and transitioned through God's covenants to the modern church today. The early Jews had exclusive rights to the things of God, including the writings of Moses. The main part of the sanctuary was accessible by the high priest only, and that inner sanctuary journey happened once a year. By the work of our Lord, the old church was broken down and became accessible to all that would accept and believe, by the work of our Lord, not by any human effort. The Lord was accessible to one nation who had the responsibility to spread His Word to all nations. This is why the land of Israel was and is so important, in that day just about every group of people in the world would travel through Israel to Egypt and back. As the principle trade route, Israel had the opportunity to be the evangelists of the Glory of God to the world, and when they did it, they were blessed, such as in Solomon's time.

The cross replaced the old way of the church, and the veil of the temple was lifted up and became poured out by the Spirit to us, the body. Thus the ministry and responsibilities became real and relevant to all and not just a handful of priests. So the experience of the church was for all, and the ministry for all believers became our call.

The Temple veil separated the priests and the holiness of God from the people, it protected God from our sin, and protected us from the wrath of God. Since the veil has been lifted, or actually torn in two, Christ paid that debt, and we now have access to

God without fear of retribution. The division of responsibility of the specific chosen priests also has been muted for the most part. God still chooses people into the ministry as a call and vocation, and their responsibility is to administer the Word and Sacraments. They are responsible to equip and train the lay people, and do the priestly things of marriage, burial, the Lord's Supper, and proclaim the Word.

The problem we run into is that most churches have forgotten that the veil has been torn, and expect the pastor to perform everything, while they sit as spectators. So they do not have to fulfill their responsibility and call.

We must ask the question, do we have a healthy understanding of the purpose and mission of the church and the role of the lay person versus the pastor? Since the end of World War II, the church has finally but slowly adopted more of a role for the lay person, and a mentality that most of the ministry is not the sole responsibility of the pastor. Calvin and Luther clearly taught the ministry of all believers, and the Catholic Vatican II of 1962 also has a similar proposition to it.

We still have a deep rooted sense of ministerial obligation to the paid professional, and this is good, as long as it is a respect for the office the pastor holds, and we yield to our responsibility. But when we lift them up as the only available and willing caregiver, we will have a lot of hurt and wounded people in our church. The pastor cannot do it all, especially when the congregation puts on the bathrobe of laziness and not the armor of Christ.

The local church must place a high value on the lay person to be the feet of the ministry. The church leadership needs to take the ownership that they are not there for the sake of the meeting, but for the sake of the Lord, and to release the gifts and power of the congregation. Then the church can assess the gifts and train and equip the people for the Lord's service, with ongoing encouragement and training. When we fail at this essential task, that Calvin and Luther spoke of so much, then we have a failed church and a stressed out and over worked pastor.

"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully." (Romans 12:4-8)

The lay person must be continually trained and supported by the pastor and church leadership to carry the ministry burden of the church. We are called to be the participants and not the spectators. Ministry of the church is not to take place in the church solely, remember we are the church, and thus where ever we are, so is the church. So when someone is sick at home, the lay person can give comfort, prayer, and care to the person. The ministry of the church takes place in the context of the need, not

the location, where ever the people are in the world is where the need is. If we venture out of our planet some day, then the ministry takes place there too. The body of Christ needs to keep the focus of their call to Christ, each other, and the world. Thus the ministry no longer takes place by the few chosen priests alone, it has been franchised out to the rest of the Christians with the various gifts and abilities to do the Will of God.

The questions that the priest or the pastor had alone were how could I minister effectively to my neighbor in all of life's situations? How can I live out the truths of Scripture and God's will in society? What are my role and gifts for my life, and how do I please God with them? What is my responsibility to my local church and the neighbor across the street? The baton has been passed, not the role of head equipper and minister of the Word and Sacraments, but the baton of the responsibility to care and to live out our faith effectively to one another. These are the questions we must all diligently answer with the Word of God, and the follow through of our will to conform. Christianity is no longer a spectator sport, we are not Monday night couch quarterbacks, we are the people of God, called to do His will.

When we start to function as a cohesive group, you will be amazed at the impact you will have and the incredible increased effectiveness for the building of the Kingdom of God. God's Word tells us that we have "diversity," yet in it all we have "unity." We are not to allow the diversity to be our focus, but we need to embrace it, train it, and focus it to the call, goal and purpose our Lord has for us. We will have a healthy form of codependency and cooperation filled with encouragement and love. Bitterness, strife, and the unhealthy codependency that ruins lives instead of building them up will no longer consume the ministry.

We all have different gifts and abilities given to us by the Lord for His purpose and glory. Doing ministry means we are to exercise the gifts that we each have received for us to be able to accomplish His purpose. And until the Lord calls us home or comes back, we are to keep plugging and persevering on.

I recently heard a radio interview with Billy Graham, who is 80 years young. He was asked why he does not retire. Billy responded that he had a dream that he was in his coffin, and people were viewing him as Billy shook their hands and preached the Word. He went on to say he will not stop preaching the Word until the Lord takes away his ability to do so. So how are we to respond? Just follow Billy Graham's example and the call the Lord has given you, because there is no retirement in the Kingdom of God. So until we are called home, we still have the responsibility to serve the Lord. I was on staff at a church where the only consistent Bible study was taught by a 99 year old lady, who was an ex-missionary, but was not retired. The rest of that church felt they were too busy or too old to do any serious Bible study!

Yes, we need breaks, at times I know I do, but when we get out of the habit of church, we will soon replace it with an assortment of activities pulling us away from our Lord as we saw in the previous chapter.

The Three Essential Priorities for the Church

The church has many roles and duties that have been expounded in Scripture and have been found by the experience of ministry. For example, the Bible says nothing of youth ministry, or children's ministry specifically, so does this mean we are not to do such things? Or do we respond to the call to make disciples and take the imperative directive from our Lord and contextualize it to our situation? The Bible is clear on our responsibility, we are to look at those responsibilities and make them work in our context of life and the needs of the community. For example, in youth ministry several years ago, I started a skateboard ministry to reach out to the neighborhood youth, and it was an extreme success. I took the command of the Bible, and then saw the need of the youth to skate in a city that outlawed it. I received a variance from the city to proceed, and the call was fulfilled, and the need was fulfilled, this is called contextualization.

When we take careful view of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, we see three areas of responsibility that we are called to do. John 15 expresses these three priorities all together beautifully, and I list several other passages that support these essential priorities, just turn to a concordance and see for yourself. Out of these priorities, we can take God's Word and contextualize it to the streets and to the direct needs of the people, so they can come to the knowledge of our Lord.

We see from Scripture, the importance and mandate of our relationship and intimacy to our Creator. The only way we can remain in that relationship and share His intimacy is to do just that, remain. We remain in Him by His nourishment, and not of ourselves, not of our thinking and sense, and not just emotional devotion. No, we need rational commitment that will have emotion with it but not driven by it. Our nourishment will be set by the effort and time we put in it as with just about anything else. And the calls and priorities the Lord has for us will be greeted with anticipation and eagerness to build His Kingdom.

Priority One: Commitment to Christ

To Love, Worship, and Praise God is our prime commitment and call from our Lord. Here are a few Scriptures testifying to this first priority:

Joshua 1:8:	<i>"you shall meditate on it day and night"</i>
Psalms 1:	<i>"His delight is in the law of the Lord"</i>
Psalms 63:1:	<i>"O God, Thou art my God: I shall seek Thee earnestly"</i>
Psalms 42:1:	<i>"As the deer pants for the water, so my soul pants for Thee, O God"</i>
Matt. 6:33:	<i>"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness"</i>
Mark 1:16:	<i>"Follow Me"</i>
Mark 8:34:	<i>"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him..."</i>
Mark 12:30 :	<i>"Love the Lord with all..."</i>
John 15:1-11:	<i>"Abide in Me"</i>
John 17:3 :	<i>"That they may know Thee"</i>

Romans 8:29 : *“predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son”*
Romans 12:1,2: *“Present your bodies to God”*
I Cor. 10:31: *“do all to the glory of God”*
II Cor. 5:15: *“He died for all, that they who live should live for Him”*
Phil. 1:21: *“For to me, to live is Christ”*
Rev. 4:10, 11: *“(They) will worship Him, saying, 'Worthy art Thou, O Lord...”*
Rev. 5:12: *“Worthy is the Lamb”*

The magnitude of these and many more Scriptures are almost overwhelming to our efforts and His call, but are still clear for us to understand and obey!

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. (This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” (John 15:5-11)

“Remain” in this passage means to abide, to be steadfast and sure of our Lord and who He is, and who we are in Him. The imagery is perfect, as a vine needs the nourishment throughout its whole system from roots to leaves, and without any one of the main parts, the whole vine will die. It is also with us, when we are not in Christ, we will wither and die. Only when we are rooted in Christ and are receiving our nutrients from Him can we grow and thrive!

The church is us, the people of His pasture, in the care of His majesty. We are joined to Christ, and this is the true church. Thus He is our Lord, purifier, overseer, boss, and Savior. If we remain in Him, then we fulfill the call He gives us and the nourishment that flows from Him to us, will then flow to those around us. As we remain in Him with a surrendered will, we will grow and will receive purification. We must realize the gravity of our situation when we are not in Christ, or when we turn our will away from Him. When we are the fruitless branches, we will be subject to pruning, which could mean suffering and trials brought on by our stubborn nature. He must purify, for He is holy and calls us to holiness. Let us not be the branch that is thrown away, the dead wood that sits in a pew and does nothing, except to receive salvation.

We could not have been saved by our own efforts or reborn to receive our salvation and grace. We could neither receive nor exercise the gifts for His purpose, this is nothing of our doing. When we bow to our own will over our Lord's, then we will receive our self-inflicted damnation, strong language for a strong opposition and will. Our call is to seek holiness, not to seek ourselves.

We must abide in Christ as the principle priority of our life and work. Without this sense of purpose, we will fail to our schemes and worst laid plans that will derail us from His holiness and will. Without our Lord's presence and leading, we cannot do anything, we could not have been created, we could not live, and we could not work and serve, nothing. The only true good thing we can ever do in life is to remain in Christ. Then the fruits will flow, but they cannot unless we are in Him. No work can be good unless it is flowing from our Savior. If we start off good and growing in Christ then forsake Him with our busyness and distractions, we will dry up and wither away. Let us stop, fall to our knees in prayer, and repent to stop the action of the fire, with a surrendered purpose and abiding in His majesty.

For us to be a successful church and a growing disciple, we must abide and remain in Him, and not ourselves. The life of prayer will keep the connection and the abiding in Him. Our obedience comes from the worship, the Bible learning, and prayer life that lays the pipes for His nourishment to flow.

We need to see it this way, when we are obedient, then we will succeed, and then we will prosper no matter what we will face! So let us embrace His friendship and directive. Because His incredible self-sacrifice should empower us to obey with power, conviction, and joy that flows from us and then to others.

We must have a commitment to Christ in our worship, devotions, service, and in our surrendered will. We are modeling His character and the relationship He gave us back to Him, being thankful for our grace. We must and can do this by our loving response of worship, truly desiring to be poured out and surrendered to Him. To be in fervent Bible study and the learning of His character and purpose: to be in in-depth prayer and two-way communication with our Lord.

The result of our surrendered will is to be in an abiding relationship with our Lord, then we will be a healthy church doing and following the design and purpose of our Lord. Then we revive a great comfort of verse 11, "*my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*" There is no other true and joyful way than to follow our Lord's decrees. We need to see it as Christ's joy is living in us, and thus needs to flow through us into the second priority.

The model for us to follow is who Christ is and how He abided in the Father, that the Father loves His Son without any limit or measure, as Christ loves us without any boundaries. Before we were born and beyond our death is His love for us. So what is our response to this first priority? Are we worshiping out of obligation, out of social reasons, out of habit? Or do we worship out of a response to His deep love for us? Is our worship so formal that we never see His presence, or is our worship so bare that we are as dry as the effort we put in? Spurgeon says we ought to be "*Prevalent pleaders, and not formal worshipers.*" (Morning and Evening)

Give careful notice to this, you cannot worship God with a heart filled with yourself. You cannot worship God with a heart that is occupied by greed, slander,

arrogance, pride, envy or malice. Neither can you worship when you are filled with worry, because these things take up all the room in our worship and then no room is left for God!

As we grow and learn in our personal discipleship, so will our church grow collectively, and our commitment will increase as our love and devotion increases. And the best way is to do our time joyfully in our growth, to be our best for His glory. We can do that by making sure that His call is released in us, that His choice and elect is our response, and then we will bear His fruit.

Priority Two: Commitment to the Body of Christ

To love and care for each other in the body of Christ is our second commitment and call from our Lord. What flows out of the first priority is the response to pass it on to those around us as a gratitude response! Here are a few Scriptures testifying to this second priority:

Supporting Scriptures:

John 13:33-3:15:12,18:	<i>“Love one another”</i>
John 17:21:	<i>“That they may be one”</i>
Eph. 4:11-16:	<i>“He gave some as apostles; for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ”</i>
Col. 1:28, 29:	<i>“That we may present every man complete in Christ”</i>
II Tim. 2:2:	<i>“These entrust to faithful men”</i>
Heb. 10:24, 25:	<i>“Stimulate one another to love and good deeds”</i>

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.” (John 15:12-15)

Love comes from the self-sacrifice of our Lord, who paved the way for our relationships, especially to God, then we must respond gratefully to our fellow believers, this is the fruit called from us. This starts off as a commandment! Love is an imperative response of the will, a choice we make and a choice to follow His directive and will. Love is life and a response, and love is a reward for our obedience, yet love comes before obedience, and love is the result of obedience, yet this is non-contradicting. Love is the elixir of life and the reward for all that remains in the vine.

This was a core Jewish belief as stated in Leviticus 19:18, and is quoted by our Lord when asked what was the greatest commandment in Mark: 12:30-31. Since the

Lord loves us, then we should.... respond in love to each other! Since Christ is our model and Lord, we should follow His example. Christ will walk with us, the question is will we walk with Him and allow "priority one" to be our rule, so priority two can function, so love will flow both ways?

Now remember that the love that Christ showed us was sacrificial, not superficial, so our love should not have any strings attached, and be real and flowing.

What flows from love is obedience, another response we are to give our Creator. Just as our Lord was obedient to His call, so must we be to His call to us. Real friendship is trust and obedience, not too common today, but required in the body of Christ for us to function correctly. We place strings and conditions on our relationships (yes we need boundaries, to protect others and ourselves, but not chains), and then wonder why our families and churches are so dysfunctional. It has materialized and risen from our refusal to obey our Lord!

The basic theme is for us to model the first priority, our relationship with Christ to those around us. If we cannot do it, then our relationships with each other will be dysfunctional just as the daytime talk show crowd. Thus when we are in a good, healthy relationship with the Lord then what should naturally fall from it is good relationships with people around us.

Just as God the Father models to Christ the Son and a good earthly father will model to his son, we are to model to our siblings, that is all those in the body of Christ. We are to be in growing and encouraging relationships, which are based on His redemption and our loving response and heart for His people. All those in the body of Christ are our brothers and sisters. The more we grow in priority one, the more we will grow in priority two, and this is progressive just as any growth. God asks us to sit at His feast and eat from His table; do we do the same with those around us? If our relationships are not growing progressively, then we have something blocking us, usually sin and our selfish will is getting in the way of our relationship with Christ!

Let us heed the great call that He chose us first! It is God's choice and not ours. What great comfort that He took the first step in our reconciliation. But God did not choose us just to sit in a pew, He chose us for a reason and a plan. His plan is for us to bear fruit. Not to just do it when it is convenient or when we feel like it, but continually, whenever we are (that time does not constrain us), whatever we are (that culture does not hold us back), and wherever we are (that our place or location shows no limits)! To be encouragers of each other is the call for the good productive church that builds the Kingdom of God. If not, all we do is build the kingdom of disease and dysfunction, and all we have to blame is ourselves for refusing to play ball God's way, which is the best way.

Priority three: Commitment to the Mission of Christ

To Love, and care for each other in the community and world is our third commitment and call from our Lord. What flows out of the first and second priority is the response to pass it on to those around us as a gratitude response for what Christ did for us! Here are a few Scriptures testifying to this second priority:

Gen. 12:1-3:	<i>"Blessed to be a blessing"</i>
Dan. 12:3:	<i>"Those who lead the many to righteousness will shine brightly, like the stars forever and ever"</i>
Proverbs 11:30:	<i>"He who is wise wins souls"</i>
Matt. 9:37-f	<i>"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray"</i>
Matt. 28:19, 20:	<i>"Make disciples"</i>
Mark 12:31:	<i>"Love thy neighbor"</i>
Acts 1:8-28:30	<i>"Be witnesses"</i>
Mark 16:15:	<i>"Preach the Gospel to all creation"</i>
Mark 1:17:	<i>"I will make you become fishers of men"</i>
John 17:34:	<i>"That the world may know"</i>
II. Cor. 5:18:	<i>"God...gave us the ministry of reconciliation"</i>
II. Cor 5:20:	<i>"We are ambassadors for Christ"</i>
Gal. 6:10-f	<i>"Do good to all men"</i>

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: They hated me without reason. When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning." (John 15:18-27)

To reach out to the community and world, is one of the prime purposes for us to be a church. This is what flows from our devotion and worship, and then our healthy relationships with Christ and each other. In a nutshell, these are our fruits! If we are not reaching out; then we become a Dead Sea, just like the Dead Sea in Israel. It has a fresh flow into it, but no flow out of it, thus it is stagnate and lifeless. If we refuse to follow the great commission, we too will be a dead church, stagnate and lifeless, only existing for our selfish purposes and not to God's call. This selfishness does not make us a church; this is not what Christ has called us to do! We cannot just be a church for our own whims and agenda, we are to follow Him!

A lot of pastors and Bible expositors have made the mistake that this passage is an excuse to be a recluse from the world, hence the monastic movements of the Catholic Church, and the refusal to reach out by the some of the Reformed denominations and Main Liners. Jesus made it clear that the world will hate us, but that is no excuse to ball up by ourselves, just a further reason and need for us to reach out in love and care. So when we receive insults and rejection for living out our faith, we are to rejoice as our Lord is working in others, and us. So should we be expecting to receive such a positive response? Should we expect better? No! We are to respond to the need with a grateful will and with joy that flows from the first two priorities.

As Christians, we will receive the Lord's love and acceptance, which is the greatest treat and gift conceivable. Thus when we do not receive the world's devotion, let us not retreat and fall back from our responsibility and call. We are secure in Christ and we need not to feel the security of society, even though we may feel it is necessary for our self-esteem. We are to rely on Christ's esteem and not our self-esteem!

We cannot go through life just eating junk food and sweets, just as we cannot expect to go through life just receiving praise. We have to expect to receive tension as we go against the flow of our society and even sometimes people in the body of Christ. Christ was crowned with thorns, should we expect to be crowned with anything better?

We know better! If we grew up in the church, or spent any time reading His Word, then we know better, even if we are fairly new to the faith.

Verse 22 tells us of the seriousness of our call, it is not a maybe or an option, it is clearly an imperative, that is a straight forward command as a superior officer gives a direct order to their troops! God is our Lord, which means He is our commander and chief, no direction should come to our path that is not given from Him! When we refuse the command, we should expect punishment. This may not be a very "churchly" politically correct idea in a 'Jesus loves you' and 'gives you what you want' church. But this is the truth from God's Word! Hard medicine to swallow for our feel good and complacent way of doing Church, but again, it is why we have buildings, budgets, resources, and people, to go out and fulfill His directive. When we sit in meetings and just talk about it and do little to nothing, we are refusing to yield to our Lord's very teaching!

How can we worship and praise God, then hate our neighbor? How can we kneel down in prayer but not take the time for the people around us? If we sit and hear the teachings of our Lord and then do nothing with it, we are in fact practicing atheism and not Christianity! Because that is exactly the philosophy of people who reject God, is to reject His teaching. Thus we are no better than they who claim themselves as their own god!

The wonderful news of our directive is we are not at it alone, and I do not mean our fellow believers, but we have the Creator and Equipper of all things to empower and come alongside and help us! We are not alone! God first comes to us, then desires us

to love and worship Him, and to allow that testimony to spill and fill those around us! The Holy Spirit is our power agent for the task, Now we have no excuse but to be poured out as He pours His Spirit in us. If not, what we are doing is being antagonistic to the building of His Kingdom, just as the atheists are!

A look at Colossians

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-- if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.” (Colossians 1:15-23)

What does this passage have to do with the responsibility of the church? A lot. Because this passage is about reconciliation, and the church's responsibility is to mirror the character of God who reconciled us to Him! Christ has and is revealing the invisible God to us, and we cannot and must not look for God anywhere else. If we look for God in ourselves or anywhere in the world, we will fail as a church and as believers. This is because the church is the body of Christ, and as believers we are to believe. We are to follow and lead as examples surrendering to His Lordship and not our own.

One of the big issues and problems is that most Christians just do not get this passage. Our Lord is the head, thus our churches are run as if we were in total control and reign supreme. As far as the responsibility of the church goes, what more can we say, other than Christ is the head and our lead, thus the vision and call can only come from Him and not of ourselves and our effort. If Christ is our “all in all” then we must respond to His teachings as marching orders and not a list of probable suggestions and ideas. We are to see and know Him as our Creator and Lord, as our Redeemer and Savior, as our God. Then we can respond, and be the church that our Lord died for.

We must do this in all we do from worship, to relationships, to our thought process, to how we make decisions, and how we institute and instigate the work of the church. It all must flow and come from Christ our Lord, Leader and God, and nowhere else. When we stop having Jesus as our Lord, and He becomes only a figure in the sanctuary, then we will go nowhere as a purposeful and called Church for our Lord. When we are singing praise choruses and hymns that point to His Holiness and

Greatness and as Head of our lives and church, do we mean it? Or is it rhetoric and repetition that has no meaning behind it?

The church exists as a response to the grace of our Lord. Because of what He did, we are to glorify, magnify, praise His name, and then respond further from our worship of Him to our works for Him. Remember that works have no saving construct, they are only the gratitude and response we are give to His majesty and redemption. So that grace working in us will produce the work and will of our devotion and holiness, to be set apart for His plan. Thus our response is to bend and accept His teachings and love, with joy and excitement, and replicate it in our lives, thoughts, and actions. And to grow and perfect the relationship and work He gives us.

Remember the Dead Sea; if all we do is allow Him to flow in us and not out, we will stagnate. If we just try to go it alone without our Lord, we will fail. And we cannot flow out what does not flow in. The responsibility is clear, we are to allow His Spirit to flow in and out, as we are His tool, His child, and His love!

When our faith becomes strong, we will not be moved from it, and that means not being moved from Christ. This is what steadfastness is all about, not being shaken from our beliefs and faith in our Lord. When we stray off our path, we will substitute the steadfastness with stubbornness that brings us far from the purpose and responsibility of the Lord's church. Being firmly rooted in Christ is to keep to the integrity of Scripture and His teachings, for when we stray from that path, we will stray our church away from the opportunities and call of our Lord.

Christ gives us the hope and opportunities to grow, learn, and be in Him, and our response is to anticipate with hope and joy and then respond to the call and opportunities He gives.

A look at EPHESIANS

"far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior."(Ephesians 1:21-23; 3:10; 4:15; 5:23)

Our responsibility is to burn with vigor in our devotions and surrendered will before our Holy God. If we are not poured out with passion as a response for who He is and what He did, then how are we communicating the purpose of the church to others? If there is no distinction between the Christ-centered church as compared to the fraternal organizations or social clubs, then what are we doing, who are we modeling,

and what are we accomplishing? If we are not excelling for Christ, then we are not getting what the responsibility of the church is.

We must know the calling and respond accordingly, or we are nothing but Christian trash! By responding, we are actually seeking our Lord's hope and riches, which He gives freely to those who seek Him! It is God's mighty power at work in the church, so let us not block His flow with our evil desires and attitudes. We are to put our desires, aspirations, plans, and vision all under His feet, under His command and control. His dominion means that Christ is our power and lead. Then the fullness is the gift we receive by our service and obedience for His glory. His fullness will exceed over all our plans and desires a hundred fold. Our hearts must burn with passion for worship of our Lord and not ourselves. We must fall down and worship at our Lord's feet for us to be a real purpose-filled church, that is His purpose!

The church must exist from and through Christ, because it does in reality, and thus must exist in our will as our reply. The church fulfills the hopes of the brokenness that sin caused and that the new Testament pointed to. Hope is a call that Christ gives us that we can, in turn, give to others as peacemakers. The church is to promote peace and welfare, and not stir up strife and division. Yes, there are times we must take a hard stand and we are called to do so even past the point of sacrifice. But the relationships and teachings of Christ that bring division and conflict will bring peace too.

Peace is the positive hope of Christ clearly taught and given to others in loving and caring ways. The church is to be the beacon of light first before she can take a stand. A stand done out of chaos and division is a foolish endeavor, because the credibility will not be there nor will the true purpose of the church be communicated correctly. The church is the result of our reconciliation, thus our teaching and drive is to proclaim the reconciliation we received to those who have not received, and in turn remind us who have received. In Christ we are united, so do we set that example and show it publicly and to each other? Just as the Jew was united with the Gentile, we are to unite with one another for our Lord's purpose and to excel in His call.

We are to learn and to grow in our relationships and knowledge of our Lord. The wisdom of God is to be made known. And we cannot do that if we are too busy fighting with each other. We must realize that God will not allow His message to be thwarted by our pettiness. We cannot be hostile to our Lord as the Demons are, or as the unsaved are, we must be set apart to be a distinction and a mirror to His majesty. The love of our God is to be known and expressed by His followers and made known to others.

Our weakness and feebleness will not get in the way of our Lord's final purpose and will. So we need to take comfort in His purpose and holiness, that He will guide and lead, we need only respond. Yes, we will make mistakes and God knows I have made a boat full over the years, but our comfort is it all does work to His glory. The point I need to make is we can do better, and His plan is better than ours. Character is the outgrowth of our struggles and obedience that will be turned to further His Kingdom. We do this as a united body, rich in our Lord and committed to His cause. We model this with integrity,

honesty, and care with love as our drive, and pointing to hope in His name. So our weakness will become our strength, because of His work in us.

Christ is our head, and when we do not get this essential fact, we will spill our diseases of disgust instead of blessings from His presence. We are to give God the glory in all that we do, so our triumphs will be His and our failures will be His as our Lord reboots and gives us the perseverance to go on with greater character and ability to press toward His goal. When we stop seeking the honor for ourselves then we see His glory and the responsibility for the church. You see, we have a Lord who created the universe, and who governs it. Thus we must realize He governs us too. Our acceptance and practice will put into place the healthy church, which has been given to us as managers and responsible caregivers.

Chapter XI

The Leadership Challenge

“Our Expectations or God’s Characteristics”

Leadership expectations of pastors and elders are often unrealistic and not centered on what leadership is really about. Too often people confuse a strong-willed personality as an effective leader, leadership is not being strong-willed, rather having a strong sense of purpose that’s centered upon God. The reason large churches become more attractive to people is usually they have learned what leadership and discipling is about, and have trained their leadership and lay ministers to do the primary care so people don’t get lost in the cracks. That’s why big churches got big, of course, big churches have their problems too.

The effective large church is a convention of smaller churches where each of the members are being cared for by people who are being discipled, who are being taught, encouraged, and led. This is the formula that all churches should follow. The death of a church is when we follow political trends, not the national politics but the patriarchal personalities that want to control people. And when we have a controlling attitude, that means we do not allow God to control us, thus we become empty shells and hollow logs. Being hollow means there’s nothing working within us. There is no creator of the universe leading and directing our ways, so we become worthless to the Kingdom of God.

The church of our Lord needs leaders, not petty instigators. There are too many churches that substitute a petty person for a godly person and see no distinction, because the people who put them in power do not know the difference.

The Characteristics of a Leader

As leaders in the church for the most part we are leading volunteers. Volunteers are there out of a wiliness to serve and are not there for compensation. Thus they have different attitudes and expectations from professional staff that we must be aware of. Volunteers may also have a stronger sense of ownership to their church, and may see it as ‘my church’ and not our church. So we are to walk a path that is difficult, but not impossible. Just like managing professionals, leadership takes commitment to stay the course in a consistent course in the mist of frustration and conflict. Staying a constant course with the characteristics we will discus is paramount. Because if we deter the ship away from the storm the waves will buffet on our sides where we are not protected or able to withstand, we will then capsize. A ship must go into the waves head on, to be able to go through them safely. True leadership is the ability to keep the helm steady.

Most people can manage when things go well, this is not success, it is how we are with people and crises when the seas are tossed. Strong characters that are poured out to the Lord are essential. This will be the ability to move people from distrust and

frustration in to a godly centered path. We are to move people past conflicts past the storm and into the waters, into the place that the church is for.

None of the characteristics will work unless a foundation of maturity and Godliness is the foundation of the leader. Without a growing love relationship with Christ, you will have conflict and strife, and be running a nursery for adults instead of the church for Christ. If we choose not to grow and live for our Lord, then we are choosing to live for ourselves. So prepare yourself to be a baby-sitter in a nursery, who constantly puts out fires of hurt feelings and misdirected expectations causing all kinds of problems, all leading away from the call of Christ. You will not able to function as a leader, but will be functioning as a bitter, frustrated, unfulfilled, immature individual. And I do mean individual, because you will be going it alone without the support of the Spirit and of our Lord because you will be acting contrary to His call and moving forward in the direction of your own will.

Vision: *“Where there is no vision and revelation, the people will fail and have no restraint and perish to themselves; but blessed are the people who keep the law.”*(Proverbs 29:18 personal translation from Hebrew)

Vision gives us a strong sense of purpose and direction to follow the will of God over our natural desires. The revelation is the Word of God, which is to be our vision, because without God’s guidance we will run amuck! Vision enables us to build on what Christ gives us with passion and conviction, ‘just doing it’ will accomplish little to impact the body and the world around us. George Barna wrote in his book “Vision,” *“Vision is a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to His chosen servants.”* You can call this sanctified dreams that put a God based goal by a God based idea into action. So the results of the visionary leader will find out what God wants and do it, plain and simple. Vision is the result of obedience and humbleness before a Holy God. Then it is shared with the rest of the people in the church with excitement. And without vision or revelation, as in Proverbs, we will not hear the Word of God and be unable to follow His will.

“Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness-- the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.” (Colossians 1:24-29)

Paul is showing the Colosse people that their direction is in the Lordship of Christ. This new direction is based on what He has done on their behalf, and has

specific connotations to bear in their walk with Christ. This passage is a testimony for the total supremacy of Christ, and His total sufficiency for the Colossians. Which means Christ is supreme and sufficient for us today, and this is the primary road of vision. When we are lacking, we need to fill up on Christ and not the distractions of the world and ourselves. We are to rely on nothing but the Lordship of Christ and what He achieved on our behalf.

In the ancient world, a “mystery” was a secret disclosure or word of knowledge that enabled a person to grow spiritually. The early church heresy Gnosticism is a primary aspect of this thought that the individual needs a secret insight to achieve a goal; Paul uses this imagery and turns it around that Christ made the mystery known to all. Thus invalidating the secret movement, which what used to be hidden is now freely accessible to all that are called and believe.

A lot of leaders, pastors, and people in general feel vision is a dead horse that has been beaten too much. I do not think so. For us to be effective for the Kingdom of God, we need to know where we are going to lead others. The effective leader will have walked the path before leading others on it and will know where they are going: this is vision. The ability to know where and why you are going. This will allow you to come up with the **why** and **how** of the ministry, which will lead us to the “**what**,” the “**who**” we are targeting, the “**where**” we are doing it, and the “**when**,” which are the objectives that we are called to.

The “**why**” is the call from our Lord as manifested through Scripture and reinforced by our prayer and devotional life.

The “**how**” is the plan of action that maps out the target and the way we are going to accomplish the task that our Lord has called us to. A mission statement commonly does this. That is a short description of a few pages that outlines how you are going to implement your vision, and the target you are reaching, and the reasons for.

“**What**” is leading by asking and seeking the “**why**,” and coming up with the “**how**” which is the plan and the “**what**” is what we are called to do. Sounds confusing? Basically it is the wise and careful thought with lots of prayer, Scripture, and study, what we are doing all logically and systematically spelled out. We start from a simple statement that sets the pace, then a detailed listing with analysis and projections of how we will do it. That is the purpose of our church, Biblically and characteristically, by our unique personality and what we have to offer by our collective gifts, and our target we are called to reach.

The “**who**” is the target we have. The principal target is always the neighborhood where your church is at, then expanding from there. It can be the neighborhood around the church, new people who move into the area, a cultural grouping, widows, orphans, or the people God calls us to.

The “**where**” is the location the church is at which is the priority that God gives us. Since he placed you in a strategic place, we are to respond to it. Hence if your church is in the city, but the members live in the suburbs, then your target is both the city and suburbs. It is never an either or choice, God placed you there for a reason! It is a very sad sight to see a church do nothing to reach the neighbors around it, and even a sadder sight when a church moves because the demographics have changed in their neighborhood. How sad our Lord must be when we let petty prejudices effect our decisions!

The “**when**” is the time frame to do the mission and commission that Christ has given. As I stated, it is sad a sight to see a church spend all of its time to come up with a vision and mission plan and do nothing with it. How many churches across our country have evangelism and mission committees filled with people who are happy to be on it because that is the committee that does not meet very often, because they have nothing planned? It is a white elephant, a committee with nothing to do, filled with people who meet just for the sake of meeting, and that meeting is their ministry! Totally clueless on the purpose of the church, only filled with excuses of why they can’t reach out, even though it is directly opposite of everything Scripture stands for and why our Lord died for us in the first place. So do we sit in meetings and feel good that we are active and involved in “ministry?” Hardly!!! Our Lord Jesus Christ has called us to respond to His saving grace by getting off our “Backside” and showing the gratitude we have. The **when** is now and is continual!!!

What is a “white elephant” you may say, perhaps you have heard of this metaphor and wonder what it has to do with church leadership? In the country of Burma (best known for the movie and play “The King and I”) the white elephant is the most sacred thing, a symbol of their god’s blessing and coming prosperity. So this does not sound bad, but there is more to this story. When the king has found the white elephant, he can, if he chooses, give the elephant as a gift to someone. Wow, what an honor you may think as many countrymen did back then, or is it. The person who receives the elephant must care for it, feed it, clothe it (yes and quite extravagantly too), and provide all the necessities and luxuries an elephant god deserves. However, he must not use the elephant for any reason or means. Thus, they have the enormous cost and care for the elephant without any benefits from it. The blessings you may ask? They go to the King, period! This is quite a raw deal, and when we have leadership and vision without the “who, what, where, when, how, and why,” we will have the raw deal, the white elephant living in our church!

Vision gives the leader a sense of purpose that must be an outgrowth of their growth. The leader who disciples and equips others is a person who is living the vision and setting goals for their personal growth, before they set goals for others. Since the leader’s skills and abilities are growing, they can lead others to be workers. The leader needs to continue to be a better child of God first before they can lead. The leader is the model who goes first and reminds others in their walk of the vision over their words.

Leadership is centered upon the personal growth of the leader. Consider leadership like a chain of values all inter-linked together, if one link is broken or missing the chain will not support anything. When we leave out crucial aspects of our growth as disciples and especially as leaders we will fall flat and fail. The chain cannot function without each link working strong together, we cannot function without our links of spiritual discipline all working together, all working strong. It is out of that growth and the strong links of who we are in Christ and how we respond to Him will come the character of Christ. Out of that conduct of being in Christ will enter the values and drive the behavior of our daily walk, and this is what will influence others.

You cannot lead where you have not been, or lead if you do not know where you are going. This is essential to being a leader. The leader will see the project already completed and the steps needed to implement it. They can see a lost person and the potential that they have in Christ. There are too many who get in their cars and drive without a map or itinerary. This can be adventurous for a while, even fun, but the life of Christ is not a road trip. We have to know where and why we are going and our direction must come from the Word of God and nowhere else. We are called not to just visualize it but to complete it, not to just talk about it but to do it. The effective leader will take vision and implement it into function.

I was a part of a church where they spent most of the ministry time on writing a vision. The pastors and elders went to conferences where they learned the importance of vision and purpose, so they came back all excited to do it. So as two years went by, over two-thirds of council time was in debate over it. Sub-committees were developed and every committee worked on it extensively. The result was, the original plan of the people who went to the conference changed little, and the vision, as it was written out, was one of the best I have ever seen. But, they did not do one thing to implement it. Yes, they had a great vision, and they thought they did a great job in writing it, but it was never communicated to the congregation, nor was there any feet put to it. This was a classic case of people just not getting it, Christ does not need boneheads, He needs disciples. We are not to spend all of our time planning and none to little to do it, yet so many people do. This is why a lot of corporations go under, they dwell on their past accomplishments and do not plan for the future.

When we have a plan, then the objectives can come out of it. You cannot have healthy objectives unless there is a plan. You cannot build a house without an architect to plan it, if you do, you will have a house that I tried to build in Mexico, a mess. When we have the desire to follow our Lord, then He gives us the vision through His Word, and God will use us. We must believe, through faith, the Lord will use us and has a plan for us to head. Then we can replicate the vision in others, and help other Christians develop personal vision for their lives and then collectively for the church. Vision gives us the hope of the future that God has for us, and we provide the faith to make it work, and the commitment to persevere.

So how do you know how big your vision should be? Just ask yourself if you had unlimited resources and money, and were grounded in the Word of God, what would

you do? Then do it! *“Neither a wise man nor a brave man sits on the tracks of history to wait for the train of the future to run him over.”* (General D. Eisenhower) You may have to have a realistic budget to work with, but the mother of invention is the need and the creativity to succeed.

Jesus’ vision was the discipleship and equipping of the disciples, this was His drive and where most of His time was spent. He was focused on the teaching of the Kingdom of God, to see beyond their situation to the life to come. With His teaching, Jesus entrusted His church and people in the care of the people He taught. And they were to replicate themselves to others and so forth, so that the objective was every believer was an equipper, every member a minister, every Christian be involved in the life and gifts of the body to influence the world.

Vision is the vehicle that will carry the leaders through the spiritual disciplines to build the church and reach the world. They will be effective communicators of it and live it in their lives. The best part is the ultimate resource beyond any other including money is the Holy Spirit! The results are His, not ours. Our only responsibility is to respond to the call, so if it does not work, it is not failure, it is the will of God, as long as we are earnestly in obedience to Him.

Over 80% of new businesses in America fail in the first five years due to the needs of the owner outweighing the needs of the business. Churches fail for the very same reasons, our desires over His. The failed business do not have the discipline, which turns the thinking of getting things done into getting things done. The same is with churches, whose leaders may have great intentions but never let them outweigh their needs and comfort.

A vision will have your primary call from Scripture, such as Mark 12:28-31 or Phil. 3:10, which are my personal favorite vision verses. Then a summary on how that Scripture will effect you and the church, a statement that defines your identity and values (Rom 12; John 4:23), and then your mission field. Then your objective, how and why you will be organized, what will be your strategy and plan. How will the people of the church be involved, as in business it is called “systems strategy?” Then do it!

Knowledge: *“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”*(Romans 12:3)

“Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.” (I Timothy 1:18-20)

Always remember that we exist only by the grace of our Lord, as Paul expounds to us. Paul’s ministry was the result of grace and so is ours. As the call and responsibility have been given to us to carry it through completion with the gifts and

abilities we are given. Knowledge is the recognition of our faith and the abilities we are given, and what we are to do with them. Be realistic, yet bold and daring, be wise stewards and cautious, yet go with gusto. Wisdom gives us the temperament and balance and place for us to be. We are to be growing in wisdom of the Lord, know what our capacities are, and where the opportunities lay so we know where to go, where to grow, and then carry it to be the lead.

Timothy received his call to the pastorate, and with it the responsibility to grow in knowledge and lead effectively. Timothy's anointing for service comes from the work of the Holy Spirit and the gifts he received and the responsibility to follow through with vigor. And the repercussions that fall on us when we fail to yield to our call, and mislead others in the wrong direction, and wrong knowledge as with "*Hymenaeus and Alexander*" should cause us to fall to our knees in remorse. With knowledge comes the responsibility to use it in the wisdom it is meant, and not adding our inclinations to it.

A leader must have the knowledge and experience to put in practice the work that needs to be done. The leader will be studious so that they are nourished by the Word, getting into the Scriptures with study and application, not just reading it like a novel. The Word must touch us as who we are and transform our very core, this is the knowledge that leads and transforms. You cannot lead if you do not know the way, and to know the way you must have the knowledge. The knowledge comes from experience and experience comes from discipleship. The will of God is for us to study His Word, this will change our behaviors and our lives, so that others want to be like us, because we are like Him.

The ability to lead others is expressed in the knowledge we are able to present to others, so they can in turn make a difference and be transformed by the renewing of their mind and ours. Success is measured in discipleship where we learn and grow for our Lord. This will make the walk a victory, as we are obedient to the call. Because we will be examples by our experience to obey out of our desire to do so, not out of obligation, and thus, a positive infectious campaign to the rest of the body starts with the leader.

Our behaviors cannot change until we know how to behave correctly, this is knowledge, not by emotional commitments that do not last, but real effort in the will to work out our salvation in discipleship. "...*put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*"(Colossians 3:10) Renewal comes from emotionalism-NOT! It comes from knowledge and by the power of the Holy Spirit! Emotions are great, but they cannot substitute for a real commitment and the work and effort that the Christian life calls for, which is essential for leadership.

Too many Christians neglect the basics of the faith, and replace it with new teachings or neglect teaching all together. They forget who God is, and who we are in Christ. If we do not know who God is and what is our call and responsibility, then how can we lead others in the direction that God calls? We can't. The opposite of maturity is immaturity, and this is the result of no direction brought on by no knowledge. This leads

us in rebellion against God, and as leaders, we will lead others away as well. We will be leading people in hopelessness and despair, because most people cannot discern the difference. Thus it is the leader's responsibility to lead with correct knowledge based on God's Word.

We can learn by reading biographies of great Christian leaders as an example to follow, and the biographies of rock stars and celebrities from cable TV to see what happens when we follow our own way.

Knowledge also encompasses the ability to run the show you are in charge of. So if you are a new board member, you should not be its lead unless you have the experience to do so. Allow yourself to be mentored in a subordinate position first, before taking control. If you are on a board, such as finance, but have no knowledge of accounting then you are in the wrong position. If you are on the evangelism committee but have no direct experience in leading evangelism campaigns or the willingness to go and learn then you are on the wrong team.

A leader must know his gifts and abilities and be realistic with them to be serving the best for the glory of our Lord. If you desire to be on a committee or team in which you do not have the experience, then learn about it, take a course at the local college or even a correspondence course, and allow yourself to be mentored. If you truly have the desire for a position, then you must also have the desire to pursue the knowledge it takes to make it work.

Be careful that your knowledge does not puff you up as Paul warns. Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care. A lot of Christian groups have rebelled against knowledge and education because of the arrogance they perceive, and for good reason from their perspective. Personal corruption can take on the form of knowledge, because knowledge is power and control. We need to heed to the responsibility of wisdom and humbleness of the knowledge that God gives us, not its power trappings to put down others with.

We can be assured that what Christ did is relevant and impacting, and is a reality that must be accepted and committed to. The Sovereign Creator of the universe must transform our lives and nowhere else are we to find our lead. He will pursue, and we are to respond and surrender to His sovereignty. Then our purpose will be unfolded before us and the impact we have will be beyond our dreams and expectations.

I Timothy tells us, *"Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."* (I Timothy 4:15-16)

Energizer: *"Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I am sending him to you for the express purpose*

that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.”
(Colossians 4:7-8)

This passage is a testament to the importance of influence, and being an attractive person who gets excited and is joyful in their task and call. If the leader has all the gifts and abilities but not the ability to get them across to others, then they are pretty much useless. Unless the leader is not being utilized and taught themselves and growing from their relationships, especially with God, there will be nothing to energize. We must be aware of their weakness and partner with other leaders to compliment each other. Attraction is the love of our Lord overflowing us as leaders to those we are to mobilize and energize. No matter what the circumstance may be, we are given the gifts and abilities to strive to the fullest to the Glory of God. So the Gospel will persevere even in the harshest circumstances, and the neighborhood by your home.

Paul was an extreme example of multiplying networks and energizing and influencing people for the Lord. Being excited about who you are in Christ is an essential aspect of attracting people and motivating them for and in leadership. New Christians bring in most of the new converts, because they are excited, they are energized. Even though new Christians may be ignorant on theological and apologetical matters, they are bringing people in! Verses people who have been Christians for many years tend to lose their excitement and, thus, may rarely bring people into the church.

The principles of the Gospel must impact us so we are influenced and energized by it. If the leader is not excited, the message will drop off, and fall flat. The learner and hearer will not desire something irrelevant and unexciting. If they see no excitement in the leader, why would they want to be apart of it? The nature of the Christian life is the joy and excitement of being in Christ over all else, and this should be the biggest motivation. So the excitement the leader receives from their growth becomes contagious to those around them; this is influence. Being in Christ means living our lives for Him with excitement in all times and all places, this is influence.

Paul's language in representing his "dear brother" shows the love and respect they had for each other, the kind of positive relationship that is so lacking in our world and church these days. The quality relationship that we are called to, but place our baggage and needs to stand in the path Christ has for us. Being a loyal servant of the Lord must impact us with passion and energize us to pass it to others; if not, there is something wrong. There are always peaks and valleys in the Christian walk. We are not always in the up-key mode, but this should not mute the passion we have for Christ. We must press on and reboot ourselves when we get in those valleys, so we can rise to the challenge and follow through with the excitement of His good news.

Encouragement is the fruit of the mature walk of the Christian life. This will empower us to uplift each other and not put us down. It is the immature and ungodly individual that constantly puts down their fellow Christian and a despicable and repulsive Christian who does it to the unbeliever. Thus, the reason for the horrible reputation we Christians have in society. Can you imagine Christ putting people down

with insults so as to uplift Himself? Absolutely not! When we are called to model His character, and are created in the image of God, then we are to model that essence and attribute of our Lord. The church in Colosse with its dysfunctions needed the encouragement to press on to the direction the Lord had, just as we need to do. Usually the person with the despicable character needs the most encouragement and to be ministered to, but they should never be in leadership. A leader must be filled with the joy of the Lord, or all they will do is repulse people no matter how gifted they are.

The effective leader will have the ability to attract people for the Lord's service and be willing and able to show the way of discipleship with enthusiasm. The leader will be able to build others through mentoring, with the primary focus on how to glorify Christ and what is best for the Lord's church. It is His church not ours! If the leader does not have a heart for people then they are not called to be a leader, they are too into themselves. The capable leader will be able to motivate and energize people out of their love for people, because of their love for Christ. The ability to energize is born from the desire to please God and carrying that passion to others. We are never to be critical, condescending and belligerent to others for this is a slap in the face of our Lord, a misrepresentation of how we are to be to His people and the world. We cannot excite, energize, and influence people by arrogance. There is nothing worse in the church than an arrogant leader. If Christ was God and Creator of the universe and lived a life without arrogance then how can we, unless we are greater than He!

The effective leader will not be a force of just personality and power plays. The leader cannot be power seeking controllers of others lives, when it is the Lord who is in control. The leader must be relationship oriented, centered on building and mentoring others for Christ. The effective leader must ask this question, "what is more important, my career and desire for control or the discipleship of the people?" If it is your own self-seeking desires, you are not a true leader of God's people, get out and get help. You must re-boot yourself with God's purpose and not your own. Our true accomplishments are the faith we build and not the numbers we attract. The energizer knows the difference between being a relationship builder and a self-seeker.

Learning: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."
(Philippians 4:8-9)

Being a continual and perpetual person to learn and grow from the experience the Lord gives us is an essential element as a Christian and a quintessential aspect of the leader. If the leader refuses to grow beyond himself, if they turn their head from experiences as learning opportunities, and stick their tongue out at learning altogether, then they will fail. As a leader unable to herd others in the ways of the Lord because of arrogance and unwillingness to learn you will be totally ineffective in your personal walk with Christ. When we are not growing, we are not leading. Being a disciple means we

are in a learning process, a growth process to become a better person for the Glory of God, and for the growth of our being.

Paul is calling us to a life of obedience and with obedience comes the right relationship with our God. Then that relationship trickles down to others as we lead and allow the virtues to flow from us. With obedience will come our peace with God, peace to ourselves, and then peace to others. And the virtues Paul gives are essential to learn and keep learning and growing in them so that they will remain virtues, or all they will be is poetry and pretty words with no meaning and power behind them. The virtues are not the end product that we are to shoot for, but the natural fruit of our walk with Christ, when we walk in obedience. Then we are prepared to do the work of our Lord as His people, because of the growth and learning we do.

Paul was guiding the Philippians by his knowledge and his discipleship by what he had learned. Above all else, Paul was an example for the work of the Lord. Paul had a deep heart and love for the people he was influencing because he was modeling the virtues of the faith by his growth and learning. Thus we must take the call and example as an imperative for the Christian life and mandatory for the leader. And the fulfillment Paul experienced can be ours, even in the midst of diversity and suffering, because of the obedience we have shown and the faith that strengthens flows from our lives.

Not too long ago in Southern California there were several news reports of dentists who were practicing without formal training or a license. Many people went to them because they were inexpensive, and that was very attractive in the inner-city. Can you imagine someone with a sharp object fooling around in your mouth without proper training? Can you imagine them using dangerous anesthetics and anesthesia without the full knowledge of their function? Well, a lot of people got to experience that first hand when they could have gone to several free and low-cost clinics instead, but for convenience sake, decided to take a risk and see the untrained and unlicensed dentist. When we take on a job or task and do not have the proper training or experience, we too will be treading on dangerous ground.

Of course we cannot have experience and education in all things, and if we expect that of everyone then a lot of tasks would not get accomplished in the church. So we must have a balance to allow people to experience and grow in new things, while at the same time allow learning and mentoring opportunities so people can learn in new positions and keep growing with training.

We must take our leadership positions seriously, so if we join a team or ministry board, then we should try to learn all about it. We can do this by checking out books, resources, other churches, and conferences, so we can have the best knowledge available so we can be our best, and not just wing it through. Be willing to humble yourself in the learning process. Such as, if you are a doctor, spent most of your life in school and feel called to join the finance committee, but have no training in accounting, then you need to take a course at a local college, or something similar, to gain that knowledge. I was on staff at a church where they did not have that philosophy, so the

head person on the finance committee had no formal training in finance. Thus over a two year period of time, the church secretary took off with over \$40,000, and nobody was wise to it until it was too late. Arrogance got in the way of adequately training themselves for the Lord's service, and disastrous consequences resulted. We must be willing to keep learning and growing to be our best for God's glory!

Perseverance: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrews 12:1-3)

Oswald Chambers wrote, *"You cannot help suffering; it is a true and needful training for the soul that dares to be true to God."* (My Utmost for His Highest)

The dictionary definition of perseverance is, "To persist in an idea, purpose, or task despite obstacles (Webster)". Or, in the Christian context, to continue in a state of grace to the end for our eternal reward. It is one thing to read about biographies and story's of people who went through great suffering and came out of it better than they entered it, and then compare it to ourselves struggling to find the keys to the car. It is one thing to hear of others and all about their journey of faith, and another thing to live it out in our personal lives. So the call for the Christian in diversity is to keep on track and He will take care of us because we belong to Christ. Whatever we face and go through, our Lord is there and we are in His arms. And when we realize this fact, we can persevere through anything because our Lord, King and Creator of the universe is there carrying us through.

It is essential for the capable leader to be focused on the goal ahead and be able to carry the task and their self through the tough times. Too many leaders get frustrated when things do not go as planned or their perceived way, and they give up, or neglect the responsibility.

It is not so much how we answer the question on the reason for suffering, but how we live it out in our lives and walk with Christ. Too many people are stuck in the question of it and never learn to trust and rely on our Lord, or learn to deal with it as a learning experience so we can be better prepared to be a servant of the Lord. Suffering is a natural aspect of the human experience as we inherited our sinful nature that corrupted all of God's creation, including us. When we accept Christ, we take on His righteousness as a covering, but the sinful nature is still there and we must confront and fight against it all of our Christian life. As we battle on, we grow and each instance becomes easier to handle, we grow in righteousness and sanctification. This is our spiritual growth, and the faithful and cheerful Christian is the one who perseveres regardless of the circumstance.

Since suffering is a natural aspect of life, we need to realize this and guard ourselves from it, whether it is physical, mental, emotional, financial, or spiritual. The Bible tells us many times to expect it and to be persistent when faced with adversity. Christ will give us the comfort and strength to press on, just look at the life of people like Joni Erickson Tada. Joni describes her paralysis as a crown, and the influence the Lord has used her for is incredible. From her books of incredible insight to her beautiful paintings, the Lord has indeed used her powerfully. She realized years ago her reward is yet to come and our adventure on this life is very short compared to the eternity to come. So we need to make the best of it as life deals us the curves and not to be overcome with frustration, but overcome with joy by the life we have in Christ. When things do not go our way, make sure we are going His way! Keep going as, "The Little Engine that Could."

Maturity: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (II Corinthians 4:16-18)

We must realize that our Lord can and will bring goodness and glory to any situation that He is glorified. Even through our weakness and failures, through our let downs and discouragements, Christ is there loving and encouraging us. Paul knew this firsthand and lived it out in his life and ministry, as must we. Whatever our circumstance, we need to see that it pales in significance to the eternity we have to come. This world and life is a dress rehearsal, and a mere shadow of what is to come. So let us keep the focus on what is ahead and what we will enjoy for all time that we may not see unless we press on to the goal, and then at the end we will see.

One of the clearest evidences of being a mature Christian is an increased awareness and knowledge of the need to be in Christ, and not to be to ourselves. When we have an increased need that goes beyond ourselves, an increasing need that goes beyond our self-confidence when we are focused not on ourselves but Christ; then we are maturing. When we are dependent on our Lord and the Holy Spirit; then our self-confidence becomes rooted and dependent in Christ working through us. So we are not self driven but Christ driven. Thus resulting in our will to be in total surrender to God's will as the driving force for our existence. This is maturity! Too many people feel they are too busy to contemplate their existence, just ask anyone and you will be surprised at the answers. Yet God created us for a purpose, but most give little to no credence to it, even Christians. We cannot venture into maturity unless we realize the need and the purpose of who we are.

As mature Christians, we will recognize our need for Christ will bring us beyond our failures so we can grow increasingly effective for our Lord and grow in sanctification. We are focused on the goal of holiness to be the person God created. He created us to be images of Himself, and as images, we are to reflect His character that goes beyond

ourselves to the purpose He has. It is not about our needs, but His need. It is not our purpose, but His purpose. This is maturity!

As we grow in Christ, we will become aware of our futility and inadequacy as human beings, that we are products of our sinful nature that only Christ can regain and redeem. And this frailty will become a strong building with the foundation of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit who gives us extreme provision and realization to be our best for God's glory. We become complete human beings who walk away from our fallen nature into a renewed nature in Christ. As we grow in the progress of our walk with Christ, we become more able to stay on the path of what he has for us. Then the other paths at our side will not be even considered so that the many temptations and adventure into new and different paths, away from His presence, will no longer consume our desires. Instead we are to become convicted to spiritual fulfillment that Christ has for us. Thus, when we walk on the path of God and are confronted with the enormous assortment of doors, all leading to temptations and desires, we will know what to do. All these distractions and sins leading away from His best for us will not be a temptation, but rather repulsive and ugly as they truly are.

With the power of the Holy Spirit and the conviction of faith in Christ, when we are modeling His image with love, we are maturing. The desires and aspirations that once hindered us will be of no bother. We will be able to walk away from them like a racehorse. A racehorse has its blinders on the side of its eyes, so it is always pointing straight ahead, so it is not distracted from leaving the course. We too must keep our eyes focused ahead so we are not distracted away from our Lord. For when we are overcome by our desires and distracted from our purpose, then the diseases will infect us like cancer and consume the body of Christ which end up serving only our whims and the devil's purpose. When we stop and open those doors of temptations, even the small doggie doors, we will be consumed, and our growth in Christ will stop and the infection of diseases will replace their growth.

There are too many Christians who flat out and deliberately refuse to surrender themselves to the lordship of Christ. Christianity is merely fire insurance from Hell, some means of social influence or personal desires that do not grow beyond the sinner's prayer: such as the parable of the sower. Our Christian growth in maturity is not self-realization, but rather Christ realization. As we grow, we become totally aware of one great fact: there is one God and we are not it. Our confidence in who we are is because of the work Christ has done on our behalf. As we grow, our utter dependence is upon our Lord and our confidence is in Him and not ourselves. People will always disappoint us. We will even disappoint ourselves. Christ, however, will not disappoint us, but gives us the care, love, and His grace that we do not deserve. We in turn model to others who we think, do not deserve it, this is our mandate and call.

The capable leader is rooted and grounded in the spiritual disciplines of the faith, whose drive is their passionate love relationship to the Lordship of Christ. What flows out of it is the desire to love God's people, to herd them with love to maturity and lead the people where they have not been before. The leader exhibits the maturity of the Christian life as the result of their growth and experience in the faith. An effective leader

cannot be new to the faith, even the Apostle Paul spent three years being disciplined by Barnabas, and he received his call and was empowered directly from Christ Himself. I have seen too many immature Christians who go at it by who they are in society and not who they are in Christ.

A few years ago while on staff at a church, we received a family who came to faith at a crusade and the father was the founder of a major fast food franchise. So in less than a year, he was my boss and the president ruling elder of the congregation. Now he was a great guy and very successful in business, but he did not know how to run a church. So he instinctively ran it like a business and his policies failed. He did not know how to lead in a church, which is different than a corporation, even though a lot of the principles are transferable. After several years, he did become a good leader as he matured in the faith. But the church suffered during his learning curve needlessly.

There is no substitute to time spent in the face of our Lord with a surrendered heart and a learning will. We must be willing to be humble no matter who we are or our experience. I had to learn this lesson a few years back. I went from being on staff at a large, influential church to a small church in a small town. At first, before accepting the call, I thought that I was too good for the position. God, however, wanted me there to teach me to walk closer to Him and not walk in the position that I held. So I did, and I experienced humbleness. Nobody knew me as the conference speaker, author, or having a big position in a big church, but just a youth pastor in a small church. This is where Christ wanted me and I learned a lot there. It prepared me for the road He had for me. And I am glad I went there, I learned things in a broader context that I could not have in a mega-church.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.

Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful." (II Timothy 2:15-16; 22-24)

This passage is a testimony to the importance of holiness, and to keep ourselves growing in our spiritual lives so that our emotional selves are impacted and grow too.

Spiritual maturity will lead to emotional maturity most of the time, unless there is some physiological or psychological problem, or deep stress that has never been resolved. It is imperative for the leader to be in control of their emotional health. If not, they need to step down and seek help, both spiritually and psychologically. If the leader is given to fits of rage or is just overly emotional, they cannot set the example that Christ has in our character. We are not to be Vulcan's exhibiting pure logic and no emotion, absolutely not. God created us as emotional beings, but as with anything else, we must have control of the excess emotions and the potential for rampage.

Love their Call: *“As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.”* (I Thessalonians 2:6b-9)

Paul is responding to people who had doubts about his ministry and call, so he responds to the fruits he bore and shows the example of following the call by his life and work. To follow our call requires courage and passion that flows from what Christ did, that we respond to with vigor. That desire and vigor will be the love of the call and enable us to press on to the goal of pleasing God, with our vigorous service in His name. In leadership, anything we say or do must be a pleasing sight to the Lord. It is not enough to know our call, for we all are called, but we must respond to it with desire, passion, and excitement.

Our relationships, our tasks, our talents, and how we carry ourselves in the role of leadership must flow from our love of Christ, and the responding love of His call. Any hostility or obstacles we face in leadership, especially as it applies to people, must be met as Christ would. Jesus was not in the business of pleasing himself, but His Father. He was modeling obedience and love. We too must follow suit with our obedience and willingness to be His child. To grow in His service with excitement, while not being a burden in our attitudes and work. The result will be the moving away from our needs to the needs of others and the call of our Lord.

Passion means there is nothing better you would rather do than....! For a person called to ministry, they must firmly believe that there is nothing else they would rather do, even through personal sacrifice. This means having no conditions or expectations in the way. If you feel that way and it has been tested, then you are called to ministry. Passion is an essential element of any endeavor in order to be able to succeed at a higher level. The person who is really into a movement or political view and spends a lot of energy and time fighting for it will be more influential and involved than the person who may have the same view but are not consumed by it. It is the same with the Christian walk and faith. You will grow closer to Christ and in mature faith by “getting into it” with all your energies. Versus just desiring to have a love for the call but unwilling to place the effort, time and passion into it. It must be with passion and a great desire and love of our Lord. Enthusiasm is the fuel that empowers leadership and gives us the love for the call that we have been given. Enthusiasm is the pipe that flows the earnest endeavor of our work and service. With this passion will come the natural desire to do our best for God’s glory. Out of the gratitude will come the desire to please God, and the desire to please will synergistically combine with the passion to produce the love of His call. When we love the call, then we are attentive to the needs and expectations of the people we serve. Thus our service is coming out of our love of doing it instead of out of an obligation. Just like the person who loves their hobby and spends a majority of their time and desire on it verses the person forced to do something they do not like doing.

The call of God is always present. The question that people raise is how do I know what I'm called to do? This generally results from not listening to the call in the first place. And the best place to look is in our jar of talents and abilities. If you like to work on mechanical things then you may be destined for engineering, but if you prefer to argue with everyone then maybe engineering is not your thing, think about becoming a lawyer. The call is a summons to bring our faith into alignment with God's will and the gifts and abilities He gives. So in leadership, this transfers into the desire and willingness to do our best in a particular service. As with myself, after I was converted to the faith, I had the desire to teach God's Word. For it can be a myriad of tasks from missions to dishes. We all have a place in the church with our gifts, it is our responsibility to find them out, be used in them, and grow in discipleship in those abilities by having more experienced and mature Christians mentor us.

Spunk: "Then the man who had received the one talent came. Master, he said, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you. His master replied, You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest." (Matthew 25:24-27)

Leadership takes spunk, this is passion and conviction the willingness to take a risk and go beyond ourselves, our experience and knowledge and into what is best for the body of Christ. The servants were each given opportunities to serve their master, and were given the ability and responsibility to lead. All the servants did well and received the praise from their Master. However, one servant decided to play it safe. He responded to his responsibility with a sense of protection, so he hid the talents so no one else could steal them. He refused to take a risk and do what his Master required and expected. On the surface this may not seem so bad, since in a bad decision he could have lost it all. But the master would not have been upset if the servant lost the talents in an investment and failed his task as long as he tried his best. The intense anger was directed at the inactivity of the gifts and abilities that he received. The servant was given all that he needed to succeed, or at least to serve at his best, but he preferred to hand over his abilities to the ground where they would be of no use and the result was no growth. No growth in his personal experience and nurture or growth in the fruits of his work because he did nothing. Even if he failed and lost all of the talents, even if we fail and do not meet the expectations of our overseer, we will at least grow in the nurture of the faith as long as we try our best with the gifts as given to us. The praise was directed at the effort and willingness of the servants who decided to take the risk. The question is are we taking the necessary risks without being reckless, are we doing our best with the abilities God has trusted to our care? We are responsible to obey His call, we are not responsible for the results, because that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

We must be willing to do the work and put our best effort forward for His service. When we have been given gifts, no matter how much or what level, we have a responsibility to use them. When we do not, we too can expect our Lord to be very displeased with us. We can follow God's will and please Him by responding to the responsibility we have been given, and we do this by imitating Christ. We can please God by taking His love and giving it to others, and finding our natural talents and spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit entrusted to us. This takes risk. This takes spunk. As leaders, we are to compel our people to follow their call and exercise their gifts with energy and passion, and to do it with spunk. Spunk is the willingness to take the risk with a joyful attitude, while being wise stewards, and not as children sharing their piece of candy. Spunk is not being reckless. We are not overly concerned with our reputation or what we will lose because our confidence is in the Lord. He will protect us in His way and His time. If our concern is self-protection, then we will lose and be ineffective as a leader. Of course, remember commonsense; do not allow a breach of protocol or virtue to become an excuse for a goal, saying our trust is in the Lord. For example, as a pastor never counsel women alone. Go to a public place or invite another to come along. If you think you are above reproach and must help her first, and think it is a risk worth taking, you are wrong. Do not allow a spurious action to take place, even if your motives are pure and true. When I first started out as a youth pastor many years ago, I used to tie an old car hood to the back of my VW, as a slide, and give kids a ride. This was very attractive, extremely fun and drew a lot of youth in. However it was a breach of safety. There were many other ways to attract youth and have fun without sacrificing safety. Spunk works together with discernment!

The opposite of spunk is procrastination. Procrastination is a tremendous destroyer of His church. It distorts our abilities and call; it distorts our opportunity and the gifts He has given us. Procrastination wastes the precious short time we were given to do our call, and this is "Pew Sitting" at its best or I should say worst. The problem with this destructive force is, it is addictive. When the leaders procrastinate, it quickly catches on to the rest of the congregation. If you have a lazy boss at work that expects little of you, then little is usually what you give in return. I cannot count the times I heard over the years, "let us wait on that" or "well, we do not need to do that" or "I do not see why we should do that" and "well, we've never done it that way before." These are the destructive procrastination diseases that sit down the church and neuter its ability to serve and please God. Yes, we do need to be careful and plan ahead with wisdom and discernment and not be reckless, but too many people in the church do not have a discernment problem, but a "getting off the pew and doing something problem!"

"Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap." (Ecclesiastes 11:4)

This passage tells us if we keep waiting for what we consider perfect conditions, then we will never get up and do the task. This is the procrastination that keeps us from accomplishing anything. I was on staff at a church while they lost the senior pastor, so a lot of people left the church. The leadership felt that they would come back when they called a new pastor. Three years went by and hundreds left, and no one would visit or

call the members who left. They felt they had a good excuse, saying, “they will come back when we get a permanent pastor,” so they did not need to do what was necessary. Thus the people found churches that truly cared for them and left the one that did not. A leader cares and is willing to go out of his way without making excuses or letting his fears get the best of him.

No Fear of Failure: *“I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”* (Philippians 4:12b-13)

Paul was very aware of his needs and situation, and if you know anything about the life of Paul, then you know the intense suffering and trials he went through for our Lord and on our behalf. Yet Paul was still content about what he had to work with and go through. Paul was not stupid, and had no masochistic complex, but his focus was on the Lord as ours must be. Paul wanted to impress to us the necessity of a focus on the Christian life. Without the goal of pleasing our Lord as our guide and gratitude to drive us, we will be too afraid to go beyond our comfort zones to do anything of significance.

When we do not have the ability to take a risk, then we need to ask God and ourselves why. Then we need to realize the results belong to the Lord and Him alone. We do not need to worry about the results, because they are in the Lord’s hands, they belong to Him. The great Reformational doctrines of Election and Predestination have to do with the fact that God is in control and we are not. So we should respond with our hardest effort because we need not fear the result. Most business plans and philosophies have the focus of result as their primary goal. These ideas sneak their way into the church, and there is some truth to them, but as Christians we are not to be performance driven, but rather centered on our service and desire to please God. Too many churches put unrealistic expectations on its leaders, pastors, and staff that cannot be met. We have the natural desire to succeed as the large church does or as in the business world. But sometimes God does not call the small church to be large, but obedient. Yes they need to be focused on reaching the lost and discipleship, and not stay a closed social group. Of course we are to seek results, but the results are not the focus. If the results are not as you expected, be as joyful as if they were much more than expected, as long as your focus was trust and obedience to Him. We are to always strive to do and be our best for His glory, but His glory is not always success as we interpret success! Christ’s version of success is our obedience, yet we tend to ignore that and try to take on His role, and be His “bean counter.”

When we have the idea firmly planted that we are not responsible for the results of the ministry, but only the obedience to His call, then out of that will come the perseverance to press on to serve Him and the fear of failure will cease. The ability to take the risk will become more vigorous, and the fears we have will go away. Always count everything in joy when we are serving as best as we can.

Since we are to keep the focus and attention on our call and obedience, such as to reach our neighborhood as paramount, then the planning is centered on how we can

do our best and not worry on the, “what if they do not respond.” We are not to concern ourselves on the “what ifs.” Thus the big block party that took months to plan and thousands of dollars to execute only attributed a couple of visitors or perhaps none. Be joyful, your work was not in vain! Our mission is never the focus of increased membership, but increased obedience and discipleship. Increased membership is usually a sign that obedience is happening, but not always. I have seen too many churches that are obedient that do not grow and disobedient churches that do. There are just too many circumstances that effect it, and mostly what is God’s plan. The attention is always the ministry and not the results, this subject of results is purely the work of the Holy Spirit. Since we are not God, we should not worry about His job, only ours! Thus when we face setbacks and disappointments, we do not consider them failures but rather victories and joy.

“The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases. All a man’s ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs the heart.” (Proverbs 21:1-2)

Fear does not take into account the sovereignty of God. God is sovereign even over pagan kings and presidents, over our family, friends, and ourselves. God is absolute. Thus His dominion is total and complete from the macro of creation of galaxies and universes to the micro of the number of hairs on our head. At the same time, we have free agency of our personal decisions and will. What we do is subject to judgment from our Lord. God is in control over us but the specifics of that free will and control may be debated by theologians. All we need to know is we are responsible as moral agents of our Lord entrusted with a call and abilities to make it work. Since God is sovereign, we should not fear going to our neighbor and witnessing, nor should we fear to do what it takes in our leadership responsibility.

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 21:31-32)

We need to focus on our relationship as God’s child and our service to Him. We need not seek our own needs and expectations, but trust on Christ and our efforts will please Him. Our Lord knows us and our situation better then we could ever know. From this knowledge comes the promise of a future that is in our best interest as well as His, so we should trust and obey with a joyful attitude. By keeping focus where our focus must lay and keep it off where it does not belong, will allow ministry to flourish, and disease to be eradicated!

Followers: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God--even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” (I Corinthians 10:31-11:1)

We are called to do all that we do to the Glory of God. Paul is only imitating Christ and not gloating in his glory. We are to be followers and examples first and foremost over all else and to never gloat about the praise we may receive. Remember one of the main aspects of love is that does not seek its own. Leadership cannot effectively transpire unless we as leaders are the followers of the Lord. You can call this the “prime directive,” the point and focus that all the other leadership characteristics follow. This is the horse that pulls the cart of leadership.

You cannot lead where you have not been. Unless the leader is a good follower of the Lord and submitted to one another and of the aspects of leadership themselves, they cannot lead effectively. We cannot do the work of our Lord unless we are followers of our Lord. We may try it with all of our best efforts, but all we will do is spin our wheels in the wrong direction.

Setting goals in our daily situations can be a challenge for some and anticipation by others. Goals need to have a plan and target to strive for as well as a strategy to implement. Any good goal will have an example behind it as a template to follow. And the results of the goal will lead to an assortment of possibilities as determined by the strategy and effort put into it. And remember results and outcome are the work of the Holy Spirit. Goals give the sense of direction to go for as with vision, but goals follow the lead of the strategy and plan. Our strategy and plan is Christ our Lord and His call for us. We cannot dream or wish our expectations into the call of the Lord, we need to stay on track one step at a time, following the lead of our Lord.

Focus is the essential element of the martial arts, and is the difference that makes one professional sports team beat another. The goal for most sports’ endeavors is to place the ball into the cup, over the fence, pass the goal line, into a hoop, in a glove, into the net, or over the net. The professional athlete must know their abilities and strategy for the objective to be achieved. All their effort, planning, and challenge is to press on to the goal. The athlete has spent most of his life in preparation for the reward of the game. The leader must also be in preparation as in modeling the path that Christ showed him. A professional baseball player came to my Bible study while I was in seminary and told me something that I will never forget. He said when you get to the level of professional sports, regardless of position or team, you are at a level that there is literally no significant difference in physical ability and mental knowledge of the game. So I asked how does one team beat another. He said it is mostly mental and psychological. The ability to be confident in their ability at the same time as with their teams. To be able to be a team that is willing to sacrifice their personal lime light for another on their team; to be a follower and not always a leader. The Los Angeles Lakers in the late 90’s had and has the best players that basketball money can buy, yet I used to watch them lose a lot. I’m no sport’s expert, but I can observe the key players in competition with each other and what my baseball friend said all played out in front of me. The Lakers did not have the focus to win, even though they had the ability. So some insignificant team, I had never heard of before, beat them. In the church, we have to have the right focus, and that focus is to always be willing to follow before you are willing to lead! The Lakers had to learn this lesson too, and when they finally did, they

went all the way in 2000, 2001 and 2002, and then the lesion became lost again in 2003!

The focus is to adhere to the teachings and example of our Lord. Our love relationship with Christ is the template to our leadership plan. We are making disciples in Christ's image and not our image. I was shocked at an early time in my ministry to hear the elder at my church say it was his job to make disciples of himself and not the Lord. His view was to create images of him, and this was discipleship. Too many people in Christian leadership may not agree with this view, but they sure will behave as if they do. For us to be effective leaders, we must be effective disciples and disciplers. Creating a disciple is to help someone form in the image and character of Christ, not ourselves.

Following Christ is not an option to the Christian leader; it is clearly a command that we must adhere to. Following is not an option, it is a lifestyle. Out of following will come discipling that moves us from ourselves to prayer and passion to His service. The leader then will see the lifestyle change in the people they effect, as an expression of Christ's character. When the people we effect are effecting others themselves, then we have reached the goal and placed the ball where it is supposed to be.

If we wait to give God our lives and be His followers at the end of our life, then we are savoring the choice part of the steak for ourselves and giving God the trim we cut off. It is like giving God an old stained T-shirt and saying this is our best garment, instead of giving Him a new one as a gift. If we refuse to give God our choice time and effort, we end up cheating God and ourselves. Then we are not true followers, and when we are not following, we are not leading.

God's desire for the leader is to be a follower of Him, not the trends, personalities, and self-desires we may have. Without this primer of a surrendered heart and maturity, we cannot practice the essential elements of a great leader.

Listening: "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:19-25)

There is an old story where a student comes to the great philosopher Socrates to be disciplined by him. When this young student came to Socrates, he kept talking and talking and talking, so that Socrates could not get a word in edgewise. Socrates had to put his hand over the student's mouth and say "I'm going to have to charge you twice."

The student asked “why?” Socrates said, “in order to make you a great leader, I will have to teach you two disciplines. First you need to learn how to hold your tongue before you can learn the second discipline. And second you will need to learn how to use your tongue correctly.”

Greek philosophy put a very high premium on elegant speech, and Socrates was the best of them all. But he knew very well you can not speak until you can listen. The early Christian community, as it was facing persecution, knew that to be a support and leader, it must listen and to progress in spiritual growth, the Christian and, especially, the leader, must be willing to listen. That as a follower of the Lord, we have to listen to his Word, and to be a leader, we must also listen to the people in our care. How we listen shows where our interests are and our health. Are we mirroring Christ’s character and grace or just our personal needs? And the fruit that flows from listening is the growth and spiritual maturity that leads to godly action.

Listening is the embodiment of leadership, not the last and least of the characteristics, but a key integral aspect of all of them. To be an effectual leader, you must know how to listen. You can look upon it as a form of support structure on the foundation of the Lord where all the leadership aspects are part of the building of a leader. Listening makes up the frame that all the structure is built on. Without the frame and without a skeleton, our bodies and houses will limp and fall to destruction. Without the support of listening and caring, a leader will fall limp and surely fail, even if he is following the rest of the characteristics well.

I like to joke with my wife. When she tells me that I’m not listening, I respond by saying “I’m listening but I just did not remember what you said.” From birth to death, we have the need to be listened to. One of the main problems facing youth today is no one cares for or listens to them, that is a major point why events like those school shootings happen. Each of us has a deep need to be heard, whether we admit it or not. It can be a casual conversation or a deep therapy session, if you feel that person is not listening then you feel they do not care. Being listened to is a lot like being loved, so we must take this manner seriously and grow in this skill.

Listening is not a spiritual gift that some people have and some people do not have, listening is something we all can do even if we are deaf. Listening is a natural ability and a skill that can be improved on, all it takes is the will to turn it on and let it work. We can also learn techniques to improve our abilities.

Relationships are built on listening, to God’s Word and to each other. The relationship between a husband and wife is as good as their ability to listen. The leader in the church is as good as their ability to listen. The words that we hear are not as important as the care and effort put into them; the effect of listening is that the words are not all of the meaning of the message. The primary focus in communication is the hearer and receiver of the communication in relationship to each other, that means the care is usually more important than the words, especially for the Christian. The words are the wrapper and the listening is the chocolate. Humpty Dumpty once said, “*I know*

you think you understand what you thought I said, but I'm not sure you are aware that what you heard is what I meant." (Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll)

In Summary

All that it takes is a few wrong decisions where sin and desire have taken over the responsibility of our call. It will cause a ripple effect that will cost and keep costing until the church is distorted and destroyed, unless repentance and forgiveness places a firewall to end the shame. The leader has to ask themselves what will my decisions cost? Pride and immorality, and placing our desires over His has a price that can never be paid. We may think a quick prayer will be the cure all, after all God is love and my decisions really do not matter in the grand scope of the universe. This thinking is dead wrong! (Yes God is love, and then what do we respond to love with?) That cost will keep escalating with compound interest that only Christ can stop. Clean strong leadership with a focus on Christ will bring riches. Sin will bring a cost that will foreclose on the ministry and joy of what we could have had. When we defy God, then all those around us for generations to come will suffer. Let us put a stop to this insanity with the firewall of who Christ is.

So how do we do this? Let God's Word be the mirror to show your true character and response to His call and grace. This will allow us to see our own true selves and the areas we need to grow in and listen. Because the result of these characteristics is the care, nurture and the passion to grow in Christ, this is for the listener and the hearer. Our relationship with Christ gives us the motivation to be the "Lover of the Call." Caring by listening gives us the motivation to be the "Energizer," that leads to being an effective leader all stemming from "Following" and "Vision." All these characteristics are synergistically combined to build the character and leadership "right stuff" that it takes to be a leader. If we leave out one of these characteristics then we will not be as effective as we can be and as we are called to be.

Do you make it easy for people to follow you, or do you make it difficult for them? Ministry is not an easy task, nor should we expect it to be. However this does not mean we are to put obstacles in each other's path for spite, no are we to put others down in fear they may be better than us. We are to create the path of least resistance, while challenging them to take ownership of their task and most importantly our Lord.

It is not always realistic to find people who manifest all of these characteristics equally and effectively. That is why a team mentality is necessary in leadership. Because there will be people who are weak in some areas that others are strong in. It is essential for the leader to be sensitive to their abilities and those of others so they know their weak areas and strengths. Therefore, an effective leadership team will have a combination of all these characteristics and be a synergistic powerhouse for our Lord!

It has been said recently by a prominent church growth guru that if the pastor is not a visionary, they should not be in the pulpit. To a degree this is true when vision is from the revelation of His Word. If the pastor, or any leader, is not capable of seeing the

goal and call that the Lord has, what are they going to accomplish anyway? Not much. If the pastor and leader do not know where they are going or what to do, then they cannot possibly lead others. If vision is just a plan and mission statement to push ahead with what the latest polls say, or what the large church down the street is doing, then that statement from the church growth guru is harsh because that is not leadership. Mission and purpose are very important, but is no substitute for the pastor's heart and the shepherd's call.

Training and Discipling Leaders

Perhaps there has been no person in history who has had more influence on and instruction to the body of believers since the close of Scripture than Augustine. Augustine was the bishop of Hippo, who fought the decline of the Roman Empire and its lust towards self-destruction, and called Christians to an early reformation. He has had considerable influence on both Luther, who was an Augustinian Monk, and Calvin who quoted Augustine more than any other source, except Scripture. His "Confessions" is a must read for any serious Bible student and essential for pastors and leaders of the church!

Augustine knew human nature and the holiness of God well. He called God's people to experience the Christian life with passion and the realization of our responsibility in the face of sin. He called leaders and pastors to "self watch," that is to examine their spiritual condition, abilities, and sin. We must be intently aware of who we are in Christ and where we are in our walk with Christ to be effective leaders. If not, we will fail. It was true in Augustine's time and is still true today. Because of our sinful nature, we require accountability to each other. We need to have people who know us, ask us about our prayer life, whether we've sinned, have been in Scripture and what we've learned. Being accountable will incite us to grow further and not hide behind our natural laziness.

Accountability gives us the perimeters to be effective Christians because it forces us out of our self-desires and ourselves and into relationships with others, "*as iron sharpens iron.*" If the leaders of the church spend all their energies preparing themselves for their vocation, and virtually zero in preparation to be a Christian and a leader, how good and influential will they be? The disciplines of the faith will lead us to personal holiness and closer to our Lord. Time spent in Scripture and prayer, along with accountability, will hone the skill to be an effective force for our Lord and to further His Kingdom!

We must realize the responsibility we have as leaders and step up to the plate of challenge, with a surrendered will and passion to serve our Lord. Let our Lord reveal Himself to you in your devotions so it impacts who you are and how you are. We will be effective leaders if we follow Augustine's example. Augustine knows life well, as he spent the first 32 years of his life as the ultimate "partyer," and then, at his conversion and realization of his sinful nature, devoted the rest of his life to show us the true way,

not the self-centered party approach! The people we minister to will benefit greatly from us getting to know Augustine's "Confessions!"

The best training is our realization of our dependence on God and each other. And the growth of our devotional life, coupled with our accountability, will make us the disciple that our Lord will greatly use. Is this not what the purpose and call of leadership is about, to serve our Lord and His people? We cannot serve Him unless we are His people and are His example in society.

The capable leader will be in tune to his gifts and abilities and will truly desire to grow in them. We need to read resources and attend seminars to further encourage and challenge us. I was asked at a recent youth pastors' convention why I was there attending and not leading or speaking. My response was that I need to be learning too. If I spend all my time teaching, then I will not be learning effectively from other talented and capable people. Do not be the pastor or leader who sits in their office thinking they are better and do not need any training! We all need training and further education, and we cannot do this by being selfish with our minds and unwilling to yield from our pride.

The Elders as Leaders with Responsibility

Never forget who you are and what Christ has called you to. The leadership position is not a place of power and control over other peoples' lives. It is a place to be humble before our Holy God and to respond to His grace with the best of our gifts, abilities, and time to further His Kingdom. Leadership is not about the personality of the leader, it is about being surrendered to our Lord and being a humble example of His character.

It has been my experience and observations over the years that the most qualified and best leaders are the ones who are hard to get. That is they are not usually seeking the position, you have to go after them. They do not want to be in the 'limelight', and they feel they are not qualified and able. The 'what to be' leader who pursues the position with lust, tend to be the worst leaders, because they tend to have distorted motives. Now these are just broad observations, make sure you and whoever is the leader has the right motives.

We are to act as examples of the Lord first before we can ask others to do so. There are few things worse in the church than bully leaders who put others down and do not follow their own teaching. We cannot be in leadership with the focus of power and control over others, this is not the call and example of our Lord! Read the life of David and how God blessed him when his heart was in tune with His. And then take careful note of how and when David was not in tune with God, but was engulfed in his pride and lust, and the consequences of his actions.

The committee is not the ministry, but a huddle to plan the ministry! Too many churches think that being on a committee is a ministry and the buck stops there for the ministry of the church. So what is the point in that? I cannot tell you how frustrating it is

from a pastor's perspective to be on a committee, such as Youth or Christian Education, where its board members do nothing to help the ministry. Their view is to only "oversee it," but never see it for themselves or attend, let alone help out. It is not the call of the Lord to be a Christian supervisor, God does not need anybody to sit in a room to critique and manage His servants, who themselves are separated from the ministry. Do you see the absurdity in that? It is funny when you read it in a "Dilbert" comic strip of an incompetent boss, clueless to their task and duties, only to supervise their employees out of ignorance and apathy. I do not see the humor when Christ's church is the example!

The church needs leaders who are involved in the ministry they are supposed to lead, and if they refuse, they are the incompetent fools "Dilbert" makes fun of. We do not need this in the church! People are the feet to the mission and vision of the church, the leader will lead by example, and not from a chair or bully pulpit. The vision and mission statement are the instructions to build the model. If we try to build a model and don't use the instructions, we will have a lot of pieces left over, and it will not look like the picture on the box. And if we spend all of our time reading the directions and never reach for the pieces and glue, what good would that be? Yet this is what a lot of leaders in the church do and then feel good about it. Our Lord does not feel good about His children sitting in rooms talking in circles and coming up with excuses when there is work to be done, and His message to be spread.

Meetings are important and necessary to do His work. They are the planning and springboard for action that needs to take place. We need to see the committee as a football huddle, the strategy planning for the game, to plan the next play of action. As our coach, the Lord instructs us from His Word and prayer.

Do not lower your standards or compromise key theological points or Scripture for personal gain or to please some politically correct whim. Churches that compromise with Scripture and with moral and value judgments will be very surprised at the end of the game when they are called home for Judgment! We must take our task and call seriously, and take God's Word seriously too.

Remember all the aspects of leadership require the practice of care and love. This is the fuel to the call and attitude we are to model. This is what God calls us to do, to have the attitude of love and caring. This is what people need, and what makes a compatible church that people want to attend versus a church we go to out of obligation or flee from!

Leadership, as with all things with our Lord, has grace to it. I have seen churches so picky with its leader selection that they pass up a lot of good people. And I have seen total boneheads brought in and the mess that occurs under their leadership. We must take careful heed to the responsibility of being leaders, and the awesome power that is at our hand, and the people under our care. With the knowledge of discipleship and growth in our Lord will come more responsibility, we must acknowledge this importance and essential element of the Christian walk. When we turn our backs to the essentials of

the call and replace it with the quintessence of our own self-focus, we are spitting in the face of the sovereign Lord of the universe and the Redeemer of our soul; not a good thing to do.

So we must strive to be our best for His glory, always learning and growing. We may never be perfect, and we will make mistakes, but the grace and the love of the Lord will allow us to persevere. The key element is to be our best for His glory, not to our whims, then we will be the great leaders that Christ calls us to. Then we will have churches that are healthy, are reaching their neighborhoods, and are filled with people growing in Christ who want to be there!

Chapter XII Preventing and Resolving Conflict

“Cultivating a Biblical Solution”

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,” (Philippians 2:3-6)

I recently saw a cartoon in a Christian magazine that depicted a mom telling her young son the reason he did not have a father, *“you never knew your father-he was killed at a conflict resolution seminar.”* (Christianity Today May 1999) This first struck me as very humorous, but also sad that this subject is a mockery for some people. That, as humans, we cannot get past ourselves and see others as Christ sees them and taught us to see others.

A church will just be going about its business, then suddenly wham! People are arming themselves for battle, choosing sides and indulging in their pride. Personalities and self-determination takes control of the situation and seeks its own over sound reasoning, the truth, and call of our Lord. So arguments of persuasion with the skewing of truth produce self-directed outcomes, which comes against the peaceful church. And its peace is no longer, full-blown war has broken out. It can start with one gossip and escalate where emotions rise and logic ceases. Do we dare tread to calm these waters? Maybe with the right attitude and guidance from God’s Word, we can give a win/win outcome that is best for all people involved. Then we can create a church free of conflict, when we are focused on the mission and the purpose of being a Christian and being a Christ-filled church.

There are conflicts with various views of moral and value stands today that would have been unheard of in years past. The leadership of the church must be prepared to

deal with people not having values and focus in their lives. People not having moral centers and absolutes to govern them. Even Christians who grew up in the church will come back from college and life experiences with views they were not brought up in, and when thrust into a power position will produce conflict. They may even deny the existence of the God of the Bible, replacing Him with a mystic force or idea, but still hold onto their church without the faith.

Conflict is a normal spice of life, and an outgrowth of our sinful nature that we are supposed to have dominion over. Just as God warned Cain that sin was “*crouching at your door*” that he needed to master it or it would overtake and destroy him. Cain did not listen to God, but only to his anger and inclinations, and the first interpersonal conflict resulted in the taking of the first life.

Conflict is something we all are capable of causing. Conflict is also something we are called to master and be involved in its ending. Just as with any sin, we have the natural desire to sin but we also have the natural ability not to. Even the non-Christian has the ability not to sin but, as far as I know, no one in the entire human history has ever gone without sinning with the exception of Christ. Calvin taught that non-Christians have the civil ability to follow the Law (Civil), and this is the reason why they do good works without being saved. Thus we should take heed to our responsibility as Christians on what God calls us to. One thing God does not call us to is conflict and strife, even though the non-Christian may think different because of our actions.

Conflict is not always something evil or bad. We must remember that God will allow all things to work for good for His glory. Sometimes a church can split and then there are two and so forth, a way of church planting. That is why there are so many Denominations. Sometimes conflict draws people together for a cause and perspective, such as when I was involved with “Operation Rescue.” Conflict can open opportunities and communities and bring them together, but we are not to cause conflict for this effect. Well-managed conflict can be healthy and inspire growth to the church and to people spiritually. When a person sins and is disciplined and, then comes out with repentance, they grow and become more effective for Christ versus if there was no discipline and they keep sinning.

Our responsibility is first to realize the diseases we previously discussed and their causes and cures. We also need to remember that love covers a multitude of sin. Love is the first fruit where all the other fruits derive from (Gal. 5) and sanctification is our growth in Christ. Our salvation is the result of love that the redemption of Christ paid for. So if you are a bitter person, then you discover love, the bitterness is muted and will be erased by seeking the forgiveness of Christ. Then the fruit is to go to others whom we have offended to seek their forgiveness: conflict terminated. When we are full of pride, the polar opposite of love, we will be unable to manage conflict effectively but only spread it out of our pride. We need to keep the focus on the love of Christ as our baseline for all that we do.

Conflict and discipline may conjure up medieval inquisitions, emotional trauma from being overly disciplined as children, or libelous defamation of other's character. Personal accountability has gone under the strata of the Jurassic period, that it now takes a pastoral Archeologist to dig it up again. Personal confrontation and the sharing of ethics have become a repulsive by-word in our society and not the virtue, as it should be. When our government leaders directly lie to us and spin their wheels to keep denying and changing the definition of morality, then the resolution of the conflict becomes castrated. Thus it becomes more vigorous and spreads its message of hopelessness and strife.

These thoughts of action into the life of others has become a difficult role for the church to fill, mostly out of fear of offending and then the fear of confronting itself. Most Christians and leaders have no idea on the responsibility and Biblical instruction concerning confrontation because they have not experienced it, seen it demonstrated at all, or have experienced it skewed and misrepresented. We may flee from the accountability and obligation, so we ignore the problem hoping it will go away as some of my examples in preceding chapters. It can be a family member who we refuse to chastise because they will not like us, even our children, because our lead comes from Dr. Spock and not God's Word. Or it can be a friend who is in sin, but we do not want to lose their friendship, so we look the other way. It can be a teenager who knows their friend drinks and drives but will not tell anybody, thinking they would be giving up a confidence. So their friend gets himself arrested or killed, where is the friendship in that?

Yes conflict management is a hard act to do, and my least favorite job in the church, but it is a necessity for a healthy church. So to avoid the conflict in the first place is to have a Biblical plan to resolve it. And when we play Ostrich and bury our head in the ground, the strife keeps building and we become the wicked servant who hides their Talents instead of investing for His Body: Because one of the main aspects of being in Christ is accountability. We are first accountable for our sins that Christ covers and mutes, then we respond with the attitude of love to God, and then to His people, i.e. the great commandment.

Being a disciple of Christ and making disciples requires the devotion, nurture, commitment to the Word, and worship. Most mature Christians would agree on these basics, but what else is required is discipline, the ability to be studious, and to be accountable. Certain behaviors are not acceptable in the church, such as fornication; thus we are called to get rid of them. The sins and the people doing and continuing in them are destructive to themselves and others and, if they refuse to cease, must be dealt with. The Westminster Confession states,

“Church censures are necessary, for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren, for deterring of others from the like offenses, for purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump, for vindicating the honor of Christ, and the holy profession of the gospel, and for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall

upon the church, if they should suffer His covenant, and the seals thereof to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.” (Westminster Confession XXX.iii)

Church censure is not a politically correct thing to do in a society that tolerates anything except righteousness. But if we do not resolve these conflicts and have a plan to deal with them, then we are in violation of a higher order. We need to concern ourselves with what is best for His church, not what is best for our culture. Culture is a reflection of peoples desires and plans converging synergistically. The church is a convergence of the people of God giving God the glory. They are separate entities, even though the culture is worshipping in and leading the church. We sometimes need to be not ‘politically correct’ and we may suffer some rebuke from our culture and society. But the consequence from not acting, that so many churches do creates the diseases of destruction. The purpose is not to punish, but to pursue reconciliation and repentance.

Our basis and starting point is God’s character. Peter tells us *“we are to be holy because God is holy,”* and the way we can respond to this call is by being accountable in our personal lives as believers and as a church. So we need to realize that one of our calls is to participate in conflict management so the wickedness of our nature does not get out of hand. God’s Word does give us the guidelines and focus for proper confrontation and the management of problems, so we can be more effective in His service.

Types of Conflict

There are three main categories of conflict:

First there is **Interpersonal** Conflict. These are the conflicts on personal grounds, such as between church members, staff and leadership. ‘Interpersonal’ conflict is the typical disagreement between two or more people. I would venture to say that over 90% of all conflict are in this category. These can be disagreements on who is going to sing in the choir or lead a study when there is one spot and more than one person desiring it. The interpersonal conflict may then escalate into a negative confrontation that will require intervention. You will find a whole host of various forms for this category, such as gossip, slander, legalism, power controls, false teaching, and the list can go on and on. If the church has a good system to deal with it, then little conflict would escalate to the point of confrontation. We Christians can be like little kids seeking what we can get away with until the parent figure comes back. This is just our human nature.

The second type of conflict is **Intrapersonal** Conflict. This is the conflict with your self-desires verses what God calls us to. This is the personality and desires of an individual seeking to change and to grow that is in conflict with the sinful nature or other beliefs and ways. The new life in Christ verses the old ways of sin. And this is not limited to new Christians, in fact this type of conflict is caused by older ‘church grown’ people more than any one else in my experience. This struggle becomes like a group of

politicians all campaigning for dominance and the office they seek. This is where our spiritual crisis comes into play. And when the wrong dominance takes over the will of the Christian, then the self is in conflict with the church, and the self is fighting God's character which produces the moodiness and power plays we so often see. Virtually all 'passive' conflict is the result from these struggles in some form, and where a lot of our church fights and even family struggles derive from.

This is where the famous adage, "for evil to happen all that needs to be done is for good men to do nothing," effects the church and family. Such as I desire to be a good parent, but I do not want to yell at my kids. I want my kids to be happy at dinner so I will give them what they want, even though this might cause health problems when they grow up. Mr. Ed always has to teach the 6th graders, but they do not like him, and Mr. Ed is mean and uncaring to his students. But we do not want to try to recruit someone new or offend Mr. Ed, so we do nothing. These are the conflicts we deal with personally, but can creep into the "Interpersonal" category, such as my spouse insists the kids eat vegetables, but I do not. This is different from bipolar disorders where the person is schizophrenic (multiple personalities in conflict for dominance and control), here it is just being human. The desire to seek our way in the easiest means possible. Thus, the struggle to try to prevent or side step conflict in fact escalates it.

This category also can also mean personality conflicts. Such as I just do not like so and so's personality. I do not like people who are loud, so, since Mrs. Sims is loud, I will prevent her from being elected for the position of Deacon. Thus, there is no logic or cause for the conflict, just the fact we do not like someone or something based on our experience and perceptions. Or, I do not like praise music in church. So I will do all that I can to prevent it being introduced in our worship. Feelings in the most cases override listening and logical Scriptural study. It is about my whims regardless of anyone else's. This is the category where we will twist Scripture around out of its context to make our points, to conform the Bible to our reasoning. And when the strong willed person with their whims firmly planted in the ground meets the leader or church member who carefully studied the matter that is in disagreement-BANG, conflict breaks out! Or it can be just two groups who did carefully study a problem but came to two different conclusions. Because we will do anything to back up our reasoning, as humans we do not like to be in the wrong.

The third category is **Substantive** Conflict. These are the conflicts of moral grounds. This is the area that theological disputes come from. The conflict over vision or goals, color of the hymnal's, or it can be values such as abortion. The issue is not personality or people, but a cause. This can quickly escalate into Interpersonal and Intrapersonal conflict, and the reason why a lot of churches split.

Proper Attitude and Motives

We must remember that as a Christian and ambassador of Christ, we are to proceed any endeavor with the Fruits of the Spirit where love is our focus. We must

have the proper motives before we can be the peace makes and resolve the conflict. Galatians tell us,

“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.” (Galatians 6:1-5)

We are to take seriously the call to be responsible for each other in love and care. When we help each other, even in the midst of conflict, to point out sin and wrong doing, we are helping that person. We need to take seriously the call that our Lord gave us, that we are positioned to be peacemakers and help in the restoration process of all humankind from evangelism to conflict management.

Restore gently is with the attitude of love and care, not being overly harsh and, especially, not allowing our anger and outrage to get the best of us. God did not express His anger and outrage to us or we would be space dust, rather He gave patience and grace. We are to reflect and replicate His way and not ours. The primary goal with any confrontation is the restoration of the individual, just as it is God’s will to restore us in our love relationship with Him. The goal is not the chastising; this is not a sport, but a serious manner where the person must be dealt with the motive and attitude of respect.

Our churches are riddled with conflict and we need to realize the frustration levels of the people we deal with. Most Christians can and will act in a very ungodly manner and, basically, bite the hand that feeds them. The forces that drive them are fear. Fear of change, fear of being wrong, fear of being embarrassed, and a fear of having no control. We need to see the root motives of others and ourselves in order to deal with the attitude and situations respectively. When we are ministering to those who are insecure and bring our own insecurities, then the proper attitudes will be cut off and our effectiveness will be mute. Our motives must not be self based but Christ based, so when we go into a conflict situation we can deal with it in a levelheaded attitude.

Our own motive must be in the restoration of God’s people from sin, not the work of the Holy Spirit, but our call of being constructive and providing solutions, not more strife. Our call is to extol people, that is to come along their side with comfort and help. We are to help each other grow in our relationships with God and each other. And with this motive in mind, sheepdog people on the right path when they veer off, as a loving parent does with a child. As a community of believers, we are responsible for each other, including the actions and deeds that we extol on to each other. We are also responsible to extol each other onto the right path. So conflict management is not a double barrel shotgun, but the love to extol and lift up each other. Conflict management must have the best interests in mind for the people involved as well as the church, and most importantly a driving force to glorify our Lord. We get ourselves into

trouble when we try to be a savior/ super hero and 'save the day,' so we look good. Our focus is not just to look good, but lift up our Lord.

Be Prepared Spiritually

Before a leader or any Christian can be effective to extol each other, we ourselves must be prepared. Extol is defined when attributed to God as to give praise very highly, that goes beyond emotion and experience, but into a deep commitment and passion. Extol is also the ability to encourage and lift up someone beyond just to tolerate and put up with. So we need to extol as our Lord did for us and then extol to each other. We also need to extol with gentleness and firmness when we confront and encourage the person being confronted. Sometimes the person we confront is innocent, and we need to follow our Constitutional law of innocent until proven guilty, this is Biblical.

So when we confront someone, it must be to lift him or her up while pointing out the grievance and we have to be prepared mentally and spiritually to do this. This is why it is important that someone new to the faith, or someone not as mature, should not get involved in conflict management. Our preparation in any situation is our maturity in the Lord, and the knowledge of the situation, the person, and ourselves. We need to ask ourselves these questions so we can confront with the proper attitude and motive.

First, we must be willing to deal with conflict in a healthy manner and not hide ourselves from it. Are you willing to abide to the mandates of Scripture or are you too engrossed in your anger? If not, you cannot possibly be objective and listen. Are you yourself willing to admit your mistakes and sins, if not, how can you expect others to do so? Are you driven by God's Word and not your own will so you can listen and be objective? Can you, as a person in Christ, handle change and growth where you have not been before? If not, how do you propose to handle others with encouragement and help where you have not been? Do you have the confidence to go against the peer pressure and expectation of others if they are not in alignment with God's Word in order to stand up for truth? If not, you will not have the courage to extol to the level the person may need. Do you have the thick skin and tenacity to listen to self-criticism without it effecting your self-esteem? That is if someone accuses you falsely, can you stand up with confidence of who you are in Christ and not melt away? These characteristics must precede the conflict management process, if not, you will create an even bigger mess. Remember you cannot do the work of our Lord effectively until you are modeling His Character!

The good capable leader will be sensitive to the recognition of the seeds of conflict. That is the type of conflict that simmers below the public surface that we do not show until we are "fed up." Such as people avoiding other people, with such comments like, "I just do not like Timmy" or "I am just not drawn to that person or personality." Now it is unrealistic to expect everyone to like everyone else. As Christians, we will all end up in Heaven together, so we should get along, but we do not. There are tendencies for simple personality dislikes turning into eruptions, we should beware of them and have a

plan to deal with them. When we have our radar screens up for conflict detection at its earliest, it will prevent blow-ups later.

A few years ago there was a story in the LA paper of a woman in Florida who won the lottery. She called her live-in boyfriend, told him the news and told him to pack. He responded, thinking they were going on a trip, "That's great, what should I pack, for hot or cold weather?" The woman responded, "I don't care as long as you are out before I come home!" Life is full of interpersonal storms. Either we are in a storm or we are leaving a storm, but one thing is clear, a storm is sure to be on the way! So how we deal with it will make the difference of a bump in the road or all out divorce.

The storms of life can be such a frustrating experience, but also a source of growth and maturity. But the crisis in of themselves can be an opportunity or a danger, as the Chinese word for crisis expounds both the characters of danger and opportunity. They come into our life sometimes without a hint of warning, and other times it is our own miss planning and arrogance that gets in the way and creates the problem. We cannot avoid them, so we need to learn how to deal with crisis in a Biblical and mature manner. If not, the results can and will be devastating and un-repairable.

The pastor must beware of his leaders' situation and the maturity level of their leadership. If the elders are not mature enough to handle a disagreement in a calm level and encouraging way, then they will just make the situation worse. Because in an unhealthy and immature church (which most churches fall into these days), a pastor or leader who confronts the wrong person of sin or any situation will find their bags packed and office vacant. I have seen this situation in church growth consulting over and over. The people who are supposed to suppress it in the first place blow a simple disagreement way out of proportion. Maturity is your key. The problem is most people think they are mature, but in fact they are not. Your template for finding your and the leaders maturity level is in Galatians 5. A pastor can survive having sinned greatly himself, such as infidelity, but they will not survive confronting a key money giver or key personality in the immature church. This is extremely unfortunate, and a lot of leg work needs to be done to disciple and help a church mature, or seek another call and wipe the dust off your feet.

To be a healthy church, we must have a plan of action on how to handle conflict. The ability to deal with conflict as it emerges will allow a church to stay healthy and vibrant. So it is my goal to show from Scripture a simple model of conflict management that can provide the foundation of understanding to create and implement this essential value in church leadership. It is the wise and mature church that can receive and give criticism as well as to have a written out Biblical plan to deal with it when it ventures off too far.

Cultivating a Biblical Solution

We need to look to God's Word as the primary example for our interpersonal relationships and to the ways we confront, extol, and exhort people with love and care.

There are scores of examples of conflict in Scripture and how it was handled properly and improperly. For example, Paul confronted the churches in his letters to live for Christ. He gave them encouragement, pointed out their errors, and taught the right way of behaving. David did not do well in his confrontation with Uriah and again with Nathan, but learned and grew from his experience, even though he suffered the consequences of his actions.

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” (James 5:16)

God calls us to confess our sins to each other and to Him. We are not called to go to a mediator, but wise counsel and guidance can help us go through issues. There is such a negative backlash in some churches against the Catholics, that Evangelicals “throw out the baby with the bath water.” Too many Evangelicals say we do not need to confess sins to each other, but only to God, yet we see in Scripture the opposite is true. Confrontation is Biblical and we are called to exercise it diligently and with caution. Confessing sins is a mandate and the essential aspect of forgiveness and resolving conflict!

“God will deal with each of us upon the principle which sways our own life, and if we adopt a stern and severe mode of action, we must expect the same rule to be carried out in our case.” (C.H. Spurgeon, “Evening Sept 10”)

The following is a Biblical model to confront someone on the basis of sin and/or wrong doing, or to handle disagreeable rifts in the body. These 5 steps are based on Matthew 18.

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” (Matthew 18:15-17)

STEP 1: Remember Spiritual Maturity:

“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.” (Galatians 6:1)

The goal of confrontation is restoring the individual to healthy relationships, helping them to reconcile their relationship to the Lord, to themselves, to their family, and church family. The moderator, the person who will confront, must be a person who sees the Lord as Lord and is not driven by fear and guilt or personal agenda to solve problems. An attractive attitude is essential for moderation, not aggressiveness and control. God does not need any more Pharisees, because “they are not fair you see!” We must hunger after our Lord and not after power, we are to be servants and create

communities of servants. The person doing the confronting must have a healthy perspective of the Scriptures regarding the issues, be willing to suggest a wise course of action, or refer the person to someone who can.

We always need to approach these situations with a win attitude, not so much that the one intervening is right, but with the perspective of restoration and healing of the people involved. This is the win we want. We also, most importantly, are to be in prayer and to be seeking Grace for ourselves and the person we are confronting! And when we are in an attitude of Grace, then we will be of a humble attitude and, thus, not give in to pride and think of ourselves as a weapon of God. Self-righteousness is a self-destructive weapon and is of no use to our Lord.

Do you as the person confronting have anything to gain or lose, or do you have any preconceived ideas or prejudices? If so, then seek someone else to moderate. Are you a person who is open and honest to their problems? If not, seek someone else. Are you willing to take the heat of criticism, having the person dump on you or blame you? If not, seek someone else. The leader or moderator of the conflict must never be there for self-gain. We must never see conflict resolution as a means of control and to be in a position of power. We are to show who is the Christ, not who is boss in the church, because we are not it, He is! The last thing you want to do is escalate the problem.

STEP 2: Listening and Recognition:

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.” (Matthew 18:15)

“So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.” (Luke 17:3)

When you have firsthand information or some reasonable proof that a sin has been committed and/or a conflict needs to be reconciled, then it is the call of the church to deal with it. So a friend, elder, or pastor needs to go to the person privately and confidentially to deal with it. They need to be sensitive to the feelings and frustrations they may encounter, and the motives of the people involved.

We need to establish goals and objectives for the parties involved or the individual who sinned. What can we accomplish and how can we do it should be in the mind of the leader. If not, then the emotions will take over and will turn into anger and further the conflict. Try to see yourself as part of a team with the parties involved settling the matter and not adversaries with a judge.

We need to be objective and speak to the person directly, not go to or through someone else. We are not to make assumptions, such as women are overly emotional, because both men and women are equal in producing and being blinded by emotions. Assumptions will cover our ears from listening effectively. Then ask key questions, be good listeners to the situation, be in prayer and seeking discernment. Look and seek

what will benefit both parties, what they agree on. What are the reasonable steps to solve this issue? We are not to be focusing on the behaviors and emotions, but seeking the root cause of the dispute. We need to be looking at the structure of the arguments and the underlying cause, not the emotionalism, and not the first reaction we may have. We need to focus on the attitude of the person over their behaviors, so we are not being sarcastic, nagging them, or putting them down. We must always go to God's people (saved and un-saved, we are all God's people, because He created us) with a servant's heart. We need to be speaking to the person with love, without the words of "you always" or "you never." We are not called to be sarcastic or naggers, but encourages. Most people in argumentative situations are focused on the emotion and believe they have the truth, but few will check out the facts, only to relay on the power of their feelings and fears.

We need to ask ourselves questions like: Is there a problem? Is it rumor or fact? What is the person's story and what is the other side? Is there an offense that needs to be confronted or rumors that need to be put down? If it is some political game or power struggle, how can we solve this without taking sides? A leader must seek out and destroy the petty games in church politics by seeking to work with the people to find common ground and resolution before the disciplinary process.

Questions such as, do you have a plan and Scriptures to back you up? Is there a trust level between you and the person? Do you know the history? Has this person done it before? Have you discerned the real issues or willing to do so? Is one party to benefit over the other so it may cloud the true issue? Is it guilt by association or has there been careful measurement and analysis of the situation? Are you willing to verify the facts in the situation, review the evidence, and listen to the other side? Can you see through assumptions to get to the root of the matter? Are you willing to say, "I do not know but I'm willing to find out?" And are you willing to apologize if your confrontation is in error?

It is important to realize that not all conflict is sin. Although most conflict can and will lead to sin, it is not always a sin problem.

Then you need to ask questions specific to the problem being confronted. Coming to the situation with, "How can I help you? I see this as a temporary problem that we can overcome. May I share with you a concern I have? May I say to you that you are an important part of our church family, and your well being is a top concern of mine, because we care for you? You are not alone in this. You are a part of a church family that loves and cares for you. We have a God who loves and cares for us. How can we come along side you...? I know this is hard and a challenge and I know this situation is temporary and we can overcome it, are you willing...? You know God's Word has a lot to say to us in these situations, we all have been there...? It is a challenge to obey God's Word, but he gives us the power and ability to do so...?"

When settling disputes, have each party state what they believe about the situation, and what they want out of the conflict. Have a secretary carefully write it out and then go over it, clearing up any misunderstandings. Then ask each party separately

what are their hidden motives that they did not want to share with the other party and what are their desires and fears? Then come back and go over what each side said in a non-argumentative non-condemning atmosphere! Then ask why does each party feel that way. What do we agree on? What are the motivations? What are the advantages and disadvantages to the perspectives of each party? If there are still points that diverge, work on an equitable solution and commitment to heal and grow from this experience. What can we do for both parties to benefit from this? What will be the result of the various and final decisions? Then seek the Scriptures and spend time in prayer, significant time, and not popcorn prayers! Remember that not everyone will agree with everything! But there must be an agreement on personal growth, mutual respect, and compromise (as long as it is **not** a significant Theological or Biblical point!) so not to destroy relationships and hurt the Body of our Lord. Make sure it is the right decision and not just the most equitable or acceptable one!

We need to be sensitive to the process here in Matthew, that we do not rush through it, but allow it to unfold carefully and not to jump to conclusions. Do not be afraid to take your time. And at the same time be sensitive to stop bad situations as they emerge. The action must be stopped in its tracks, but the healing process will take the time to unfold. Now if there is a severe situation such as child abuse or someone is in danger, yes we need to act very quickly and involve the local police authorities.

Take caution to not just look at the surface and emotions of the incident, but the underlying cause, and this takes time and discernment. Waiting and hoping it will go away is a sin and will destroy you and your church! Being passive and trying to please everyone will put out the fires, but the ambers will simmer until they explosively reemerge. We must have the courage to act quickly, be sensitive to the people, and allow the time and process to heal.

So if you are sure, proof positive, that a sin has occurred, then just between two people, friend to friend, pastor to individual, or elder to individual, confront the person in the spirit of love and care, with the first step and goal firmly in mind. Here is the tough part of sharing the fault and problem, if the person refuses to listen, then it must be escalated to a "supervisor" step 3. If the person acknowledges the wrong and repents, keep the matter private and confidential. The person has been won over, and healing can begin. An effective leader and mature Christian will always be in prayer, listen and discern the issue, and go to the individual with Scripture and in love.

STEP 3: Semi-Private Reconciliation and Goal Setting:

If the person refuses to listen and continues in sin or conflict, and you have checked out the facts and both sides, then you need to involve an elder or pastor. So two, no more than three at this stage, go to the person and confront and moderate a solution. Again, remember the Fruits of the Spirit and the goal of bringing the person in a right relationship with Christ and the body of the church.

Conflict resolution is easy when both parties agree, but more often than not someone will not bend because of **their** principles. God's call for us is to be peacemakers, which we are to pursue it, "*Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*" (Romans 14:19) As the person who mediates the conflict, it is our responsibility to create the peace. We cannot afford to see if they come up with a solution themselves, although they may just do so. Sometimes people just need a listening ear or to hear the other side. We have to remember to be prepared to build up one another and not tear down.

This is also the step you need to set goals and benchmark a plan. The first step is a friendly word that may end the problem, if not a plan of attack is needed. The goal is resolution and peace in the congregation. It is not always about who is right and who is wrong. So bring both parties together to explain their side and listen with the rule of no interruption to the others retort and argument. Then allow a response again without any interruption from either party. Each side must feel the freedom to express themselves clearly without fear of retaliation or guilt. Then they need to agree to an equitable solution by the moderator with a win/win scenario in mind. You can even give the parties the ownership of seeking a solution, this might motivate them even more. But the attitude of my way or no way must be neutered. There cannot always be an "I win and you lose attitude," our focus is on the Lord and His plan for us and not our perceived will.

The moderator is the catalyst and may not have the answers, their job is to keep the peace with an atmosphere of acceptance and care, and provide a winnable plan. They may intercede for clarification, to refocus on the issue, or to put out personal attacks. Stick to the facts and issues in hand. Do not allow old issues buried for years to resurface. You may need to focus on a plan to prevent continual conflict if there is a history between the parties. This is so that the conflict does not come back in the future in a different area.

The moderator, after listening, provides various creative solutions. If no solution is at hand imminently, then set the next meeting date, be in prayer and take the time for research and good Biblical plan and solution. Make sure all the information has been let out and all the best alternatives are given credence. If no solution can be brought forward, then an outside source may be sought, such as a consultant or the court system. But beware, these outside solutions will not provide any more solutions than the capable leader but will bring high costs and consequences. That is why God's Word tells us to settle the matters ourselves.

We must realize that there is not always an agreed solution, someone may feel they were not listened to and get offended when they do not get their way. So we need to agree to disagree sometimes. It is okay to not always have a solution when the parties cease their war. So in the beginning, explain that cooperation and unity in Christ is the focus. Life is about relationships and not self-desires. We must be willing to compromise, unless it is on Biblical grounds or compromising our integrity and morals.

Conflict handled correctly will strengthen the church and grow the people further in their walk with Christ, if handled correctly.

“But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” (Matthew 18:16)

“One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime, the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among you. The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you.” (Deuteronomy 19:15-20)

STEP 4: Church Counsel:

“But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” Matthew 18:16;

“Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning.” (1 Timothy 5:20)

When step 3 and 4 fail then you involve the elders, and the Bible tells us that resolving conflict is one of their primary roles. Take the person before the elder board of your church. (This step is in response to sin and moral and Biblical deviations. Personal conflicts reside in steps 1-3, unless both parties agree to the moderation of the elders, and the elders agree to it, but the decision of the elders must be agreed that it is final, and no escalation beyond.) Do this before going public, this gives the person one last chance, and involves the key leadership in the process. Most denominations have this in their piety for good reason.

Basically the elders go through the same first 4 steps. As the primary leaders of the church they will have more leverage and sociological pressure that the first 2 or 3 people may not have had. Thus this step is like carrying the case to the supreme court.

STEP 5: Public Action:

“If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” (Matthew 18:17-20)

“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.” (II Thessalonians 3:6;14-15)

“Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.” (Titus 3:10)

“Hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.” (I Corinthians 5:5)

If all the steps did not work, and if you are sure beyond a reasonable doubt, then the matter needs to go before the church publicly. The problem needs to be dealt without violating others confidences, and the details and specifics do not need to be public. Absolutely no crowd-pleasing tactics should ever be used! Leaders are called to clarify and not cloud the issues.

The elders and pastor must be people above reproach, so their word can be trusted without question. If the individual or group or faction refuses to repent and make any needed restitution, then they are to be disfellowshipped, that is kicked out of the church. And when they come to conviction and repentance, they are to be let back in fellowship with all the love and care of the prodigal son. Just a simple statement that the person is no longer welcomed and they are to be left alone until the leadership states otherwise. If they are seen in the church, then the pastor or elder is to escort the person away (they may receive help, but the normal member should not be involved, unless asked to do so).

Fortunately I had to do this only twice in my ministry carrier personally. And believe me this was extremely difficult. Although one of the aspects of being a church growth consultant is also being a conflict resolution ‘specialist’, which I personally hate doing. I try to avoid it by trading with other consultants and take the tasks that they do not like. Yet, it seems I play referee in churches far too often, over cases that should have never escalated beyond step 2! My two personal cases involved a member calling and harassing the single women, to the point he was stalking. All of the 4 steps where used and finally he had to be disfellowshipped! I even had to warn other churches of this man, because I found out he had done it before in another church, and refused to stop, thus will keep on doing ‘his thing’. You can call this ‘step 6’, that if the person is going to cause harm to another body of believers, it is your job to warn them. You can do this discreetly by going to the town’s ministerial fellowship, and even local police authorities and court for a restraining order if considered necessary.

One church I worked with had to get a restraining order because someone who was a volunteer was harassing children, and would continue elsewhere without intervention. This was years ago before ‘child molesting’ was in the public eye, today he would be in prison. The other case had to do with a divorced couple that went very nasty, and one was asked to find another church to keep the peace.

"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, O wicked man, you will surely die, and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself." (Ezekiel 33:7-9)

When we have properly dealt with the issue and people in a loving way, while confronting the problem in truth and with Scripture, then you can rest in the knowledge that you have fulfilled your duty and obligation and call from the Lord. The person is in the hands and providence of God. The Lord may choose to let the person live in their sin and the consequence there of; I John 5:16. *"If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life."* The person may be subject to being chastised by God with an assortment of consequences, such as disease, broken relationships, or may be called home to Heaven if they are a Christian, or 'elsewhere' if the person is not a Christian. It is extremely important to release our control and realize that God is the only one capable of changing a person's heart. There is nothing we can do but point out what is in Scripture with the Fruits of the Spirit working in us. We as Christians and leaders cannot force our will and beliefs on others, all we can do are share and try to persuade. We cannot force ethical and values on others. Values come from the character of the existential core of the person that only they and God have access to. We must be in prayer and be willing to turn the people over to our Lord. We are to trust and obey Him ourselves and be the example that He calls for, and do the same with trusting that God is working in the lives of others too, even when it does not seem so.

"because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." (Hebrews 12:6)

"That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep." (I Corinthians 11:30)

"but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." (James 1:14-15)

Church Staff Conflicts

If it is your desire to destroy and split a church, then simply have no plan to resolve staff disputes. Satan will just love you and your members will be disillusioned and spread bitterness and spiritual distraction to others. Of course, no one truly wants to do this, at least I hope not, so we need to have a plan and atmosphere to prevent and deal with conflicts in the upper management of the church, from the pastoral staff, secretaries, elders and various leaders.

The pastoral staff may start off with a good relationship, but if there is not the proper format for discussions and communication, you will be laying out a landmine field that the whole congregation will have to tread over. A landmine field filled with distrust, blame, anger, bitterness, attacks and personal misconduct, where the Fruits of the Spirit have fermented and become rotten. An atmosphere of mistrust and tension will replace the true call of the church and the purpose of what we are supposed to be about. I have consulted and been to many such churches over the years, and it is a sad pathetic sight to see pastors arguing and staff meetings full of contempt and tension.

But there are simple steps to prevent this pathetic mess from ever happening.

First, there must be a clear agreement on key theological grounds, if not, a retreat where the Bible is opened and the senior minister goes over the areas of dispute for Biblical recognition. Minor points must be agreed to disagree, if not, the subordinate pastor should seek another call or seek moderation from the Denomination. Pastors must never try to divide and distract the church from its mission, especially in personality matters.

Second, open communication is a must. Each staff member should be able to go to each other and share their feelings and concerns without any reprisal, but with a listening ear. If a staff person refuses to agree with such a policy, they must seek employment elsewhere. Open communication is a tall sign of a healthy church. Closed communication channels is a sure sign that says, "Land Mines Ahead". Thus everyone is too busy watching their steps to accomplish anything of significance for our Lord. Each member of the staff should and must be comfortable to express himself or herself in a clear healthy way so that confrontation is accepted and expected.

Third, and most importantly, the staff team must be in prayer with and for each other. Staff meetings should begin and end in prayer and be in significant time before our holy God in prayer. This will hone the relationship with each other and with God. The result will be cultivated leadership by modeling our Lord, where defensiveness falls aside and misunderstandings are quickly cleared up by the unity in Christ.

The senior staff person/people should be aware of the signs of potential conflict and quickly deal with it. Such signs as avoidance and withdrawal, contempt and over negative criticism, competition, defensiveness, blame, over accommodation, and collaboration. The head of staff needs to be in continual prayer and possess wisdom and discernment to exercise mediation, or should farm out staff conflicts to a third outside party, perhaps a pastor from another church in the same denomination. Most denominations have resources for you to use to have conflict management procedures (if yours does not, seek the resources from one that does), and a 'Employee handbook' that lays out such procedures.

Pastors are walking targets of all kinds of attacks, from fellow pastors, from church members, and from Satan. So having a system to deal with conflict will alleviate 99% of it! Our fight is against the enemy of the ages, our fight is against the self-

precepts that cloud our relationship with Christ, and our fight is not against each other. Yet Satan is happiest when we do fight with each other!

Agreeing to Disagree without Disunity

We as mature Christians need to see the distinction of God's providence working in the lives of His people, and the pettiness of our actions. God is in control and He will win no matter what we do. The tone of Paul's letters to resolve the various conflicts in the churches center on one crucial theme. Whatever the disagreement was, either the role of women, the spiritual gifts, the role of leadership, and the authority of the church all centered on surrendering to the Lord and not to the flesh. Two thousand years later, we are dealing with the same issues that Paul dealt with. So how do we respond? Just as Paul stated as led by the Spirit, we must allow ourselves to be taught by the Word and surrender to the Lordship of Christ and not ourselves! And Paul continues to remind us that we are to express our oneness in Christ by being loving and accepting to others because Christ was and is accepting and loving of us.

True wisdom will solve any conflict, and our desires will keep us from seeing it. Our envy and selfish desires will always get in the way, and God's Grace will eventually mute our reckoning and bring the peace. So we must focus on the major issues and tenets of the faith, such as key theological issues just as Paul did. Paul took to task the issues of the physical Resurrection of Christ and Faith Alone by what Christ has done that saves us. Paul did not call us to be perfect but we should be able to handle moral and values as our Lord would. Thus the minor issues should be agree to disagree, such as the role of women in leadership. My denomination recently split over this issue, because the key areas of conflict management were not used.

It is always best to be a listener to God, so we are in tune with Him and not to ourselves! From our pettiness come the conflicts that ruin relationships and property. From our Lord come the Grace, Mercy, and Goodness that creates the Peacemaker. When we are in tune, then we will be that peacemaker with our submissive hearts, minds, and souls, which flow the good Fruits of the Spirit to be bearers of Righteousness and not bearers bringing contemptible actions into our relationships and His church! Remember James 3 & 4, and the true causes of conflict.

Taking the Lead

The leader of the church will face all sorts of attack and conflict and thus must be rooted in the principles we talked about in the chapter on "The Leadership Challenge." So the result is we need to be in good and solid relationships with the people we serve, while at the same time are sensitive to their motives as well as frustrations. So the leader will be able to discern situations, the dynamics, and personalities involved without they themselves getting pulled into the conflict. Remember we are called to serve Christ and His body and not to fight. Yet people will take advantage of you and misunderstand your motives to resolve conflict. Most people, including Christians, have a spurious nature, a better understanding of strife, and a harder time accepting the

Biblical principles of peace. A Mature Christian will respond to criticism with gentleness and never respond to anger with anger or power with more power, we are to respond in the character of Christ and truth.

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly. The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good.” (Proverbs 15:1-3)

The leader must be willing and able to get above the situation without emotional or preconceived ideas, so we can be objective as well as to listen and share the Love of our Lord. The leader must be able to facilitate an atmosphere of trust and encouragement, so the congregation looks to them for their lead. If not, the conflicts will get worse. So the result of our actions will be to get closer to our critics and not push them away. Do not follow your natural tendencies to fight back or get even, God calls us higher. So see the people who are critical to the plan of peace and see them as opportunities to teach and model the correct way of church government from God's Word. Leaders are not combatants, but are peacemakers who moderate and understand so they can intervene with the Grace of our Lord.

Maturity is the key interpersonal force that will seek the truth and, most importantly, the Holy Spirit to facilitate the growth and healing; because constructive criticism and conflict will be a catalyst to personal and church growth. This will create bonding and forgiveness and love will permeate, though there will be struggle in the process. The leader/moderator, when successful, must never give in to pride and self-glorification. Always be humble and realize your depravity and brokenness before a Holy God! Our will must be in surrender and our realization in the power of our Lord to heal in the situation. It is not about us, it is always about our Lord.

The leader is not a force of personality and strong-willed inclinations, but is a servant and a heart after His. So the result will be to give compassion to those who we feel do not deserve it, to love the unlovable, to help those who bite us, to lead those who want to go it themselves, and to do it with a smile and grateful heart. Under the veneer of the critical person is a child that needs to be guided. They may seem self-confident, but usually they are full of fear and mask it with the rough exterior of criticism. They may have had a life filled with conflict and shame and have no way of interacting socially but to be instigators of conflict because they grew up that way. The good news is what Christ has done, the acceptance and love He offers, and the healing and growth that will result from it. Remember the section on “Spunk” in “The Leadership Challenge,” risk is a necessary element of moderating and leading, not self-seeking and self-protection, they only lead away from our Lord.

When Do We Engage in Conflict

There are times when we as Christians are called to arms, as the song goes, *“onward Christian soldiers.”* As they said in the Middle Ages, *“if the cause is just...”* of

course most of the causes were not just. But for us, if there is a situation that must be defended, we need to prepare ourselves and be willing to fight for our Lord. Conflicts that are worth fighting for are such as moral and value issues, spiritual warfare, evil desires, or physical attack.

“When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.” (Galatians 2:11)

If someone is going to assault you or a family member and all means available to involve the authorities is exhausted, then we fight. I personally do not get into fist fights, but as a youth pastor, I was on a trip where one of my girls was being assaulted and I had to respond to that situation with physical force or the girl would have been raped. There have been numerous times I had to keep bad intentioned people away from my group to protect them and even use physical force. We as leaders must protect the people God entrusts to us. In working in some inner-city areas, I hired security to prevent potential problems with various events. Yes we are to trust in the Lord, but we are also to use commonsense and practical judgment. As Jesus told His disciples to buy a sword, so we need to follow suit. I do not believe we need to literally be buying swords and wearing guns like the old west. But we do need to protect the people under our care.

A case in point, several years ago I was doing some intervention counseling with a couple. The husband was severely beating his wife. So I put her into a battered women’s shelter. He then came to me very violently, threatened my life to disclose her location. The police were immediately called, but there was nothing they could do. I heard that the husband found out her location. So I took some elders with me to the women’s shelter to protect the wife. She got scared and left the shelter and went home. The husband was in the process of literally killing her, when we showed up, the police were called and we had to wrestle him to the ground. He was a very big man. And I had to knock him out in order to subdue him. It was one of those situations that we may never have to deal with, but they do accrue. By the way it took the police over two hours to show up, as we sat on him; life in the inner city of America.

“He said to them, But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one.” (Luke 22:36)

We need to realize we have an enemy who is nearly eternal, and fully desires to interfere, steal and destroy us. So we are called to wage war on Satan and his onerous cohorts. We can do this by prayer and various techniques found in spiritual warfare resources available in most denominational resources centers and Christian bookstores.

“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.” (James 4:7-8a)

We need to battle our sinful nature and the evil desires that come up from that nature. If we put no effort in self-discipline, then we will not last long in tough situations or grow to be fully used by our Lord.

“Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” (Romans 8:12-14)

Conflict is almost always necessary when the forces of darkness encroach upon the Christian Life. It is necessary to stand up for the rights of the unborn. It is necessary to fight for morals and values in our schools and government. It is necessary to not yield to Satan and our evil desires. For if we do not take a stand, our fall will be close at hand.

Preventing Conflict

Most of the conflict we experience in life comes from our selfish desires that insist on our own way over and against others. So we are posed to pounce on each other to get our way, while our Lord looks sadly on our pettiness and calls us to walk above, but do we listen? Desiring something is not necessarily wrong, but when we do not trust our Lord for it, then we have a problem. The Bible calls us to come before a Holy God by what Christ has done and resulting with a fountain of “Living Water” that it is our Lord. We are to rely on Him and not our inclinations. When we do, conflict is sure to erupt. When we walk in faith and realize our position before our Lord Jesus Christ, then we should bypass our self-will and yield to His.

“My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” (Jeremiah 2:13)

We need to realize how evil we are when we fight with each other because of our personal agendas and desires! It is God alone who provides us the “Living Waters.” So why do we persist in digging our own wells only to bring up dirt that is useless and worthless?

“Jesus answered her, If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” (John 4:10)

We can earn nothing on our own, and centrally our salvation is a gift from God, so our behaviors with each other must reflect this undeserved gift that we received free. The free does not mean to engage in war with each other, but pursue peace and love.

So what do we do? How can we restrain our desire to manipulate and control, to be aggressors instead of repairs of relationships? Simply by realizing whom we are before a Holy God and our undeserving gift! Primary conflict is in ourselves, so we need to control the sin that encroaches us, as Cain failed to do. We must discern between

what we desire and what is provided to us. We need to discern between our goals and what the will of the Lord is. We need to discern between what we want and what God wants! Then the conflicts and diseases of distraction that leads to destruction will cease! Our Lord already won the ultimate conflict of good vs. evil, of rebellion vs. sovereignty.

Remember that love covers a multitude of sins, so what shall we do? LOVE. The love that Christ had for us when we did not deserve it, and the response of the love we should have for each other. Jesus let go of His place with the Father. Something that we could not conceive, the precious position He gave up for a mission to redeem us. If we pursued the model that Christ laid before us, how much conflict would we have? Practically none! How could we fight with each other when we are each focused on our Lord and each other's interests? How can we carry on conflicts with each other when we take a deep introspective look into our desires and compare them to the Scriptures? Our focus must not be in our self-awareness, but what Christ has done as a template in our behaviors and actions! By being a true example of our Lord will neuter most conflicts. Intrapersonal conflict will be dissolved because our self-desires will be focused on our Lord, so there will be no conflict with our self-desires. Interpersonal conflict will cease because we will be a community of believers on the same page, especially because we have each other's interests in mind and are willing to follow the Biblical precepts to solving conflict. So what we are left with is substantive conflicts between beliefs. When we are a community of believers with a high view of the Scriptures, then we will eliminate most of them. So the conflicts will be between believers and aberrant and cult groups, and the minor theological distinctions can be an 'agree to disagree' venue.

Have a Contract with the Congregation

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:29-32)

Most people and church leaders do not like to confront and I'm definitely one of them, but it is a necessity for a healthy church. The biggest reason why people do not like to confront is fear. Fear of the consequences that it will blow up in our face, Fear of losing the relationship, fear of being misunderstood and what our motives are, fear of hurting their feelings, and fear of being the “bad cop.” So why are you afraid? When we have a plan that is endorsed by the leadership and then it is communicated to the congregation, then the fear shall fall. Our fears will turn to the love of the duty. We still may not like it, but it is a chore that can be done without the fear and intimidation as it is associated with.

One of the best ways to prevent conflict is to have a contract with the congregation. All you need to do is draw up a form that everyone agrees to at

membership and signs. Keep it simple and straight forward, laying out the responsibility to be a follower of Jesus Christ and to model His character, so gossip, slander will not be tolerated. Then describe the conflict resolution process and the Scriptures behind it. Some congregations have their vision on it too, although this should only be done if the vision is Scripture based, and not personality driven. Learning to control conflict is a key aspect of leadership. Having a process to deal with conflict is key to a healthy church. This will eliminate most, if not all, conflict as long as the church leaders are following it too.

The next step in preventing conflict is to create a church environment that fosters encouragement and growth. This will mute most grounds that start conflict. The pastor should be open (to a degree) to their failures and the congregation should be accepting, then the spirit of humbleness will overtake pride, the main instigator of conflict. Being open about our failures will encourage others to do so, so when someone is going through a tough time, they will feel secure in the knowledge they are not alone. This is a delicate process, because human pride and our sinful nature will take a person's openness as a weakness and a sign to attack. Like a predator devouring a wounded animal. Christians have the habit of shooting their wounded. So we need to take this in baby steps, and be discerning on how and what you do share. I have seen too many good pastors be torn down by ravenous congregations, because they sensed blood in the water, and not the hope of Christ.

We need to communicate those attitudes of love and care to the people God has entrusted to us. So we make disciples of Christ and not sharks looking for a meal. We can do this by giving praise and encouragement whenever possible, both publicly and privately. Encouragement goes to those who we feel are biting our hand, the people who do not show love themselves and may seem undecieving, but in God's eyes so are we! We are to give encouragement to people of and with different opinions and perspectives, at the same time keeping them on the Biblical track (Remember the Priesthood of all Believers!). We must be encouragers to all the people, not just those who we like, and it cannot be phony. It must be real in our hearts, if not, you are in the wrong business! So get right with your relationship with Christ first, and if you cannot, then seek help. The church does not need phonies, people will see right through you and your effectiveness will be more negative for the kingdom of God than positive.

We need to be on the lookout for bad attitudes and get to the people as soon as possible with a loving arm of encouragement. By putting out the fires as they begin to smoke will cease the coming war in its tracks. A good leader is diligent and watchful! It is a necessary aspect of leadership to expose the political games people do! We must go to those people, listen to them and seek to find an answer before they arm for war. "How can we come to a understanding and solution rather than dividing...?" Political coalitions, variant agendas, power struggles and prejudices must be in the gun sites of the leadership! And then we can have a healthy church, free of conflict, that is modeling the purpose that Christ has set for us. Then the witness is what Christ has done and not the misguided actions of Christians. Maybe then the Great Commission will be filled!

Here is an example of a “contract with the congregation:”

"Having received Christ as my Lord and Savior and been baptized, and being in agreement with the Vineyard's statements, strategy and structure, I now feel led by the Holy Spirit to unite myself with the Vineyard Church family. In doing so, I commit myself to God and to the other members to do the following:

I will protect the UNITY of my church
... by acting in love toward other members
... by refusing to gossip
... by following the leaders

"So let us concentrate on the things which make for harmony, and on the growth of our fellowship together."
Romans 15:29

"Live in complete harmony with each other - each with the attitude of Christ toward each other." Romans 15:5

"Have a sincere love for your fellow believers, love one another earnestly with all your hearts." I Peter 1:22

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs" Ephesians 4:29

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account . . . Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be no advantage to you." Hebrews 13:17

(From Vineyard Christian Fellowship of San Luis Obispo, Ca)

Chapter XIII The Praying Church

“The Key to God’s Door”

“Prayer can do anything that God can do, as God can do anything, prayer is omnipotent.” (R.A. Torrey, “The Power of Prayer”)

Many Christian leaders, possibly stating with Augustine, said that prayer is the occupation of the soul. For the mature Christian, their heartbeat is to serve the Lord and, in serving, we are communicating and, in communicating, we are praying. The occupation of our soul is our communication lines with our Holy God. The occupation of our soul is our prayer life with Christ, one of the primary purposes of our existence.

When prayer is mentioned at most churches, dull, dry, and boring images come to mind. Most Christians flat out do not want to pray and even get offended when they feel they have to spend what they perceive as too much time in prayer, usually over 10 minutes. Yet the Bible is filled with examples of prayer gatherings, which we called to participate with. This is called “corporate prayer,” which means praying together as a community of believers. However, this does not necessarily mean praying for big business. What it does mean is a way to express oneness and unity. Yet we do not like to do it! We may spend time with our individual prayer lives but not together or when we do, it turns into gossip and ridicule as I discussed in Chapter III.

God calls us to seek His presence, as a body of believers with one mind and voice, so why don’t we? And if we do get together, it is all about us and our individual needs and desires, which is good as long as we include others and go beyond our own backyard. So we need to find the excitement of communing with our Lord and doing it with each other. We are to focus on the Lord and not ourselves.

When we desire to have a church that is after God’s purpose then prayer will be at the heart and core of it. The church cannot function without prayer. To have a church that does not pray is like having a telephone operator who refuses to use the phone or the computer programmer not using a computer in their occupations. Sounds like foolishness? Well a lot of churches do not pray, in fact if you carefully inspect churches as I have over the years, you will be shocked on how little prayer actually goes on, or that prayer is wispy and scarce.

Unfortunately today a lot of churches have altogether neglected prayer in their weekly schedule. All you have to do is look in a worship folder or bulletin and see what is listed in for mid-week activities, and unfortunately you will not see much listed in the way of prayer and spiritual growth. Some churches may have small group activities, or even Bible studies, which is well and good, but what about prayer? In years past most churches had some form of a mid week prayer meeting. People in the church would gather for the sole reason to pray. There may have been a devotion or some teaching, but the bulk of the time was in prayer.

I was an intern in a very large church in southern California during my seminary days. I was responsible for starting a young adult group, but because of a lack of facilities we could only meet early in the morning. Since Sunday was a time to sleep in for most, we did not have very many people attending. The elders asked me to cancel the class, because they saw no fruit in it. But one young lady was determined not to let it go. She convinced the elders and I to change it from a Sunday school class into a prayer group. They agreed, and so we did. For six months we had met just to pray. I would lead a short devotion or teaching, then had a discussion about prayer needs and then prayer within the larger group, which was around 20 people or so. We then would break into small groups for at least 20 minutes to pray. I saw some amazing things in that group. I did not see miraculous healings, but what I saw was even more amazing, people started to become more mature and focused on the Lord. Their attitudes changed and then they stated to reach their friends. These people went from only being focused upon themselves and their career to being surrendered to Christ. Some even left their careers to become missionaries and teachers. One person was a top 'rocket scientist' for NASA and left that career for a couple of years to teach English in Russia. Others went to China and even a closed Middle Eastern country where being a missionary is a sure death sentence. One person was a top LA disk jockey, he left that profession to become a marriage and family counselor. He reasoned that he could help more people that way. Prayer changed these people from being self focused to being God focused.

And there was another person who did not attend our prayer meetings, because he was afraid of being convicted. He did not want to leave his career or lifestyle. Though there was nothing wrong with it, he was a good Christian, but he was comfortable where he was at in life. And after several years he started to attend and grow more and then he left his job and went to a two year missions trip to teach in Russia. Now God will not send you anywhere you are not gifted and called to do. This young man was afraid of leaving his comfort zone. We must allow God to lead us where we are best suited. Perhaps the call is to go overseas, but more often than not, it is to stay where we are already at and be better there for Him.

After 6 months from starting the prayer group we stated to explode with people. We had over a hundred people attending very early in the morning. So we moved the prayer meeting to the evening and in the early morning we started a Sunday school class, with worship, teaching and prayer. Over 15 years later this group is still going strong. It is sad to think that I had to be convinced from a young woman something I and the elders should have instinctively done and supported.

Churches used to have prayer during the service, in which the pastor would lead the congregation in prayer. This used to be called the 'pastoral prayer' where the pastor would pray for the needs of the world, the nation, the community, and the church. Where praise and thanksgiving was offered up that led the congregation from corporate prayer in the church to being prayer warriors in their individual lives. Then the people in the church would emulate and put into practice fulfilling to the best of their abilities the needs of the nation to the people in their church. Thanksgiving, praise, and

glorifying Christ our Lord where apart of the Christian, because prayer was the focus in their lives.

As I have visited countless churches across the country and world over the years as a consultant, it seems through my observations that churches are adding more worship time and taking away prayer from their services. They forgot that prayer is the highest and purest form of worship that we can do. Celebrating our Lord through music is very important, but prayer is the essential act of worship. It is like putting on a light sweater on a cold day, when we should have put on a coat. The sweater may look better, so we replace the 'real' need for the looks good 'felt' need. Missing the very point of keeping warm when it is cold. We are missing the point of worship when we cancel or reduce prayer. We are making a sandwich with great home baked bread and all of the condiments but with no lunch meat. Leaving prayer out of the church service is leaving out the meat.

These very same churches also have eliminated any prayer meetings during the week, saying people will not show up. And those churches that do have weekly prayer meetings, their attendance is typically only a fraction of the churches total congregation. Somehow through the years the busyness of life has interrupted the prayer life of the church. Today it seems we no longer have the focus that prayer is a priority. We may think it is and even say it is, it may be in our mission statements; but, is it our practice, is it our passion? Prayer has left the building literally in the church.

The few times that a church may pray, the passion and intensity that once was is missing. Prayer has become just an obligation, and something we must get through. Prayer is not something we do because He first loves us. Nor is prayer something we do because we desire to change, to grow in Him, to learn to be our best for His glory. Our lives now are just too complicated and important, and what little time we do have is relegated to our pleasures, or the TV and the bed.

Churches tend to spend little time if any in prayer at their committee and planning meetings. Most elder meeting have only a minute or two devoted to a quick wimpy prayer. At one church I was on staff with, I took it upon myself to have at least 15 minuets of prayer before the meeting, I really wanted to do more. The elders said this was wasting time, and to cut it down to 1 minute like everyone else. (This was the church that was a disease to its community.) When we throw out prayer from our planning meetings, we are throwing out God. We are in fact saying 'I do not need God to guide me.' Can we be anymore arrogant? But what I tried to explain to those elders is that our meetings actually ran more smoother and went a lost faster; because we were more at one mind and purpose. They just did not get it, to them having God at church was a waist of time.

Just take a look at Acts and see how much prayer was a part of the early church. Prayer is addressed more often than any other activity or subject. For example in chapter 1 they prayed for the choice of a new apostle. In chapter 4 and chapter 12 Acts speaks about the 'church gathering with their concern for the imprisoned apostles', they

prayed. In chapter 14 when it came time to appoint new leaders, they prayed. In chapter 13, for the calling of Paul and Barnabas, they prayed. When you look down at the daily planner of the early church, what they established as a priority was prayer. What they did before anything was prayer.

Maybe look into your own family history if you are a multigenerational Christian, how much was prayer apart of you parents or grand parents life. How does their time in prayer compare to yours and your church? Do you realize how and why prayer was so important to them? So is it important to you? If your church were to schedule a prayer meeting and a social, what would bring out the most people? Does your daily schedule reflect the priority of prayer? Does the desire of your heart cry out for intimacy with our Savior? Does your church have at its core values and practice prayer? If not what is hindering you?

Perhaps why prayer is disappearing from the church weekly schedule is that we do not want to be convicted. At one time I did not, and one time those in that LA church did not, yet we committed ourselves to prayer and it changed us. And perhaps through us it has changed others too. We must get beyond our fears and embrace what God has given us.

Perhaps we are too used to shrugging off responsibilities. You may ignore healthy eating, but eventually it will catch up with you. So why is it that prayer meetings are the lowest attended event of the week, that is if your church does have a prayer meeting? Why is there so little prayer in the Christians personal life? Why is there so little corporate prayer in our services? Well, because it is not a priority. And when it's not a priority, when it's not a part of our practicing core values, then our church will fail. Because the power is not realized and sized, its power is no longer desired. And when we do not desire prayer, then we do not desire Christ in our mist, then we do not desire Christ in His church, or in our lives.

If people do not want to come to the prayer meeting we have to ask why. How can we improve them? Are the leaders attending? Does the pastor make it a priority? Do we keep at it even when there is just one person? If not, we have a problem. We cannot just eliminate them by the vote of the feet leaving the scene. We have to be obedient to the precepts of Scripture, even when the body vote is not corresponding. We are in service to Him, not to popular opinion and expectations.

I had the displeasure of working with a senior pastor who flatly refused to pray. We did not pray in staff meetings or committee meetings and he did not even pray personally. He said it was a waist of time. I asked him why he felt that way and he said if God is all knowing why do I need to tell Him anything! He totally missed the point of prayer. What if a parent who knows what the kids will want and say, but flatly refuses to engage in any dialog with them. Creating a household that the children are not to speak, nor are the parents to communicate with them. Would they be good parents, would their children grow up healthy and well adjusted, ready for life? Even though the parents have already experienced childhood themselves, even though they already know what

will be communicated, they will precede with communication. Because communication builds up the relationship between the parents and children, and it helps the children get ready for life and their future interpersonal relationships.

Our relationship with Christ is the focus, not God's omniscience. Just as a parent who knows what their young child will say, but will listen to them in a loving way anyway, it is being a loving parent. We have a loving God who desires to communicate to us and with us. Prayer is in the business of building and forming our relationship with Christ. Pray is not a letter to Santa Clause. Yes God is omnipotent and omniscient, which He is all knowing and all-powerful, but he wants to talk and hear from us and this is done through prayer.

So our call is to proclaim the Gospel and further His Kingdom and the primary work of it is prayer. Prayer will enable us to be transformed to do the task that we cannot possibly do on our own or collectively as a church. We do not have the strength, knowledge, or ability to do squat for our Lord, but through prayer we can do all things that He is willing for us to do, beyond our imagination!

Prayer is the key to start the power engine of God that enables us to do His work, the key that empowers us with His presence to proceed in His will and His plan. So what we are doing is activating God's power for our lives and ministry that we do not have by ourselves. God listens to our prayers and acts His will through them. Theologians will debate on the intricacies of what that means. We know through Scripture that God is eternal and never changing, thus He does not change His mind, yet through prayer it seems that He does. Just as Abraham prayed to God to change his mind over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18). Abraham prayed the number down of who is righteous not so much to save the cities, but his nephew. God did not change His mind, but Abraham grew in his knowledge and relationship with God through that process and prayer. We too grow in the process of prayer. That senior pastor who refused to pray and made a campaign in that church for meetings not to include more than a few minutes of prayer because it was a waste of time is not in the ministry or even attending a church. He chose to be lost and disillusioned after he was forced out of his church because of gross theological errors and an inability to pastor effectively. He was a good and knowledgeable person, and taught in a local seminary, but had not a clue what the Christian experience was about. Thus he was unable to pastor people because he was unable to grow himself.

Do we want to be people like that ex-pastor? Do we want churches that are just social clubs and do nothing but exist to themselves? Then the answer is to keep prayer to a minimum, and allow it to be an obligation but not a passion, and you will succeed in your endeavor. And that endeavor is ours and ours alone, because God is pushed out of the equation and out of our lives!

Prayer is the instrument and means that God has chosen to communicate and direct His will in our lives. Prayer must be a priority in the church, in the leaders, and in the individual Christians daily planner. Yes God will accomplish His means without our

prayers and devotion, but where does that leave us? Bankrupt and useless! How can we be the people of God without getting direction to do the work of our God? We cannot! God is acting through our prayers with Him and with each other. God works through us, we are His tools, we are the plungers and He is the plumber, and the world is a leaking toilet. Our plumber chooses us! God can choose whatever tool He wishes, He does not need to use us, but He chooses too. This is the incredible beauty of our relationship with Christ.

Our God is the Creator and Director of the Universe. Astronomers tell us we have 12×12 to the 12th power stars in this galaxy (more hamburgers than McDonalds, and more grains of sand than the biggest beach) and at least that number of galaxies in the universe. Then there is the question of how many dimensions/parallel universes are there. Yet God is there through it all loving us and choosing to use us. What an honor! So do we step up to the plate and communicate?

We have a God who elected to choose us and selected us for a purpose, and one of the primary calls is for us to be in touch with our Creator and loving Lord. His power flowing through the universe is available for us to use if we choose to trust and obey, according to His will. Can you imagine the awesome nature of our Lord? Can you fathom the power that is at our hands? Can you see the potential you have and the plan that God has for you? Or are you too busy watching TV and no time to tap into the power at hand, the power that goes beyond any human means or adventure? We can do beyond what we are capable of as God is working through us. We are capable of much more than you can possibly imagine when we are people surrendered through prayer, through what He allows according to His purpose. So do you get it? Are you ready to have a church transformed to do what a church is actually for, what the foundation was poured for, and poured out for?

Prayer is the Key to God's Door

The key to a successful ministry and church is prayer. There is no way around it. John tells us,

"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." (John 14:12-14)

The Key to a healthy Church is prayer. We may not walk on water, but Jesus' declaration that we will do greater is a call to the number and territory that we will cover in His name. Jesus may not give me that Viper sports car I want, but will empower me to do His will, which is greater than anything I could ever ask. God gives us an incredible promise, that whatever we ask... To ask God is His will, and the main reason for our existence, to be in relation to the God of the universe. This is His primary call for us and when we refuse or make light of it, we cut our self off from the power and God's desire for us. You see God knows us and our need better than we can ever know, and

then still asks us to be in Him, as John 15 states. To be conformed to His likeness as in Romans 8, is for us to grow. We need to be in tune to Him. For us to serve we need to be in Him and to be in Him is to be in Prayer. So for us to receive His blessings, to be fully used by Him, and to receive His full load, we need to be in prayer as individuals and collectively as a body of believers.

The key is our realization of who Christ is and the power He gives us at our disposal for His purpose. Just as the Disciples were told firsthand by our Lord that they would be able to ask anything in His name, then they lived it and experienced it. They did not realize they could do the things they saw their master do, yet they did. Do we realize what we can do and do we attempt it? Or do we shriek at the chance? And His choice is to use and work through us. And then what is our choice? The ministry that our Lord had started on this earth continues through us, and through prayer we receive His direction and power to accomplish it.

To make a simple slogan, “we are to perceive before we receive,” that is we are to engage in prayer before we can accomplish the task. And when we are in prayer, we come into a metamorphosis transforming us from the very nature of who we are. Because the first thing that changes for the person praying, is the person praying. And when we are changed that means our evil self-desire nature turns around to be a heart after others other than ourselves. So we gain the perspective of our Lord and the heart for His people, then the passion to do His will. Then we will receive less opposition from our enemy, the prince of darkness, because He that is in us is greater than he in the world. Prayer then is also our shield to protect and defend us from attack and curses. No amount of study and work we can ever do will match the work of our Lord that will flow through us in prayer!

“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.” (Romans 8:5)

Satan will laugh at our efforts and strength, but will tremble at our prayers because we can accomplish more when we pray than anything we can ever do on our own! All of us Christians in the world today, yesterday and tomorrow will be under satanic attack. Scripture calls to us to, “*Carry each other’s burdens*” (Galatians 6:2), and we do that in person and in prayer. This is the shield that protects us from the attack of our enemy and the onslaught of problems we face in our fallen world. So when we lack the necessary prayer life, we open ourselves up to the travesties of life without the comfort of the one who protects!

“Every work of God can be traced to some kneeling form. Tarry at a promise, and God will meet you there.” (D.L. Moody)

The critical aspect of prayer is what it does to the person who prays, it changes them! It hones in our relationship to God, to ourselves, and to each other as a body of believers. Every member in the Body of Christ has direct communication to the Lord and Creator of the Universe. Every member of the body of Christ has the opportunity and

obligation to communicate to our Lord. Every member of the body of Christ should count it as a passionate privilege to do so and not a dreaded time consuming chore. God through His grace provided this opportunity and privilege for us. Just picture the opportunity that everyone in your church is praying individually and collectively together. Each person through their relationship with Christ is growing, discipling and being disciplined, all coming together synergistically, what power there would be!

Just think back what a privilege it was of having a phone a hundred years ago. Very few people had a phone. In fact, sometimes there was only one phone for a whole town even up until the 1920s. Just think about the mass communication at our disposal today from cell phones and pagers to e-mail and videoconference calling. Just think about all the people they could talk to and the ability to get things done sooner and more efficiently if the people a hundred years ago had such communication at their disposal. Just think today of having your phone privileges taken away, how would you get things done and communicate to others? It would be very difficult and time consuming indeed! The world may come to a crashing halt. God's Word encourages us to bring our needs to Him, to be in relation to Him and to each other all through the marvelous avenues of prayer.

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 7:7-12)

God is basically telling us to keep asking, to keep seeking, and to keep knocking at His door! This passage dovetails and expands the passage a few verses back, *“But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”* It is our Lord's call and desire for us to be in a right relationship with Him. Our highest priority in life is our relationship to God, not our careers, our cars, our houses, our business, our abilities, our money or anything else gets in the way period. There is nothing more important out there in the big universe, than our relationship to the One who created it!

Our relationship in Christ is built upon how we view our Lord's sovereignty. We are to be fully aware and active in our thinking and actions that we are before a holy God who is righteous and pure. And what He did to pay for our sins that we received as a gift. And our realization of who God is verses who we are, this should give us a zest and passion to pursue His righteousness and be filled with His Spirit. So the result is we are to seek Christ and what is done through us is because of Him, and not us. We can never see our service as to be a testimony to our abilities and honor, God just will not bless it! We will receive no reward from our boasting and pride.

Prayer changes us, it removes pride and removes our self-desires from clogging the pipeline of communication with Christ. The more we pray, the more times the 'pig' goes through to clean us out of sin and pride. (A pig is what plumbers call a device that cleans pipes as used in the oil industry, because it squeals like a pig when in use, and we as humans spend a lot of time squealing!)

Prayer brings us before His holiness. Our Lord is not deaf or forgetful but loving and guiding. Prayer brings our mind into His and shapes and makes us the person we can be for His purpose, our best interests, and care. God must be in the highest thoughts of our mind and highest place in our life. The measure of who we are as God's children is the direct amount of time we are before Him! The close of this passage is how we relate our prayer to others, how it changes us so we can bring changes to others. The "Golden Rule" as clearly laid out is our response from our prayer life. God is willing to give greatly, are we?

Hebrews tells us to come boldly before Him, *"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."* (Hebrews 4:16)

Never forget the awesome privilege we have to go before our Lord in our sinful depravity. We are totally undeserving of His listening year, yet we have it anyway! We must realize our need and then see the need in others. When we are flying in an airliner the flight attendant will tell us to first place the emergency O² mask on ourselves, then we can help others around us. If not, we will be too weak from O² starvation to help others, just as it is in spirituality. We cannot serve God unless we are growing in God! When we struggle, we go before His presence. When we hurt, we can go to Him. When we are tempted, we...well do you get it? And if you do, you are light years before the average mundane Christian who simply warms the pew, but not the heart of our Lord. When we realize His full love and forgiveness offered to us, we are released from our burdens and can be thankful for who we are in our Lord. This will release us to be the people who we ought to be.

The mundane Christian walk is a journey of hang-ups and fears that are harbored in us. We are consumed in our own being and pride, but our call is to venture out of ourselves and take possession to what Christ had paid for us. Our burdens are built up and unable to be released because true forgiveness is not seen as a reality, thus we do not see others as Christ sees them. The result is we spread those diseases instead of spreading ourselves before our Lord.

The Specific Acts of Prayer that Strengthens the Church

Why is it so hard for Christians to pray? This is a major problem and obstacle that hinders us from being the people we were called to be. The lack of prayer is possibly the biggest reason why our churches are failing. Because without prayer, we will quickly substitute our devotion to God with devotion to ourselves which leads to the diseases and various problems in the church as in the first few chapters.

The Bible makes it clear what is required of us and what happens when we fall away from our call, just read the lives of the Old Testament characters, how they failed and how they succeeded. The Bible makes it clear that the answers to all of our struggles and frustrations in life are prayer. The Bible calls us to,

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matthew 6:33-34)

We are to acknowledge whom God is by responding to His call to commune. For the Christian to be in right relationship to Christ and to each other, we must be in prayer! We are to SEEK FIRST! Not struggle first, not to frustrate ourselves first, not to go spinning our wheels first, not seek a counselor first, not run to your pastor first, not run to our friends first, not weep with our family first, not to ask the talk show host first, not to flip a coin first, and not to ask the cat first. We are to SEEK HIM FIRST! Then we can ask a friend or pastor or counselor or...and still be in prayer. Our highest priority in the church should be and must be prayer. If it is not the highest priority, then what are you doing and what are you about because you are not about the Lord's business, but your own.

The church has fallen apart. Our divorce rate is about the same as the national norm, so are all of the other sociological problems our society faces. We struggle with fear, loneliness, failure, stress, depression, worldliness, and the list goes on. So where is prayer in all that? Prayer is real and factual and for us today and for us now. Yet the problems in the church get worse and worse, and prayer gets less and less. So when will we wake up to the correlation? We must be turning to our Lord and Creator and not to the self-help section of the bookstore. Seek first means just that, start off your day, problem, issue, frustration and joy in...PRAYER!

Here is just a scratch in the surface of what the church needs to be doing in prayer. This is the call of Scripture that beckons for us to reform, grow up, and seize our place and responsibility.

Not Praying is Sin

“For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own. As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will be swept away.” (1 Samuel 12:22-25)

Repentance is a response to prayer, and commitment is the result of prayer that changes and molds us further to be used by our Lord. Our responsibility as a

community of believers is to keep each other in prayer. Just as it was Samuel's duty as Israel's High Priest, so it is for us as the priesthood of all believers under Christ.

To the human mind, we cannot fathom why our Lord elected us for salvation, but He did. There is no reasoning or worthiness that could ever be considered by our sinful nature, yet He did by His immutable love for us. Our Lord even gives us duties. We should see the incredible honor in them and rejoice in our intercession to others. It is a privilege and not a mere duty or chore! Prayer is a response. And when we do not pray, we are not responding to our Lord and Creator!

We are to Glorify our Lord

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” (Matthew 7:7-8)

“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.” (John 14:13)

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him.” (I John 5:13-15)

A lot of heresy preachers use these verses out of their context to proclaim that God is a divine bellhop who delivers to us our whims and desires. Nothing could be further from the truth! There is no guarantee that God will give us anything and we certainly do not deserve anything. Out of His grace will come splendors and treasures for us in His time, and perhaps even in this life, but certainly in the life to come.

But our chief purpose in life is to Give Christ the glory and this is what these passages are all about! Again, it is not about us, it is about Him! To pray in Christ's name is to identify ourselves in His purpose and will, and not ours. The key component that is overlooked for dramatic effect and selfish inclinations is, *“according to his will.”* It must not be very convenient for some I guess, and when the church does not yield to this strong premise, we will fail to our own schemes. We may take pleasure in false emotional and sociological phenomena, but to deny the Glory to Christ is a very dangerous move that will turn and bite us hard later.

We should ask ourselves, what enchants me? What is my pleasure? Where is my treasure, where is my gain? These questions will show our character and where we receive our drive and thinking from. These are the guidelines that motivate our designs and decisions and how we treat each other and our Lord. This is also how collectively, we as a body of believers, will treat each other and our neighbors.

The prayer we have to the Father does not fall on deaf ears. We are asking our Father and not a tyrant. We are to seek His wisdom, apply it to ourselves, and then to others. Then the blessing will abound and we can be the church we should be.

The Joy in Us May Become Confident and Complete

“In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.” (John 16:23-24)

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16)

The church needs to learn to ask. Too many churches go it alone, as do too many Christians. When we realize the prevalence we can have in Christ, that Christ is in control and supreme, and is to be the predominate aspect to our every waking thought, then we will have a healthy church filled with prayer. Then we will receive our full blessing and be the church that He intended.

In this passage, we have two different types of asking. The first is to inquire as in asking a question, rather than asking for something in return. The second “ask” is referred to as a question. Jesus was telling His disciples they were being too timid with their prayers! Jesus was beyond their human existence, who was not just pointing to God, but was God. Thus they needed to learn who Christ was and is and to make their prayers reflect whom they are addressing. And that was to be with passion, conviction and power.

The result for the disciples and us are that our prayers must not be childish uttering, because we must realize the supremacy and nature of prayer and to the One we prayer to. So the individual Christian and the church should be in committed prayer. Prayer that goes way beyond blind repetitions and trivial offerings but leads us into the mysteries and prevalence of our Lord, which will grow the church closer and tighter to Christ and will be more open and caring to those around us. This we do with boldness and confidence without any selfish ambitions. Coming before our Lord this way was a privilege to the high priest only and now is available to the believer who walks the way of our Lord.

Specific and Impacting Others

“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. Quick, get up! he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.” (Acts 12:5-7)

When you order your dinner at a restaurant, do you ask the waiter for some food and liquid? Then why do we Christians pray that way? We need to be specific with our prayers. This hones us to be in touch longer and with more depth and character. Because our constant problems and issues we face in life will be buffeted by specific and constant prayer. Can you imagine the reaction of a guest at Mary's (the mother of John) house who might have said, "what good will prayer do?" Have you said such a statement? We all do at some point, but prayer is the lifeblood of the Christian and the tool that brings us in the presence of our Lord to empower us. And the empowering will deliver us, and the deliverance is complete.

It was James' death that awoke the early church for the need to be fervently and specifically in prayer. So what needs to happen awake you and your church? Hopefully it will not be tragedy that awakens the churches, but the realization of our responsibility of who we are. If you want to experience surprise, then see our Lord answer our prayers and turn your mundane walk into a high-speed pursuit.

To Have Peace

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7; 19)

Christians in prayer should not be walking around constantly experiencing stress and anxiety. The Christian is to realize we are to seek our Lord in all things, that we are to first PRAY before, during, and in the end! The Christian is not to be in prayer only at a crisis or as a last resort when all else fails.

The Christian who is not in prayer will have no one to trust and rely on, thus will be consumed with restlessness and frustration. We are flat out commanded not to worry both by Christ, in the Sermon on the Mount, and here by Paul. We are to pray about everything and worry about nothing. Then our focus will be on Christ and not just our imminent needs. Prayer is the power that must drive us, not worry and stress. Paul's statement "*about anything, but in everything*" is all-inclusive, that is all, no restrictions, so there are no excuses or loopholes to His promises. So we are to apply it with confidence that His promise is fact for our very lives right now!

God is not always telling us to be careful, but is always telling us to be prayerful. Spurgeon said "*Prayer is the cure for care,*" so when we are in prayer, we will care. Care for ourselves so to strive to fulfill our obligation as Christians and care for others so that the obligation gets completed. God is the giver, Jesus is the channel, and prayer is the supply that fulfills our needs and deepest desires. The trivialities of life will create false desires that may cloud us from our Lord. This only results in worry, stress, and dysfunction, which confuse and deceive us from our true purpose. Just ask yourself,

what will your worldly desires lead to? In the grand plan of the universe, what will be the result? Peace is the result of fervent prayer, which rids us of our stress and anxiety.

We must trust our Lord to give us the true needs to fulfill our true desires, both spiritual and material. Then the bitterness and jealousy that fuels the stress and worry will cease, and our work in Christ will increase and so will the blessings. God is providing and we are receiving, not our “wants,” but our needs, not the luxury items we may desire, but His love and kindness we do not deserve and our real needs.

Being Thankful in all Life’s Circumstances

“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (I Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Prayer is the sandwich bread that holds the meat of joy. The sandwich of prayer has the condiments of being continual and devoted to our Savior. The duty and fruit of prayer is the joy that flows on to those around us. This joy is contagious, attractive, and points people to our Lord. It creates the atmosphere that makes a great church because the practice of love and care are being thrown out with contagious action and glee. The Christian who is attracting people is usually a person in prayer and people want to be around them, to catch what they caught. Prayer creates the contagious Christian and the warmth of being in the body of our Lord.

So regardless of our circumstances, we are to be filled with joy because of our prayer walk that is totally devoted and surrendered to our Lord. Then see the change in your life and the change in others around you. Christians have no business being bitter and jealous sourpusses!

To Draw Near

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:19-25)

This passage gives us an incredible promise and hope for our lives. We can approach God with boldness and confidence since He has covered our sins by the Person and Work of Christ. In prayer, we are entering God’s holy sanctuary! We must be aware of the phenomenal sacrifice our Lord paid on our behalf and the agony and cost He bore, so we could enter in God’s presence.

Draw near is that we can, we should, and we must do; Christ is our high priest who is loving and ever merciful to us, who opened the door for us to go in. And in so being, we have an open door policy to God's greatness and presence. So we are to go to Him with confidence and assurance of His promises to receive the help and answers we need. Our Lord's sacrifice paid for our entrance. He has literally paid our way to the greatest trip conceivable to commune with Him. It is an awesome privilege and a responsibility we need to take seriously. We have the privilege to enter the Holy of Holies where before only the high priest had access to once a year. So let us embrace Him and commune with Him with our time, confidence, and the surrendering of our will.

To Praise God

"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." (Hebrews 13:15-16)

Our offerings today are not about dragging our livestock or pets to be sacrificed. Jesus was our sacrifice. So then what do we bring? We bring ourselves. Our sacrifice today is what flows from our heart, to love and adore our Lord. So that we are so full of love for our Lord that it flows to those around us. Our praise as drawn from this text is a peace offering of thanksgiving. This means our Lord wants us to be devoted to Him with our whole being all the time.

There should be no circumstance we could ever face where praise does not flow from our lips. Our praise is to acknowledge Christ alone by faith alone, by His grace alone. There should be nothing from us but that faith. What we have to sacrifice is our person, ability, and availability to His purpose. When we first give ourselves, everything else will be easy because pride and hoarding will be eliminated as well as materiality. We can sacrifice our wallets and purses to His service. Time, talents, and treasures should flow willingly from ourselves to His service with joy and gladness.

The biggest praise is what flows from our lips. The thanksgiving from His saving grace should flow with passion and conviction. The primary testimony that we are effectively praising God is the result our praise has to our friends, family and neighbors. When we are in a healthy relationship of praise, the church reaps the benefits of health and vitality. This beckons to the world who our Lord is and what He does. This is the sacrifice of praise because it distracts away from our ego and self to His presence. True praise places the focus on our Lord and helps remove us from our sin and selfish nature.

God is Giving

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the

wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.” (James 1:5-7)

God is calling us to be wise and wisdom is relying and trusting in Him. Wisdom is the practical exercise and aspect of knowledge. God is actually telling us He will help us if we ask! Prayer will seek out the wisdom and apply it to your life so it infects others through you. When we are living a life of prayer, we are in God’s will and pleasing Him. When we please God, we will receive His blessings and one of the chief blessings is to be in a healthy and spiritually growing church family that loves and cares for each other. We must realize that God alone is the true source of wisdom that will edify and grow us. Any other source will lead our fellow believers and us into a path of destruction, which leads to the practice of the “diseases.”

We are to let God’s wisdom be practical in our lives so we can handle life’s situations and circumstances. God will hear and answer our prayers. He will give us the pure, simple, ample, and overflowing gray matter (brains) to take us through life with gusto.

We must be on guard of the barriers that block us from receiving God’s wisdom. First, we are not to doubt but trust and obey. Being double minded is like being on a rudderless boat, in a storm, on the sea. It will toss you to nowhere but ruin. Second is unwavering faith. The result is we will turn our frustrations and problems over to the Lord. If we insist on solving it ourselves, we will be very disappointed on the outcome. Giving of ourselves as our own personal gift to ourselves cannot work. If you are too busy working it out yourself, then the opportunity for God to work in you will be lost. Let God give Himself to you, let him be God. Instability leads us nowhere, as the storm tossed sea. Let your faith be unwavering and your boat be guided by God’s rudder and power, then we can be that healthy church.

Confession is to be Forgiven

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.” (1 John 1:8-10)

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” (James 5:16)

Churches and individual Christians who refuse to confess their sins and even acknowledge them will turn from being a church to being a self-righteous club. A club where Christ is not the head because He has been out voted by the will of the people.

A church is an institution where the people are aware of their need for Christ and that they did not earn the church or accomplish anything to be there. Self-righteous clubs have the mentality that they have earned their place and have no need. They are

missing the Lordship of Christ and the reason for their being. God forgives us on that basis, when we admit to it and our need to be forgiven. Forgiveness is an essential aspect of prayer. Churches that leave it out and replace it with plays and performances are missing a key crucial aspect of worship before a holy God. We must seek His forgiveness before we grow and experience our Christian life.

Our sinful nature is our true character that God meets, there is no innocence before His holiness. Therefore our need for forgiveness must be self-evident and expressed by humble hearts and grateful responses to His action.

We are to manifest forgiveness to each other, so that it translates as mutual accountability to each other. Therefore we acknowledge and hold each other to our promises and to our relationships. We need not go to a Priest, but to a fellow Christian we can trust with authentic confession, and our confession and repentance claim our righteousness.

The free gift of forgiveness by His grace will nullify the self-righteous attitude that blocks our relationships. Forgiveness purifies us and molds us to be a Christian saved by grace, and to take our faith into action. And then by Christ's work, we are righteous before God, because of what He has done, and not of our self-will. Our righteousness is imputed by Christ's work, so we are not to be clubs of self accomplishments and self piety, but churches saved by grace in communion with Him and mirror to the world as an example of Christ's Lordship.

The prayer warrior is the person who is surrendered to the Lordship of Christ and has a full understanding of prayer and is practicing prayer; so that it effects them and then impacts the lives of others because of their devotion and prayer. These specific acts of prayer are crucial for the church to be its best for God's glory, to be our best to do the true purpose of the church rather than warming the pews with our rears! Christ needs us to be on fire with passion and conviction that flows from our prayer and study life; so that our churches are filled with Christ's children worshipping and caring for each other, their community, and world. Christ does not need gossip mongers and hypocrites who feel their self-righteousness is exempt from His call. Christ wants you and me to be in Him, so lets go out and prepare ourselves to be better servants for His people, that is all the people in the world!

The Muting of Prayer

These above aspects are testimonies that our Lord promises us and are overwhelming evidences of His love and care for us. These are overwhelming testimonies to His grace and provision He provided for us to seize, and I have just stated a mere scratch on the surface of the immense offerings and call of prayer for us to abide in. Just turn to a concordance under "Prayer" and you can see for yourself, the almost countless passages of blessings, warnings, and promises that He has for us. So why are we Christians just not getting it? With all these passages and powerful warnings, why do we ignore Him, why do we rely on ourselves when we can have God?

Why is it hard to get churches and Christians to pray? Why do people come up with all kinds of excuses to not spend adequate time in prayer at church meetings, at Bible studies, at small groups, or at any event that requires prayer (which is all events and experiences in life)?

What I tried to do is state three common self-objections that hinder people from their Creator and in turn replace Him with the self, which produces the rotten fruits and diseases to infect our church body and drive people away from the Cross.

Perverted Priorities

“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me? says the LORD Almighty. It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. But you ask, How have we shown contempt for your name? You place defiled food on my altar. But you ask, How have we defiled you? By saying that the LORD’s table is contemptible. When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you? says the LORD Almighty.” (Malachi 1:6-8)

What is the most important thing in your life? What is the center of your existence and what drives you? Where does your help come from and whom do you depend and rely on? If the answer is not in Christ, then the only alternative is other fallen beings and ourselves. Thus we have perverted our priorities from the reason we were created to our own reasons which drive ourselves further into isolation and oblivion. A priority is something that is very important to you, so that it takes over all other feelings and objectives. For the person in Christ, their priority must be Christ and everything else in life and experience comes after, even career, family, money, goals, desires, pleasures and the list goes on. If something is taking the priority of our Lord in prayer, then we are living in a perverted way and everything we do and attempt to accomplish will be perverted because our help is not resting on our Lord Jesus Christ!

We are not to bring old crippled farm animals before God, just as we are not to bring careless attitudes to His grace and redemption. Just as people of the Old Testament had to bring an offering, so must we with our priority as placing God first in our life over all else. Not our hurried time and short meaningless and thoughtless prayers, but for us to sacrifice our other priorities over to Him.

Every day, for most Christians, prayer becomes less and less important as various duties and obligations seem to take its place. And the time for prayer is replaced with the trivialities of life, and then we wonder why we are so busy and stressed all the time. In the days of Abraham and Lot, Abraham took the time to build altars to His God, which was to be in prayer and devotion. Lot decided to live in Sodom, thus lost every thing including his wife. All he had left were daughters who were perverted because of the evil cities influence, thus his decedents were a curse to the decedents of Abraham. God wants us to be blessed, not cursed, but we bring the curses down to ourselves as

we move God out of our priorities. Lot replaced God with the pleasures of life. Hebrews calls him righteous and he was, he remained righteous in the mist of evil, but it infected his family and blessing. When we replace our priority, we too will suffer consequences, because our hope and reliance is gone.

Does our Savior remain on the bottom of your priority list? And are you overwhelmed, stressed out, and see prayer as a luxury that time cannot afford? So do you see the problem?

I know an older lady who travels all around the country and Canada to get the latest prayer word and healing from various self-described prophets. Yet she will not pray herself. She says she just does not have the time. Think of the amount of time she must spend in travel and in planning her tips for prayer, yet spends little to none herself. How many of us spend so much time in the church, but bother little with our own prayer life? Even though the things that take up the time may be good and essential for us to do, if it takes away from our prayer life, it will lead us down the wrong path. We must spend time with family, career, and in service to our Lord in His church, but prayer comes first!

God does not want to be on the bottom of the list, He wants to be on top because He is God! If the refrigerator represents your priorities, then the best and freshest goes to our Lord, not the leftovers and throwaways! For us to receive His blessings, for us to be our best for His glory, for us to be in the purpose we were created for, we must be in prayer as a sacrifice and the top priority of our existence. If not, we are walking a perverted lie that ignores our deepest desire and purpose; so we go through life frustrated and confused as we warm the pew.

The disease of Apathy and Busyness

“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place.” (Revelation 2:4-5)

“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” (Revelation 3:15-16)

The Laodicea Church was on its way to a slow death by being “lukewarm.” They were doing nothing evil, or anything good. We are not to be cold to our Lord, but we are to show our passion and drive for His presence. By being indifferent and uncaring drives a wedge between God and us. Having no drive is like having a car with no gas, it will not run. Neither will we run. The Church in Laodicea, perhaps like its sister church in Ephesus, put away false doctrines, immoral sin, and compromise only to neglect the most important thing. They have done well with removing false doctrine, but what about their devotion to the Lord? The church in Ephesus and Laodicea lost their focus and

“You have forsaken your first love.” With the good works in Ephesus and the apathy in Laodicea, the love of God and the devotion and even prayer was pushed aside.

We too do the same in our churches. We get so busy in our programs, we neglect the One who the programs are for. Or we get so involved with other things or nothing at all and give up our care and passion. If you love the Lord your God with all of your soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30), do you show it? Or have you lost the care and focus, or are you too busy? If you are married and only speak to your spouse once a week, and then only very briefly, what kind of relationship will you have? It is the same with our God. Remember life is relationships, and relationships model God and our purpose for why we are and what we are to do. We may have started off our relationship with our Lord with zeal and passion but through time, we have drifted away. Get back together now, do not wait! Drop to your knees, repent, and reboot the love for your God and receive His love that never left you! Loving and being in relationships is not about just doing, and it is not about neglecting, it is about the time spent in quality and quantity. It is the daily communing and devotions before our holy God. And remember the sacrifice of praise, it will cost, and that first cost is only the time that we have to spare!

Missing the Sacrifice

“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” (James 4:3)

Most Christians think going to church and sitting in the pew is all it takes to be a Christian. They forget the sacrifice that was given for them and the response of a sacrifice of living for God, which is a blessing. Going to church and worshipping our Lord is essential, but if it is all you do, you will be missing the point of the Christian experience. We cannot be pleased with ourselves for our good deeds when we have learned to live a life without our King and Creator.

Too many Christians have gone through their church life without prayer and, thus, learned to live without it. So they think they do not need it. A lot of good things may replace it as we talked about before, but again if prayer is not first and continual, it will be lost and forgotten, and in turn we live a life with church and family, but no God.

Perhaps you may have been discouraged by what you considered unanswered prayer or the sufferings of life you feel you could have done without, so as a defense mechanism you shut yourself off from God and His redeeming work. You may think that you are not a person of faith like others that you see at church, so you decide to not bother with it. Maybe you think that prayer just does not work, so why bother with the time and commitment of it.

James is telling us we must have the right motives and that includes prayer. We cannot be at it for selfish motives or gain, it must be a surrender of our will and desires to His will and plan, so that we earnestly desire to be in prayer and passionately pursue

it, regardless of the outcome of the prayer or what others think. We cannot accuse God of neglecting us when we are the ones with the wrong motives. God is not our bellhop, He is our Lord! We must go before Him with pure motives and understanding of who He is and who we are. We must be seeking His will and not ours. His will is for us to seek His will, that is His will. Simple isn't it! We are to bow down to what He wants not what we want. This is the sacrifice that we give. It is not that prayer does not work, it is us Christians that are not working!

We must be willing to sacrifice our time and expectancy of His answer, that we are not to demand a response immediately because it is in His time not ours. God is the One who is faithful, we are the one who is not. So God is answering your prayer, it may not be what we want, but He answers. The question is are we listening. It may be a no, a yes, or a wait, but there is always an answer.

God first desires us to have faith and trust. A “no” response can be because He is developing reliance in us or it can be because it not what is best for us. Just as a child wants to play with daddy's razor but his daddy forbids it because they would hurt themselves, so our reliance is to have trust and patience. God has our best interests in mind, even though we may not think so at the time. God has hind site and we do not. God sees the whole picture and all possible contingencies and we do not, so to be wise we need to rely on Him. Just as you may wish you could change something that had happened years ago, such as a word said or an action done, even though at the time you thought you were doing right, God sees deep within us. So beware. If you are presently and persistently trying to go it alone, God just may allow you to do so. He just might let you have that razor. Giving up is not an answer for we are to give ourselves to our Redeemer and Savior.

The answer to our stress and frustration is prayer, not neglecting it and forgetting what it takes in the way of sacrifice, but whole hearted surrendered prayer. We cannot escape our Lord by neglecting Him, we just end up neglecting ourselves. Remember God is never neglecting us, we are neglecting Him. Let us not venture onto the prayerless path, so we remain babes who are too shallow to be used effectively for His great purpose, too weak to take on strong tasks, and too far off the right path to follow His way to glory and blessings. Do not let yourselves stray from His path. Stay focused on our right response to be in His presence to do His will.

Practical Strategies for Prayer

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples. He said to them, When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.” (Luke 11:1-4)

This passage is not a prayer, but rather a model for us to follow on how to pray, **“Saturation Prayer.”** The closer we follow this passage, the closer we become to our

Lord. The closer we attain the fullness of our spiritual potential, the better we pray. As members of the body of Christ, it is our responsibility to always teach each other how to pray, and the best teacher is the one who models it in their lives. We are to model this in all of our activities and pursuits in the church! We are to be specific and simple and follow the above aspects, so that our prayers are relevant and not too general or crude. We must be honest and open to our Lord, so our will is opened on what He has done for us, who He is, what we wish to do, and who we are to Him. Sharing our burdens and intimacy by being in depth.

Then before each activity, meeting, or event, prayer is the platform that begins, ends and rests on. There should never be anything that goes on at a church that does not have prayer at its central core! Remember confidentiality! Prayer requests are not ammunition for gossip!

1. Begin each meeting in prayer and spend at least 1/5th to 1/3rd or more of that meeting in prayer! If you really desire to be used by God, try over half of the time in prayer. But start off with “baby steps” and build up to it. You say you do not have the time? Well most meetings are taken up by poor preparation, not following the agenda, and trivial discussions in circles. By putting the focus on prayer, meetings actually go faster! Because people are one mind and direction! (Well mostly)
2. Spend significant time in prayer between meeting sessions about the decisions that need to be made and not just fretting over it. This will focus us away from our perceived agenda into His agenda. We then surrender selfish ambitions to what is best for His church.
3. Have a specific core of people pray before each worship service and event at the church. So if the Junior Highers are having a “lock in,” then have a small group come before and just pray before the event for safety. Get specific requests from the leaders of the event. Have teams pray before and during ministry programs, such as children’s and youth. While the youth meeting is going on have a prayer team in another room praying.
4. Sunday service prayer group; a small group of people who are there early praying, the longer the better, and pray in authority for satanic removal. So this type of prayer is in authority and in the name of Christ. Literally going through the church and casting away demons and any evil curses, incantations, hexes, spells, etc. You would be surprised on the number of satanic and witch groups that are in our towns and cities trying to distort and destroy you in the name of Satan!
5. Have prayer walks through your neighborhood. That is divide your neighborhood up section by section, until the whole city is prayed for (within reason, if your church is in LA, not realistic). And just pray in authority for your city. Then, in teams of two, go to each house, knock on the door, and ask

how can you pray for them. Give none of your church propaganda or even an invitation, just ask for their prayer needs and then go back to the church and pray for them. If there is a request you can fill, then fill it! You may even get a bulletin board for your church narthex and place all the prayer requests on them so the members have a chance to fill them. Have the cards number coded, so they remain anonymous to everyone except the director and people in the loop. Such as an out of work or single mom desiring a bicycle for their child. It can be a person who needs a job or car, or any number of a multitude of needs. It can even be something you cannot fill, such as someone sick or dying, but if it is our Lord's will, it will be filled, remember the power of prayer! As a body of believers you should have the resources to fill the requests you receive. Then imagine the power of evangelism when people see Christ in action!

6. Have assigned people pray for each pastor, director, and missionary of the church on a constant daily basis, both as individual prayer warriors and once a week collectively as a prayer group.
7. Visit each member of the church, in prayer teams, and pray for and with them at least every 6 months.
8. Concerts of prayer, on a monthly basis and eventually on a weekly basis, have a prayer service with directed prayer and silent prayer. Pray for revival, for individuals, for government for...practice the classic spiritual disciplines. You can combine this with worship and a short message.
9. Have 24 hour pray vigils on a regular basis where two or more people are at the church praying all the time. You should do this in short sessions for about 15 minutes no longer than a ½ hour, so they do not burn out.
10. Fasting is for today! It is not a tool to force God to comply, but for us to comply with His will.
11. Have a trained team of people to pray for people after each service. So that a sufficient number of people are there partaking, so no one is being rushed.
12. This may sound on the edge, but it is not and is totally Biblical. Have a trained team of people to engage in spiritual warfare.
13. Have a team of prayer warriors invite city and government officials over for social events in the church and see if you can pray for them. Be courteous and tactful, and never force yourself. See if you can make appointments with them at their offices and ask their permission to keep them in prayer. Pray for them on the spot if they desire. You will be surprised on the response. Most elected officials will not turn you down and, if they do, then do as Matthew 10 tells us.

Pastor's Prayer Primer

Prayer is the big aspect that is missing from the pastor's arsenal. Prayer is lacking in a big way from the hearts, minds, and studies of our nation's pastors! Prayer is the first line of defense and first responsibility of the pastor! Too many pastors feel they will lose respect in the eyes of their peers and community if they are known as men of prayer! So what! You should not give a rat's butt what they think as long as your integrity and devotions are intact! Our peers and community are not the ones we are to worship, and certainly are not the ones who will judge us and hold us accountable! Remember Augustine's call of being "self watch." This will keep us from making the mistakes and keeping the focus on the right track, God's track.

Our effectiveness as a pastor and the foundation that holds us up is prayer. The ministry rests and starts from the spiritual condition of the leaders, their devotion to Christ, and what flows from that devotion. For ministry to be blessed and effective, we must be in healthy relationships to our Lord and each other in accountability. We must not be independent to ourselves, but be dependent on our Lord Jesus Christ and to each other. Christianity is not a solo sport or a spectator sport, it is a team, a community party where we are together as one body and one force for one Kingdom!

If we are too busy in our schedule for prayer, how can we be effective for His service, especially for pastors? Remember we cannot do the work of our Lord unless we are the people of our Lord. Our focus and concern must start with our spiritual condition, with our relationship with Christ. Before we can effectively minister to others, we must be growing. To begin to grow, we must fall on our knees. If not and you are a pastor then quit and find yourself another job. Get right with God and then come back if called to do so.

Thus the pastor cannot have an effective ministry unless prayer is the focal point! We cannot meet the approval of God without prayer! How can we receive His blessings when we leave God out of the loop? If we never bother with God ourselves then how can we lead others in His direction?

How we relate with others is a reflection of our relationship with God, regardless if we are a leader, a new Christian, or a pew sitter. So if we have a poor relationship with God, then our human interpersonal relations will be diminished and shallow too. When our relationship with our Lord is growing and built in prayer, then our relationships with each other will flourish too. This is a must for the Christian, essential for the leader, and extremely imperative for the pastor. Without this view of prayer, the Christian will be ineffective in their walk and castrated from being effectively used to further the Kingdom because God is out of the picture. Yes, He is sovereign, but throughout history God uses all kinds of people from all kinds of walks. To be our best, which we are called to do, and be of best use, which is imperative to the leader, we must be in prayer! Sovereignty is never an excuse to sit and do nothing, thinking God is in charge, and if

He wills, it will be done. This is the ultimate slap in the face of our Lord, and it is in fact denying His sovereignty, because we are denying our part in His call and plan!

The Pastor's Prayer Approach

We must take a 'three-prong' attack position to guard and activate the pastor.

Attack 1. The pastor's daily prayer and devotional life must be rich and growing. Yes there are dry spells, but the effort must be there, as well as the passion. Our communication with our Lord Jesus Christ is based on the giving of everything and ourselves. He is our Lord, and we need to live, work, and respond accordingly. So if the pastor is writing a sermon, he must pray before he writes and researches, during the writing, and even while giving it.

Attack 2. Establish a lay prayer team. Their primary task is to keep the pastor in prayer on a daily continual basis and meet at least once a week as a team. Again, not popcorn prayers but surrendered deep pursuits before our holy God.

Attack 3. Have teams pray for specific ministries that the pastor is in, as we already discussed. I encourage you to have different prayer teams, so not just the same people are doing it, because they will be burned out.

We are facing a war, all out attacks, conflicts, and the spread of malicious diseases coming to outflank us, because we are too busy fighting the good fight. If we are too busy, then Satan will run us over and out. We must have the upper hand and the higher ground for a strong defense and offense. And that is the Holy Spirit and prayer. We need to have vitality in our ministry and not aridness. What we need is Christ, what Christ wants is us.

"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." (Colossians 2:6-7)

If you spend any time in gardening, you will quickly realize that it takes time for the plants and trees to grow. I visited Sequoia National Park in California where there are trees over 300 feet tall and bigger in diameter than a house. It gives you a squirrel's perspective on the world. It also gives us the perspective of the awesome amount of time for these trees to get that way, thousands of years! I saw trees that were alive at the same time of our Lord! And the lesson for us to learn is great things take time. Prayer takes time. If the trees were neglecting water, they would have died off. If the trees received bad intervention, such as the lumber industry a hundred years ago, they would have died off. If we neglect our prayer life, we too will be choked off, wither, and die spiritually. We may not be a Sequoia of prayer overnight, because it takes time and patience, but if you invest the time of your life and the obedience of our will, then things will happen. Regularity builds the desired results that shape us with quality and vitality that our Lord will use.

Prayer is something you do not take breaks from, as you do not take breaks from oxygen, food, and water. Prayer is our lifeline and nutrient center for us to grow and flourish in. If we become thoughtless and careless with our prayer life, we will be careless and thoughtless to those around us. Our spiritual priorities are our life priorities. Do not neglect your prayer just as our Lord does not neglect us. Let us go before His presence with the aspects we talked about with confidence and the authority He gives us. Then, we can be the people of His work and will, with gratitude and praise.

Remember Amen is not the end or the close of a prayer, rather it means “so be it” that we are to apply it to our life and not just say it. Amen is not an end to what we do and say but the beginning to apply God’s truth to our lives with vigilance.

Renewal Must Be A Focused Effort of Prayer

Ask yourself this question, what would it take to have revival come to your church? Renewal flows out of prayer and maturity. God’s presence in renewal has been often described as fire, because as fire breaks out unexpectedly and spreads fast, so does revival. Scripture describes fire as a form of the presence of God, the purification of our sinful nature to be in His glory and power.

When you ask that question of what would it take for revival to happen in your church, what would you expect as a response from the congregation, from the pastor, staff, and from yourself? You should expect to see people transformed out of their complacency into passion and conviction for His Word and worship. There should be a surrendered will and heart from the body with excitement and fervor. The body seems to awaken from a long slumber to running a marathon. As fire spreads, the revival is contagious; so hardly anybody is left as a “pew sitter.” Even non-Christians succumb to the presence of the Holy Spirit and become converted. And it does not stop at the church door, it spreads into the workplace, into the neighborhood, and into the families until whole cities and countries are consumed by our Lord’s glory.

We should see excited people of God who cannot wait for worship, and that worship is exciting, real, and impacting. We do not see dull and boring dribble substituting for the desire to praise and thank God for His grace and presence: A higher plane of existence, a higher level of commitment, a higher level of purpose for His glory. The character of Christ is sought not the grandstanding of emotional rhetoric and show. We should see genuine repentance and sorrow for the former days of self-directed living and the diseases we have spread, instead of the love.

We may not have seen this type of revival in the United States in several generations, but it is happening in several places in the world today. There are counterfeits out there claiming revival, but there is no fruit from them just barking and laughing. Surrendered lives transformed into fruit, and not cheap parlor tricks and self-seeking interests.

So our lives are transformed to our existential core of who we are deep inside. Then that change is communicated to those around us without the utterance of a single word, but words are used. Total commitment is not just emotionalism, even though revival will be a very emotional experience because we are emotional beings.

We cannot just get up one day and decide to have a revival; God does not work that way. We may think we can create revival on our own effort and hold revival meetings, which is not a bad thing to do. Revival comes like an unexpected visitor, but that visitor will not come unless certain things happen. And we know these things from Scripture and church history. Prayer, surrendered hearts, seeking God's will and not ours, asking for the Holy Spirit without strings attached, desiring conviction, repenting of sins, removing anything that gets in the way of our relationship with Christ, and more prayer. Revival is what God decides to do, in His timing, for His glory. We cannot start it, but we can provide the atmosphere for it to breathe. We do not have the match, but we can gather the wood and place it where it needs to be. So are you willing, are you willing to have revival come to and come from your church? If not what is in your way?

Barriers to Revival

The biggest barrier to the work of the Holy Spirit is a "I do not want to change my will and heart" attitude. We must loosen up and allow the Holy Spirit to be God, as He is! When we refuse to change and grow, we hinder ourselves from experiencing what life is all about.

If we sit in a church that is not focused on the person and work of Christ, reading and consuming liberal theology that allows for our freedom of thinking and doing with a careless and apathetic God, do not hold your breath. If God's Word is not your churches passion and driving force, do not hold your breath. If your church is into innovative theology and grandstanding performances instead of solid Biblical thinking and teaching, do not hold your breath. If you have a church that does not like younger people coming and feels the church is for members and no one else, do not hold your breath. If you are in a church that thinks having an intimate relationship with Christ is crazy, do not hold your breath. If you are in a church that restricts worship and the expression of gratitude to our Holy God, do not hold your breath. If your church is threatened by anything new or innovations that are based on God's Word, do not hold your breath. If the leadership of your church is living lavish and non-Biblical lifestyles, do not hold your breath. If your church is not committed to their Lord, then do not hold your breath because nothing is going to happen! If you are turning blue, I guess you are doing well!

We cannot be committed to political games and gains over the Lordship of Christ. We cannot have a "we never done it that way before" mentality. We cannot be overly concerned with our desires and needs over being sold out for our Lord. We cannot be living in unrepentant sins and refusing to forgive and receive the work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot be consumed with commercialism, perceived needs and stuff we think we need as a replacement for our real need, the need for our Lord.

We need to take the teachings and examples of our Lord seriously if we hope to see revival in our church. We need to be seeking His purpose and timing and not our agenda and concerns. We must communicate that the minister is every believer and member of a church that desires to serve, learn, to be disciplined, and to disciple others. And, of course, prayer must be the heartbeat and passion of the Christian who desires to be fully used by God, and perhaps the vehicle of revival will be driven.

We cannot go through life being spiritually stubborn, we have to release ourselves to His holiness. It is virtually impossible for us as Christians to have a growing walk with our Lord, let alone a vital ministry, without having a growing relationship with Christ through prayer. We have to be sure of who we are in Christ in order to be sure what we are called to do, and then be able to do it. So the goal is that we become interested and identified in the will of our Lord over our will, His interests over our desires. We are to bring ourselves before God, not just our desires and self interests. Then we can learn and funnel that posture to those around us resulting with a disease free church!

We must have ingrained in our hearts and minds that prayer is not a chore or some kind of drudgery we must endure. Prayer is not a means for an end. Prayer is the end. Prayer is the goal of the work and not just the exercise. Prayer is the goal, the means, and the ends for the Christian experience. Prayer is the vehicle that equips us, sustains us, nourishes us, and the purpose for us.

We are made for prayer, and prayer is made for us. So, let us drive it, in so doing it drives us!

Chapter XIV What the Healthy Church Looks Like

“Summarizing What God Calls Us To Do = Depending On The Cross”

“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

A healthy church can be just 50 members or over 50, 000+ members. The healthy church can be a very small group of people who are struggling to keep it afloat. Or they can be exploding with new people. They can be in a dwindling town, such as in a Midwest coal town, or in the heart of the big city. They can have many elements staked against their favor such as being in a town with too many churches, or in a liberally harsh environment such as in a new mission field or in the heart of San Francisco. They could have just withered a moral breach from a key leader or suffered a tragic loss. The healthy church can even see their membership slipping away. And of course the healthy church can be exploding with hundreds and even thousands of people, such as those in Korea. So what is a healthy church?

Our contemporary society today sees a successful church as one with a large campus and big facilities. A church that has lots of programs that dwarf the other churches in its city. If you think this is a sign of a successful church, then you are among most leaders and Christians in America today. Just as I once believed and taught as a church growth consultant. However, this is not what Scripture tells us what a healthy church is. In fact a healthy church can be just a few families, they may never see growth and may actually be in decline. And a diseased church can have that large and nice campus, they can have several thousand people with programs we all would envy. Because the health of the church is not in the numbers or in the building or in the programs, it is who they are in the Lord, and what they are doing with His call.

A healthy church is one who is poured out to our Lord. Who practices the love of our Lord through worship, teaching, learning, loving, caring, praying, and outreach. A church that chooses to be a bag of marbles, all with different colors and sizes all working together. Each marble seizing its call and exercising its gift for the game. Have you ever tried to play marbles with just one? Not very fun is it? To play your best you need more than one, each with a purpose and direction. In spite of that a lot of churches chose to be the lone marble. That church really cannot be used to play any marble games, because not that there are too few, the marbles just do not get along. Yet the more marbles you have working together the better you can play. And the more is two

or more gathered in His name. A people working together for a common purpose with vision and strength, all striving to give God the glory.

We must not care how big we are, but how we are. We cannot have the gathering of more people as our only goal and purpose. Because this is not what God has called us to. Yes Matthew 28 calls us as a mandate to make disciples and to teach. But if we interpret it as only bringing people into the church, then we are short sighted. Yes we need to invite people, but it is what we do with the people that God has given us that is the primary role and purpose of the church. We have to be a better 'how', if we truly want to receive the Lord's blessing and be all that we are called to be.

Place this stethoscope from Scripture to your churches heart:

The first church was, "*devoted to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer; and everyone was filled with awe.*"

What is the stethoscope hearing from your church? What is your church devoted too? What and where is your awe, your wonderment? This will be the question if answered honestly, be the measuring rod to the health of your church. Because this passage in Acts gives us the purpose, vision and call of the church. Not just a certain church down the street, but your church, and all churches, as we all are one body together. The healthy church looks like Acts 2! The healthy church can be your church, perhaps it already is, or it may need reformed. So catch that 'AWE', that passion and devotion to our Lord and the reason for our being!

A Healthy Church is Kind to its members

"Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined." (Titus 1:8)

This is not a call for church leaders only, although it is essential for leadership. It is a call for all of God's people regardless of rank, experience and position. Being spiritually mature is a call for all of us. The leaders are to model it down and the members are to model it up. If not, we will have a disease riddled church that models the darkness of human nature and not the love of God! Because if we are not modeling Christ's character and call to each other, then we are not going to model it to others!

So, if we are putting each other down, then we are putting ourselves down as well. If we are attacking our brother in Christ, we are fighting against ourselves! We are all apart of the body of Christ. We are in Christ along with each member of our church and even other neighborhood churches, just as our hands and feet are part of us. So, when we are plugging away at each other, we are tearing ourselves down too! We make ourselves look bad, we make our church look bad, we make other churches look bad, and we make Christ look bad. What we end up doing is dumb and keeps getting dumber, just like the movie a few years ago, "Dumb and Dumber."

“If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying?” (I Corinthians 14:16)

This verse is referring mainly to the speaking of tongues; however, it applies whenever we do worship and teaching. Because if the worshipers cannot understand what is going on and why, then very little will be gained and very much will be lost. If you are a church who preaches over people’s heads with vague references and technical exegetical speech then, unless they are a seminary grad, they will not understand. If you make the message too simple then how do you expect to challenge and disciple people? If you ramble on without logic and an orderly presentation, because the pastor is not preparing, then how do you expect others to grow? Or if the church has no order of worship and it is a free for all, what happens is what happens. This is how such heresy such as “holy laughter” comes about. Without order, you will develop chaos!

Yes it is an art to find the right balance. You have to know your people, their education, background, and experience. At the same time, you can make a few assertions that the Gospel needs to be given in a way they can understand and in a way they can be challenged. Never, Never, Never compromise the Message because you are afraid to offend or think that they may not understand! Work on a way to explain it. Use youth ministry and even children’s curriculum as ideas to communicate if you are fresh out of ideas or need to try something better. There is a whole world of excellent resources out there. Use them, but do not be slaves to them. Remember to never, never compromise the message of Scripture! You have to work at it. Challenge yourself before you can challenge others!

“Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” (Colossians 4:4-6)

We are to be focused on the things above so that we are doing as we need and are called to! If we call ourselves Christian, we must do as Christ did or we should change our designation or our behaviors. Just as the story of Alexander the Great confronting one of his young men who was sleeping on guard duty, which was a capital offense. Alexander asks the young man his name, and his reply was...Alexander. So Alexander the Great demands him to change his name or to change his behavior!

Making the most of every opportunity is essential to live a full and God-centered life. We do not want to look back on a life of mistakes and “I should haves.” God desires the best for us. That best is to follow His will and His will is laid out in Scripture. And His will in this passage is to make the most of our opportunities with strangers and guests and not just be in our social cliques all the time. Ignoring and snubbing people is not apart of the Will of God, only the will of our evil sinful selfish nature.

“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.” (I Thessalonians 4:11-12)

Some people have taken this passage to mean to stay to ourselves. It is very convenient to have such a passage, if you do not want to follow the call of Christ. Of course, you have to ignore the whole magnitude of Scripture and just use this passage out of its context and contextual meaning, but that seems to be popular today.

The real meaning is of civic generosity, which is giving out of what we have in abundance, so that we are serious and eager to represent Christ’s character correctly and continually. Our behaviors are above reproach and unimpeachable. The point being, we are not overly dependent on others and are not taking advantage of others either. It does not mean if we have a problem, we are not to seek help from each other. The point is we are to help one another, as we need it and respond to others accordingly.

It is a balance of true need and willingness to help. Just not over using the systems to get what you desire and want when you are fully able to work and earn it. It goes when we earn respect from each other, as this passage addresses living on handouts and never seeking to work.

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

“I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.”(Matthew 25:35-36; 43)

One of the clearest ways to worship God is to take care of His people. That is all of His people, even the ones **we** do not “feel” represent what **we** “think” count! So when we are in service to the homeless, we are in service to Christ and when we take care of the visitor, we are being hospitable to Christ Himself. Remember we are not to put the emphasis on the “we” and “us,” but the “Him!” Our virtues and reasoning must never lead away from the call in Scripture. That is we are not to elevate our reasoning for our actions or non-actions that go contrary to the will of God. The will of God is revealed through Scripture.

The suffering and needs of the people are the needs of the Lord. We must never forget that! It is through our actions and deeds as Christians that send the brightest and best testimony that words can never say. Words are used only as a way to put the pieces together in a systematic and logical way.

A Strategy for Reaching Out

Sometimes people are traveling, just checking out what others are up to, or are looking for a new church home, so we need to be sensitive, be aware, be concerned, be friendly, and be Christ like. The friendly atmosphere and being a good host is your primary strategy to reach out. We cannot effectively reach out unless we are reaching within and receiving Him!

Matt 10 Project: Here is a fantastic idea I picked up from Tony Compolo. It is very simple, effective and Biblical. Go to your neighbors door to door without literature, without inviting them to programs, or without anything to sell. Tell them what church you are from and your name. Then say, "How can we pray for you?" And that's it for the door to door thing! From my personal experience doing this in inner-city areas, people are very open and will share most of the time. Yes it is scary and doors do get slammed, but when you are not selling, people are more prone to listen!

Then go back to the church and spend a significant amount of time in prayer for them. You may go through the neighborhoods first and pray in power and conviction, thus kicking Satan and his entourage out of there, seeking God's help and intercession, and preparing yourselves for the endeavor.

Then you may put up a bulletin board on the needs of the community and see if things like children needing clothes to people needing jobs can be filled. Do not use people's names and addresses. Have some kind of number system and keep them anonymous unless they say otherwise. When you fulfill a prayer request, you are being the feet of Christ and a beacon to that neighborhood. I personally experienced great joy by seeing the excited faces of people when we knocked on their door, prayed for them, and then came back with a tricycle for their child or a job opportunity. This is a wonderful ministry!

Surveys: Going door to door in your neighborhood and seeking information on how you, as a church, can serve them better is a great way to get to know your neighbors and their needs. Keep it simple and short so not to tie your neighbors up and be very friendly! There are always people who do not want to talk and there are those who do. The biggest barrier to this is the misgivings and fears of your congregation. The people of the church must relinquish their fears and embrace the call of Scripture to seek out people and then make Christ known to them.

Small Group Outreach: There are numerous good programs out there that are designed to target and bring Christ into your neighborhood. "Alpha" is a small group introductory Bible study imported from England by Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena. This program has had great success in this area. It is a video series that trains and equips ordinary Christians to do extraordinary outreach. There is also a program from Campus Crusade for Christ called "The Lighthouse" which is a neighborhood prayer and evangelism tool.

With your surveys and these evangelism tools, you can invite people to your church programs. Start off with baby step programs such as the Matthew 10 idea, then

maybe get a big screen TV and invite people to watch Monday Night Football or movies. Or have concerts or dinner parties. The possibilities are as endless as the ideas. The key is to model Christ's character and show the hospitality we are called to do.

Personal Lifestyle Evangelism: There is perhaps no better way to introduce the Lordship of Christ to others than modeling His character to others. When we are distinctive and interesting, living a life above reproach with love and care to others is a beacon of hope to the lost, even if they will not admit it publicly. When you earn their attention and respect, which takes an investment of time, then you can invite friends, neighbors, coworkers, etc. to your house for dinner or something personal. Then you can invite them to a church program. Getting to know people is essential, as we are called to be salt and light. And salt and light are penetrating and not elusive. So let us meet the call and snub the elusiveness, break out of our fears and resentment and follow our Lord!

The church leadership must be supporting and encouraging to outreach. Providing training events and follow-ups for its members. Programs such as Thursday night once a month is "Invite Night", where members are trained and encouraged to invite the people in their lives who do not know the Lord or have fallen away to their homes for fellowship and friendship. People are more likely to go to a home than go to a church. Once they know you then they are inclined to participate in the programs of the church, no matter how good they may be.

If the church does not have a friendly atmosphere, then it will slowly die from unkindness. Kindness is a very important Fruit of the Spirit that must manifest itself from the parking lot to the restrooms, or you will be in a pew by yourself.

Life is full of "whys" and "how comes" that need explanation and truth that is elusive to most people that God's Word provides. We are called to share and make His Word relevant. Thus if they do not want to come to the door or if the door will not open, then their quest for truth will become a halt.

Now an important theological point is that there are no "Seekers." That's right, they do not exist because people do not seek God, only God seeks us. Scripture is very clear on this! But that does not mean we leave it up to Him alone and we go on a permanent vacation. We are still the means He chooses to use to build His Kingdom. The call is ours and so is the responsibility, because theology is the logical discovery of who God is and what He does. Theology is the way in, not the way out! Thus we are to show people the way and the truth, to direct people in the right direction, and to be sensitive to the teaching and work of the Holy Spirit. So we are showing people themselves in God's light and truth. Our purpose for our existence is how we respond to the Gospel and calls of Scripture, to our relationship with Christ and then to each other. We must be modelers of our Lord, being true and relevant. And again this cannot happen if the visitor is unwelcome and cannot find their way out of the parking lot. Modeling Christ is not having visitors shunned by uncaring members.

We are called to be presentable. Just as when we entertain guests in our homes and, right before the guests are to arrive, we make sure everything is just right, so must we in our churches or we will be in lonely pews.

There is no question that how we engage the visitor will determine the spiritual maturity of the people in your church. It will also determine how we are responding to the call of our Lord. A caring atmosphere along with strong Biblical teaching will spawn growth and spiritual maturity, which is the main purpose of the church. As a side effect, will be the growth of numbers. Now growth in numbers is important, but NOT the focus! Discipleship is. Growth is the fruit and effect of it, but not the main ingredient. If you want to grow in numbers, then follow the call the Lord gave you by taking care of the people He has already given you, as revealed in Scripture!

At the very core of being a hospitable church, it is not how we do things and what we know and do, but it is all about what is in our hearts. And if the care for people is not the blood flowing through our veins, and if discipleship is not our heartbeat, then we will not be building the Kingdom of God. Only the Kingdom of "self" will be laid. It is what is in our hearts that will determine the direction of hospitality and the tone of the church. It will set the pace and set the table of people being welcomed or being shunned.

We are called to obey the precepts of Scripture, the care of the needs of the people the Lord gives us to take care of. Care that makes people feel right at home. From signs and smiles that say we are glad you are here, an atmosphere that says Christ is here because we love Him, and friendly ushers and greeters who are showing the ins and outs, the seats, the restrooms, the classrooms, and the Spirit of our living Lord. That people, visitors and members alike are welcomed, kept in prayer, cared for, yet not overwhelmed, and then encouraged, and invited to a gathering. Then the visitor can become a member that receives teaching, prayer, equipping, discipling and training for His service. Then this process can keep reciprocating to even more people. The call has been given, the response and responsibility is yours!

"As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work." (John 9:4)

Restating the Simple Problem

Remember, the problem is not so much how we do things, it's how we are! The problem is not what we do in our worship services; it is how we treat the people that go to our services. The problem is not how we are dressing for services but how we love and care at our services. The problem is not how good our programs and location are, it is how we are. The problem is not so much who we are; the problem is how we are. Too often we confuse the WHO with the HOW! The problem is not so much as being a Christian in of itself; but, the problem is how we treat others as Christians.

So we need to change the HOW, to change how we are, how we behave, how we treat each other, how we love, and how we care. How we pray. How we do the

'practice' of the church, the love of our Lord through worship, teaching, learning, loving, praying, and outreach. So that the big 'how' is that we model Christ as a chosen reality, that Jesus Christ really is in our lives!

The church is a human institution, filled with our fallen nature. So we should expect a few flaws of unsatisfactory reactions by people. After all, you cannot please everyone. And there is no institution better; after all, who is going to marry you and bury you? Who is going to hold your baby up in baptism or dedication? These important stages of life are centered upon the church, all the richness of the traditions, and all the hope we have to look to. Would you rather go to the courthouse? Well, if we do not reform and turn our failing churches around, people will rather go to the courthouse! And then where does that leave the church and its relevance in culture?

Embracing the Opportunity, and be the Church that Christ Called

“Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.” (James 4:8-11)

Most churches that are failing did not wake up one day and just decide 'hey lets fail'. They did not have started off with me first intentions and ignore our Lord's call. They probably did not chose a purposeful direction to be critical and condescending to each other and especially non-Christians. They did not write their mission statements with a 'how to' do the disdainful disposition, or hold seminars on modeling attitudes of puffed up pride! There was a process that led up to the point of decline and apathy from a starting point of new birth and excitement. There was a point where the first love became clouded, and other dispositions took over the role of the church. As the divorcing couple did not go into their wedding with the vision and plan for the divorce. They did not say in their vows, "say in 5 years lets become so miserable, we will divorce and live frustrated and disillusioned lives." Here too was a process that went from love and excitement of there newly weed bliss, to bitterness, criticalness, condescending attitudes, defensiveness and withdraw, and then the decision to end their relationship. It has been my observations that the causes of marriage failure are the same as with church failure. Because relationships have the same perimeters for what works and what destroys. And the church is a community of relationships, with each other, to the world and most importantly with our Lord.

The process first begins with the love and excitement for the ministry and the new birth for the new Christian or the new church start for the seasoned Christian. It can just being in a healthy church, or being in a non-healthy church and never have experienced anything else. But at some point the committed Christian who has received the election of our Lord, has traded that first love in for a lemon of sin. Some how that love and passion slowly dwindles away, as other things creep there way in the place of that excitement. And these 'things' are the diseases of apathy, gossip, pride, legalism,

slander and the list can go on and on. These form the relationship killers of bitterness, criticalness, condescendment, defensiveness and withdraw. These are the sins that take away from each other, it is in fact stealing from God Himself. These were not the precepts that the church was founded upon, these diseases were not in the vision of her planters, just as the divorce court was not on the wedding planner with the couple getting married. Yet, it happened, and it keeps happening.

We may have started to “*come near to God*”, and we received “*he will come near to you,*” but we decided to engaged in the process that let go of what we had. We have let the “*double-minded*” mindset take over the plan and purpose that God has given us. We must recapture the call of that first love will all of the excitement and vigor for our Lord. We must humble our pride before it is too late.

One of the central themes of humbleness is if we do not do it, God will. God asks us to ‘humble ourselves’ for the essential reason that if we do not, He will and when that happens it may just be too late! If we do not start to reform our churches to be as they were designed and destined to, then it will too be too late. The doors will close. Just as it has already happened in most parts of Europe. The church once fluoresced there, but apathy and disease took over and now her pews sit empty in the mist of a confused and decadent culture. We cannot just visualize what a healthy church can and should look like, we must act on it to make it happen.

We have spent a lot of time on all the negative aspects of the Church, and the problems associated with the miss treatment from Christians. We have seen how we rationalize our behaviors to make us feel good, so we do not have to listen to the call of our Lord. And how we miss interpret the truths of Scripture for our own gain, ignoring the true mission of the Church.

We have also seen some aspects of good character that we can do personally and collectively as a Church to be the Church that Christ calls us to be. We have seen and read the Scriptures, seen the results of what happens when we do and do not follow our Lord, when we do not humble ourselves. So the choice is up to us, we are given choices in life, options to follow. We can see for ourselves the church that is worshipping the Lord, caring and loving each other, steeped in prayer, and reaching its neighborhood and world for Christ. And we can see the church that is full of strife and conflict. The church that has given up its call to be in Christ and substituted it with their own inclinations and agenda. The results of not following Christ are causing people to leave the church bitter and disillusioned. Because to many Christians have transferred their election of grace into advertisements of hostility, thus they forgot the main thing. So the disillusioned world has confused the strife of Christians for the care of the Lord, thus see an uncaring God by seeing His uncaring people and leaders.

I was at a youth pastors conference a few years ago and heard a story that relay caused me to shutter and think. A story of a teen who tried to join a youth group, who was small and awkward, and seemingly unlovable. None of the other youth would have anything to do with him. The youth pastor invited him to a fun youth trip to an

amusement park, a supposed fun and community building event. The other kids shunned him, the youth pastor himself did not recall if he spent any time with the new kid. Instead spent all of his time with the popular kids. No one would pair up with this new kid, or reach out to him, because they conceded him undesirable and loveless, so he roamed an amusement park all by himself. A skinny loner who no one wanted to befriend, his name was Brian Warner.

A shy reclusive timid youth that no one wanted to show and model the love and care of Christ. They were too busy in their cliques, too busy pretending to be a Christian and, singing the songs and discussing the spiritual things but not implementing them, because it was inconvenient: It got in the way of their own agenda. So Brian left disillusioned. This was perhaps his one last hope for receiving care and love. There was no Christ-like outreach from the people who are called to be the best at it. Since love and care was not presented, Brian received not.

So he grew up and changed his name. He took the first name of a famous actress who committed suicide, and a serial killer for a last name. His name became Marilyn Manson. He is the favorite of the two teens who killed all those youth in Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999, and the various other school shootings. Who so many youth in North America and Europe listen to and find life totally hopeless and un-meaningful or kill themselves!

What if the youth group did reach out to Brian. Would he be a great Christian singer attracting the youth that feel hopeless, attracting the two teens in Columbine to live for Christ, instead of killing for Satan. We may not know until the Day of Judgment of what could have happened, but we do know what did happen, and we do know what we should have done as Christians. Because we know what Christ calls us to. We just all too often chose not to. How different our world would be if just one person in a youth group in Florida reached out to an seemingly awkward and unlovable kid....!?! How different and better would our world be if you and your church did as we are called to do? Be truly loving and caring, presenting those Christ-like characteristics?

Just how different our world would be if our churches as a collective were doing as we are called, if we just would get off the pews, and get in Christ!

We have a responsibility to be obedient to His Word and carry out His call. When we do not carry out our call and duty to be in Him and act within His character, it will cost. We must ask ourselves what will our inactivity cost me, and what will be the cost to those around me. When we do not accept our responsibility the cost will build up and it may even overwhelm us. Not because God is without compassion and love, but because we refuse His compassion and love, or we refuse to share His compassion and love. The cost we may accrue is the cost of lost opportunities, what ifs, and what could have been. Such as a church that is flourishing and being used by God, versus the church that is closing its doors after decades of being there, but not really being there. Being there in a physical building form, but not being there for the community and the use by our God. Being there with facilities, but not there with heart-felt worship and

poured out teaching. Being there as a club, but not there as a church. What are you costing God? Is your church a haven of lost opportunities, or a haven of rest? Is your church surrendered to His will and holiness, or to self-seeking motives and desires?

Summarizing What God Calls Us To Do

God calls us to distinction and to Himself. There is nothing we could ever do to earn our grace or place in heaven. There is no program, ministry, outreach, or person saved that could ever earn or add one tiny immeasurable measure to His love for us. So does this mean we sit in our chairs and do nothing. Well lots of people think so, or at least act that way. But our faith may not have a price tag attached, but there is a response that shows the fruit of what He has done.

James tells us faith without works is dead. Martin Luther had big issues with that statement and even thought it should be removed from the canon. This passage is not telling us that we are saved with an addition of merit, a plus of our action or something that is needed more than Christ's sacrifice, something that He did not cover. No! Absolutely not!

It's a wake up call to our responsibility, to a response and reason for our faith. Yes we can just sit in a pew and do nothing, receiving our heavenly award in the after life to come. But will there be a "well done good and faithful servant"? A reasoning for our election, a response of love to His love for us?

"On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. Teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life? What is written in the Law? he replied. How do you read it? He answered: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbor as yourself. You have answered correctly, Jesus replied. Do this and you will live. But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:25-29)

God calls us to be a lover! Not the lovers we see portrayed on TV and in the movies or in romance novels. God calls us to real love, which is a response to who He is and what He has done in us. So we are based and rooted in Him and respond to those around us as our Lord has responded to us. So many Christians will see their faith as a self-centered journey that involves them and God alone. Even though the Scriptures say otherwise, that our faith may be an individual choice to receive His election and grace, but we are still in community with each other. It is like going up to a person who was just in an auto accident, and saying, "gee you are hurt", and then just walk away. No need to bother to call for an ambulance, they are not our responsibility, it is just God and I.

That individual thinking is imaging a God who is different that what is revealed to us in Scripture, replacing Him with our selfish inclinations and laziness. We are not "Lone Ranger" Christians, we are part of a posy, part of a community all working, learning, and serving the same Lord and God together. Remember even the lone ranger

had Tonto, and his focus was to help others, he did not ride alone. Our faith must be in community, as we are the body of Christ, and not parts to ourselves. Are we responding to the privilege we have in Christ by honoring Him? Or do we try it alone with our rationalizations as our savior?

“Jesus answered, I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.” (John 10:25-30)

Are we His sheep, do we hear His voice, if so do we respond and follow?

God calls us to Himself and to love; the love of God and the love of each other. God calls us out of our self-love pride that mutes our effectiveness and purpose and turns it in to His effectiveness and purpose. So we need to ask ourselves how is our love life? Our love for our Lord and the response of love we are to have to each other. As the sheep of the Lord He has given us endless love and care. He gives us sheep endless life and His abounding fellowship. He gives us His perfection and His protection, moving us in to the fold of His wings, as a chicken calls its chicks. Sparring us to stay away from danger, protecting us from Satan’s grasp. Christ preserves in us, modeling us to preserve in our walk with Him and our call to each other.

Our shepherd desires us to be true and faithful because He is with us, this is our call to be true and faithful in our love, in our care, in our walks and in our talk.

So are we hearing the voice of God? Are we? If not where is the call, what is it we need to do to build His kingdom church. As Christ bore witness to the Father, so we are called to bare care to each other and back to Him. We can not be as the so-called “expert of the law” and debate who is our neighbor, thus excusing us from our responsibility. Nor can we ignore the sheep in our care, ignoring our Lord’s call. Yet so many churches do.

How we see others will be the measure of how we see our Lord, and how seriously we take our faith, whether it is a spouse, child, friend, boss or stranger. What if we were measured by how we see others, what if this is how Christ sees us? Not a very pleasant prospect is it! Fortunately grace covers us, His amazing and loving grace, for which we could not venture and no anything to earn being acceptable, or receive anything eternal except damnation.

We are to forsake our pride and arrogance and selfish nature and receive our Lord with joy and eagerness to build His church as He has called us to do! Remember the doctrine of Scripture and the call of our Lord will cut against the grain of our pride and will. For we are fallen, but He will lift us up! As our Lord is our shepherd guiding us His way showing us the way of the shepherd, the way of love and care.

Too many Christians see the church as a consumer entity, which is what can I get out of it. But are we reciprocating that care? Or are just to our clique and ourselves. We can not just expect others do be the doers, while we sit in a pew. We can not expect to even give money and expect a return on our investment for personal gain of some sort. The consumer church will be the demise of the church before Satan could ever have a chance. We can utterly eliminate ourselves into total annihilation without any external help below. God calls us out of the consumer mentality and into His reality. We have to ask ourselves if we see the church as what it can do for me, what I can get out of it.

Now we do need to be in a church that does take care of us. It is our attitude and determination that will set us apart to be fully used by Christ, or sit in a pew to our selfish gain and receive our judgment later, I know I do not want that to be me, do you?

Then there are too many churches who neglect their call, ignore their neighborhood and burro themselves away from the call that Christ has given us. There are even churches who target a specific audience or demographic, that is only people that they are comfortable with and ignore the call of our Lord to reach all people. We have to reform, to get beyond ourselves and desires, to go beyond our felt needs and plans and seize the opportunities to be our best for His glory. We have to see the church as what it was designed and destined for, a haven of rest, a place of worship, a place of discipleship, a place of fellowship, and not a place of just self interests and misplaced piety.

There is no measure we could ever add, or more that Christ could have done for us. There is nothing that is needed to be a more for our salvation. Just a, ...well what good are we? So He saved us, so we are undeserving of it, so what! This must not be our attitude and expect grace to cover without any responding on our part. Saved yes, but what good is it, for what purpose do we sit in a pew?

The so is to Sow, to respond in gratitude, because He first loved us.

What the Healthily Church IS

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (Jeremiah 31:33)

God is a God of unity. The old covenant had many strings attached, strings of our extreme obedience to the law for our salvation. A covenant that we could theoretically do, as Christ did, but no one else dared to succeed completely. A law that shows our imperfection and weakness, that shows the obligation and goal, yet is to high for us to reach.

Our God of unity reached for it in our place, grasped it and implemented it. Propitiation, which means that Christ took our place in love to please the Father for what we could not do. So we need not to fear His wrath and punishment, and strive for goals we could never attain. So now we have the Holy Spirit, the very presence of our Lord living and working in us for those goals. Wow what an honor we have, what a privilege we have, what opportunities we can do and accomplish.

Our unity has no “ifs” or “buts” in it, it only has what Christ has done, His grace, His choosing to work in us and use us for His purpose. The call our Lord gives us a promise of Himself, a response in gratitude for us to say “I will”. I will return the love of God to God and to those around me. We can not thwart God’s plans, but I believe He allows things to transcend and happen that may have not needed to. He uses our mistakes to rework back to His glory and purpose. But perhaps there is a kinder gentler path we could be on, if only we followed, if only we responded in kindness and love, if only we were truly imitators of His redemption and grace.

So because of the unity we can strive for the goal, because He empowers us to do so. We may not be perfect, but we still can succeed, Christ re-writes over our deficiencies, all we need to do is allow Him to do so. To bend our will, so His can prevail. Of course God can overpower us in a micro fraction of a microsecond, but He does not choose to work that way.

The biblical model for our church is laid clearly out in Scripture. We may not agree with each other on how to implement His call, or how to do our government. We may not agree on how we worship or on the subtle aspects of pre-millennial, post-millennial, pre-tribulation, post-tribulation doctrine. But what we must agree on and what we must do cooperatively is found in His Word. The big picture and call to the essentials of what a church is to be.

“In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:25-26)

Do we use wine or grape juice is not the issue, nor is if we institute it once a week, or once a month, or just occasionally a few times a year. What is at stake is how we are in Christ, how we are responding to His call and character. What we do as Christians is to choose to miss understand His Words, and/or manipulate them for our personal gain. What we cannot comprehend is what we wish not to know, for we risk the dilemma of confrontation and conviction. The Lord Supper is a testament to who Christ is and did on our behalf. The remembrance is not just the ritual of recreating His drama and actions, it is implementing them in our lives personally and through out His church. The bread is our Lord, His life, will and character, the consumption is our action. So how do you behave at the Lord’s table?

What so many Christians do is take the ritual and replay it over and over, and think this is the model that Christ has for us. But never implement the truths and character the Supper was for. Yes we do need to have a very high regard and practice seriously the Supper, It is our celebration and worship because of His new covenant; but if that is all we do with it, we will miss the point in a big way! Just the celebration without institution is hoarding the gift that was meant to be shared. It is refusing to participate in the body as the body of Christ as it is formed to do. The Supper is also for our daily walk in Christ, our daily sharing and communal with each other. It is our new covenant that is meant to be shared and not hoarded!

“For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. By calling this covenant new, he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.” (Hebrews 8:7-13)

We had no access to God in the old covenant, we had only our obedience which fell far to short, even though the law was perfect, there was no flaw in the original plan; it was us who were too flawed to receive it. Christ has given us His holiness and perfection, He brought Himself to us so we can live. So do we live, do we respond to build His church in Him and not to our glory and aspirations? By understanding where we come from will enable us to go forward and receive the call and implement it in the right direction.

This passage is a call to holiness, not just for the individual Christian as we tend to think in the western world, but the whole community; the church locally and the Church universally. Yet holiness is not apart of a lot of churches because we have forgot why we are there and what our true role is in the church. We have forgotten that the Lord of the universe has called us out, and has set us apart for His use. We have replace our experiences for His holiness, because we have forgotten our call our definition and purpose. We have been placed in a church for a reason, and one of the main reasons is to be set apart for His purpose and not our own: this is holiness. We have forgotten our adoption into His kingdom and the vision of what our church should be. We have replaced it with gothic cathedrals with magnificent stained glass pictures and architecture that screams God is holy, yet the pews are empty, the teaching and discipleship is forsaken. We have moved the church so close to the consumer we have forgotten what we stand for. We have imprinted our ideas and motions as ‘core values’ with Scripture that rivets His plan, yet the people go untaught and spread the disease of

gossip and malice. Lust, greed and power have taken over when peace, grace, forgiveness and love is to be the way.

We must see our unworthiness and inadequacy before our holy God and seek His forgiveness and restitution. We must not let our sin replace the call of the church to holiness. We must allow His grace to work within us and through us so we can be the church that is healthy, vibrant and filled with love. His love, our love, all working together all surrendered and poured out to holiness and purpose that is not forgotten. The church is about us the Christian and is not about us. The church was created for us to house His plan in our lives, to come together in community for worship, fellowship, teaching and outreach. It is about us because it binds us together for Him. It is not about us when we replace our desires and plans over His, where we put the focus upon ourselves. We are not the main characters in God's drama of redemption, Christ is. Thus we must realize that the church is about our Lord Jesus Christ and His plan for redemption. It is about us coming together and modeling His character. We are the supporting cast of actors and extras that make the story come alive to those around us. The church is not a place for grandstanding our desires and personalities.

Our God is the star of the show, make sure you give Him the top billing that He deserves. So we can be that healthy church of holiness that shines to each other and the world! Then perhaps the people around us will except God's loving plan of redemption. Always remember our actions model His character, whether if it is accurate or not, to the non-Christian it is all the same. The story we tell in words and deeds must bespeak holiness.

We need to depend on the cross, because we fall way short of the expectations, obedience and the law. Now with grace we can go through life empowered and indwelled by the Spirit. When we have a growing relationship with Christ we can go through life without fear, and with the comfort of His presence. Our response is passionate devotion and obedience. We can not be devoted to principles or even doctrine if we are not devoted to the person and work of Christ. Our church is not a cause it is a Person, the God and Creator off all things who loves us, who indwells in us, who empowers us, who guides us for His purpose.

Our devotion must be to Christ not ourselves, and not to a principle or to an idea. We can not pour ourselves with false passion and convection for a goal that has no eternal purpose, which does not glorify our Lord. When we run our churches with our personal agenda and principles we go astray because our principle is not in the Lordship of Christ, it is within ourselves. We become in breach of the contract, of His covenant of love and acceptance that we reject for self-interests that lead nowhere! We need to receive the love of our Lord from the Holy Spirit, and not allow anything to get in His way!

The Twelve Characteristics of the Healthily Church

These are the 12 characteristics that form a church that pleases our Lord. Each of these distinctiveness are extremely important; however I feel I placed them in a hirachal arrangement. That is the first one is more important then the second. And the first one begets the second that begets the third and so forth. So when each one when practiced it is also dependent on the characteristic that preceded it so it can birth the one that follows. But if you leave out any one of them your church will not function as God attended it to. They all build from one another and synergistically combine to be the church Christ called. For example I was on staff at a church that had solid doctrine and Bible teaching, Biblical uncompromising worship, but they refused to incorporate some of the other vital characteristics. Thus, even though they had the solid foundation of the Word, the rest of the house was not built and so it could not function as a house, as a church.

The church cannot be based on just one good aspect and ignore the rest. We cannot praise ourselves for having great outreach when we do not disciple the people we are bring in. We cannot be confident we are doing as God has called us when we proclaim the Word with passion, but will not share it with our neighbors. The church must be holistic. Not the new age mumble jumble, but a balance of what Scripture calls us too, all working together by the power of the Holy Spirit. Each of these characteristics are not denominational based, but are Biblical, so all denominations who claim Jesus as Lord can follow them if they want to be all that they are called to be.

First, is the clear uncompromising teaching of God's Word.

"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, O LORD; teach me your decrees". (Psalm 119:9-12)

A Healthy church will never sacrifice the integrity of the Bible, or neuter its message. One of the problems we have in the modern church is the desire to reach the unchurched. Problem you say? No, not the reaching of the unchurched, it is the philosophy we engage in to do it. We think it is OK to water down the message of the gospel to make the 'medicine' easier to take. We think we have to hide the truth to attract people to the church. So the sermons are about daily life, interesting stories and do not mention Christ and just leave people with 'I'm a feel good person'. There is no real teaching or application. However this philosophy may work at Willow Creek and a few other 'mega' churches, but keep in mind at those 'successful' mega churches they still have good teaching. They have discipleship programs that they feed the people into such as small groups and Sunday school classes. They also have other services once the 'seekers' make commitments of faith that do teach the Word.

The mistake a lot of churches make is that they have the 'seeker service' that neuters the gospel, but do not have a system of good discipleship which is the key to the healthy church. And guess what, it is what our Lord has called us too! A healthy church keeps the main thing the main think. And the main thing is the gospel of Christ

clearly expressed and clearly taught. Never think it is OK to compromise, thinking you will reach more people; because you will not. Yes, you may get a few more people attending, and that is 'may', but most of the time you will not. Churches such as Calvary Chapel have been successful at reaching new converts better than most other churches and far better than any other denomination because they are preaching and teaching the Bible clearly with passion and conviction. I'm defiantly not against 'seeker services', as I have done them and seen them work well to attract people. What I'm against is if that's all you do, then you are doing nothing. A good seeker message will contain the gospel clearly presented so people who never seen the inside of a church can relate to it. So the service will not have the Christian jargon, rather stories, illustrations, analogies to expound the passage so they can 'get it'.

I was on staff at a wonderful church in Pasadena many years ago. We were a church of over 5,000 and we were busting at the seams. Our sanctuary holds more than 6,000 people and we had two to three services on Sunday and one on Saturday. Another church in the south land with a TV ministry that was famous for substituting and compromising the Bible's message with a positive thinking message was less than 1/2 our size. In fact you can take their glass cathedral and stick it in our sanctuary and you may not find it. I do not want to sound prideful, but my church could beat up their church! We were impacting the community, teaching the Bible and sending more missionaries into the world than some denominations. It took dozens of best selling books and a TV ministry to get them popular, it took us no media ministry but just preaching the gospel and being a caring community to be twice their size. We were much bigger, they were much smaller, not that this size thing is so important. I'm more than confident that this other church would be much bigger than we were if they did not water down their message. They are a good church, I have had friends pastor there, I just believe they could have been much better. But to many churches model the style of compromise instead of the style of conviction of the Word. Then they wonder why they are failing.

I have consulted so many churches in various denominations, and I have observed that the larger growing churches are the ones who are solidly preaching and teaching the Word. The smaller dying churches in the same denominations are not. Churches fail when they lose their focus, especially the focus of the Word! Of course there are some exceptions (there is another church in Pasadena our size that is so liberal I consider them a cult; however and unfortunately they model the character of Christ better than most churches. And that is why they have grown, because of love and care, forgiveness and acceptance that is missing from other churches), but the rule is if you build it they will come. And you are to build it on the firm foundation of solid Bible teaching. Its OK to be creative and innovative, just keep the main thing the main thing.

Second, is impacting worship.

"I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; before the "gods" I will sing your praise. I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.

When I called, you answered me; you made me bold and stouthearted. May all the kings of the earth praise you, O LORD, when they hear the words of your mouth".
(Psalm 138:1-4)

What I mean by impacting is not style; it is the substance behind it. It is the passion and power that moves people from themselves to desire to please God, and praise Him. You can fully engage in the pipe organ, or have a full 100-piece orchestra, or have a guitar and keyboard. The style and instruments are not the key, it is the heart and passion behind it. The worship leaders must be there for the Lord and no other reason. You have to have people playing to the Lord not to please an audience.

There are of course many different styles of music and as many ways to engage in worship. Each denomination has its distinctions and variations and there is all the new contemporary ways that keep coming out. Some of the ways are more popular than others. Such as more people are attracted to a contemporary praise band over the organ. But that does not mean the organ is bad, and we should stop using it. What it means is we need to look at starting and providing a service that attracts people and worships God. What it means is we may have to have two distinct services to appeal to more people.

The main focus is to be is our love and passion for Christ as our Lord, and what He has done for us. We are to pour out our hearts and minds with gratitude and praise. The object of the worship experience is our Lord. The object is not talent or personalities. The object is not is the style and people who are singing and playing the instruments. We are not putting on a performance just to entertain, yet we are performing to our Lord. The worship experience must never be just a performance, yes we are to perform our best for His glory, but not in the sacrifice of the main thing!

Worship is not just music. It is a tool that we use to express our love and devotion to Him. Worship also consists of reading Scripture, prayer, preaching and even the sacraments. If you leave out prayer you are leaving out a vital component. If you are not using Scripture and only sing songs, you are not worshipping God with the best that He has given us. It would be like making a sandwich with cheese and mayonnaise and leaving out the bread and meat. Music is one component and tool that we can use to express our love for Him. Music is very important as it has the power to move us emotionally that the other components may not do. We are created as emotional beings and expressing our emotions in worship is important, as long as we do it with order and out of gratitude. Worship is about what God has done for us, and what it is not is about putting on a show.

Remember it is not about style. I'm always running into young people who like the gothic liturgical style as well as the contemporary. At first this amazed me, as I did not like that stuff when I was young. So you need to find your churches personality and distinction and express yourself accordingly. Find out what your people want, what are their needs and what style are you able to do.

Traditionally there are 5 main 'styles' that most of today's and yesterday's worship formats fit into.

There is the 'Traditional' that incorporates more classical music such as hymns, choir or Psalter, and a formal order in which each service follows. There are certain prayers, liturgies and parts of the service that are repetitious each week. These services have an organ and piano and rarely would have any more modern instruments. They are rooted in tradition and usually follow denominational and Scriptural guidelines.

The 'Liturgical' style is even more rigid. It incorporates formal hymns, readings from a prayer book or missal. Robes, incense and perhaps altar boys will all contribute to the service. These first two styles have a distinction of a sense of majesty and honor to God, a sense of holiness that provides the worshipping congregation with the impression that they are in the presence of God. One of the reasons some people do not like this form is that it also creates a sense of over separation between God and us. They feel not apart of it, the distance is too vast for them to worship with a cheerful heart. It is perspective from various people's feelings and experiences. The traditional service can be just as impacting as a contemporary can be if the heart and passion is there.

The 'Praise and Worship' style has less formality and more of a free flowing upbeat atmosphere. They may incorporate some of the same aspects as a traditional service but being more personal. A sense of closeness is given to the congregation. Newer forms of music and instruments provide the tone. There may be multi-media used such as PowerPoint instead of hymnals. The congregation does most of the singing and instead of a choir, and you may have a few praise/song leaders.

One of the more newer formats is the 'Seeker-Sensitive' formats. Their distinction is even a more casual atmosphere than the praise style. Some churches may have only a few songs with the addition of plays. Their choice of songs tend to be secular to create familiarity with the new church goer, then gradually flow into more Christian music. It is a cushion that prepares people to worship God, who are far, far from it themselves. These people may never have even set foot in a church, and the seeker service is more conducive to get them ready so they are not culturally shocked away from the church.

Sometimes the congregation does not sing as a performance style takes that place as if they were at a play or theater. This is done to attract the unchurched who might feel more comfortable in a less formal setting. When this style is properly designed it gradually generates trust with new people and then filter them into small groups or other services with more 'meat'. One of the drawbacks to these styles is a loss of seemingly holiness and awe that the more traditional forms yield.

The last category is a 'Blended' style that incorporates two or more of the previous styles. This form is becoming more popular as smaller churches are sometimes unable to have more than one service. So they will create a combination to

accommodate more needs in their congregation. These services tend to be more spontaneous with a hymn and then a praise choirs sang with a organ and a guitar.

A lot of these styles will overlap and vary between denomination and church. I'm not saying one is better than another. Some styles are better suited to a particular congregation at a particular time. Some people feel closer to God in a liturgical setting and others prefer a closeness they receive from a contemporary service. You are dealing with feelings and perceptions based on their experience and what they feel comfortable with. Ultimately people will come, grow and worship when the main purpose of pouring out to God is the central theme and not just accommodating a style, or putting on a performance. Find your niche and do it with love and passion. That church plant I did with a top church growth guru had the finest musicians, they where the band from a famous music group. Yet the church down the street with amateur keyboards and guitar attracted more people because their hearts were in the right place. We were putting on a performance, they were praising God. What is your church doing? Are you praising the holy God of the universe? Are you expressing your love to Christ? This is what impacting worship is all about.

"On one occasion, while he (Jesus) was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:4-5)

This passage is more about getting ready than waiting. Jesus knew that without the Holy Spirit the disciples would fail fast. We must realize that we already have Him and He is who empowers us. We are a balloon that has not been filled with its helium so it can rise. We cannot live the Christian faith let alone worship our Lord without the Spirit's power. We live in a spiritual world, we may not see it but it is there. Plugging into the Spirit readies us for His service, His character, and His plan.

Third, is passion for the Lord.

"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." (Phil. 3:7-11)

This may seem dual, but think about it how many passionate Christians do you know? If you do know a lot count yourself lucky. It has been my observations and experience that passion is missing in the church in a big way. We have become compliant and settled in the church at large. We must have hearts that cry out for closeness and at the same time "fear" our Lord and Savior. To be a church that is

following the Lord of the Bible we will be overflowing with gratitude for what He has done for us. We will desire to grow in our faith and knowledge of Him. Our passion will be enthusiastic and contagious to those around us. As individual Christians and as a body of believers who are practicing what they are worshipping, that they are learning what they are teaching. We are not a club, we are the body of Christ.

There is a difference between just being spiritual and being passionate. Being spiritual is the acknowledgment of who we are before a Holy God. This is fundamental. But if this is all we have, then what is our response to others. Being passionate is taking that spirituality and being joyful with it. There is no such thing as a sad and somber Christian, this is not found in Scripture. What is found is the joy and excitement that the life of living for the Lord brings. Paul in this passage is expressing his joy for being in Christ. Paul was also in prison tied to a floor laying in his dung, eating the scraps fed to him. Paul still found the passion, and let that passion be enthusiastic to those around him. Yes suffering and bad things will happen, but our theme for our emotions and worship and interactions with others must be a clear since of who we are in Christ. Then allowing that 'since' to flow. It may not happen every day. But as a body of believers it must be the 'feel' of the church. Wet with His passion and not dry with our somber.

We may not be as emotionally passionate as the prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah; but we must be willing as a church too not only acknowledge our faith but live it with enthusiasm. We must have a love for the church we are going to. We must love the people who are there. Yes there are times we may not feel very loving, as stuff happens. But we can learn and grow in the faith and in love. When a church is wet with the love. Then people who are hurting can be ministered too. Passion is contagious, but to is dysfunction. A church is not to be a place for the whole congregation to go out of obligation. It is not a place to be when the people wish they were some place else. It is a place to be to come together with others who are lovers and doers of the Word. And it is a place to welcome the hurting, the people who do not want to be there, so they can catch your enthusiasm and passion. So that the enthusiasm is the flow of the Holy Spirit in our lives being manifested in our actions and deeds. Because God so loved us...we are responding in that love. Does our hearts burn when we here the Word of our Lord? This is passion for our Lord, this is essential for the healthy church.

Fourth is heartfelt Prayer.

"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:4-5)

It is hard for me to list prayer as number 4, as for me it is one of the quintessential most important aspects of the Christina life. For me this is number one. But when I thought this through I realized it really is not the first thing, something happened in my life and other prayer warriors lives to make it first. So the reason that it is 4 on the list is that prerequisites need to take place before prayer become more 'real'

and is transferred into 'heartfelt prayer'. That what I mean by heartfelt is a sense of passion and urgency that needs to come before this can take place. And the previous characteristics plow the field and plant the seeds so this form of prayer can grow. We have to know God and His Word first, then it will cause us to know the importance of worship. Because learning about God and worshipping Him brings us closer to His presence and makes prayer become deeper and more alive. The third aspect of passion enters in from our building and growing relationship. Thus these three characteristics power prayer, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Then the characteristics 'back flow', to cause the previous ones to work better. Such as more prayer will cause you to be more passionate, better leadership development will make the first characteristics stronger and so forth.

True revival only has happened in this country twice. First was the 'great awakening' in 1726 in the last place you would expect. The Dutch Reformed, because their cultural identity is typically closed off to outsiders, and not very conducive to grow beyond their experience. But they did not let their culture hold them from what Christ was saying through Jonathan Edwards' and George Whitfield's preaching. Even though I consider them the greatest of preachers, it was not their teaching that caused the revival, it was the prayer. They were men of prayer and allowed prayer to bend their hearts and minds, then God chose to converge on that generation. It lasted well into the 1740's and most denominations and people in the colonies were effected, it and even went into parts of Europe. A second time this accrued was at the end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th century. Prayer was the key and focus. People gathered and prayed fervently for God to get a hold of this country and the hearts of people. Nothing like it has been seen since. We have seen 'cat licks' of revival in Korea and various parts of the world, but true revival is a bath of regeneration and conversion for an entire generation. This is what the church must do, fall on her knees in fervent prayer, so God may choose to grip this generation.

I will not spend too much time on this, since there is a whole chapter already. Prayer must permeate every aspect of your church. From praying for the needs, people, programs, opportunities, direction, before the meetings, in the meetings, after the meetings, before the service, during the service, after the service, and everywhere else, continually and fervently. The bottom line is if you have a church that does not pray or only gives lip service to it, you will not grow as a church. And true growth is not numbers it is commitment and obedience to His service. Then numbers usually follow. Because these characteristics are contagious, and people will desire to be apart of them.

Fifth is Making Disciples.

"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

This is perhaps the characteristic that most churches somehow forget. It is also the quintessential aspect and reason why the church exists. So why is it that so few churches actually have disciple making as a primary ministry. For most churches it is something they think that they are doing. Saying going to church on Sunday is discipleship. But it is not. Some churches throw it in as an after thought, or may offer a class or something to the effect.

Because due to our human fallen thinking, we desire the right to ourselves as more important than the life that Christ has for us. It is a problem for the non-Christian to except a Savior when they have to give up their rights to themselves, and it is difficult for the Christian to live a life that is truly surrendered and poured out to the sovereignty of God. Yet true discipleship cannot begin until we learn one key important aspect of life: there is one God and you are not it! That is we have to yield to the Lordship of our God and not to the desires of our will. When we do this then the discipleship process can begin. And when we refuse we will be the strife and conflict that gives Christianity a black eye, the problem rather than the solution. So discipleship and instigating as a priority is lost. We make up excuse saying, well people won't come, we do not have anybody to lead it... What they do not realize is we are not responsible for people coming, we are only responsible for obeying our Lord and doing it! And the reasons why there is no one to lead it is that there is no one disciplined in the church. Even the Apostle Paul spent three years being disciplined by Barnabas, and he received his call and was empowered directly from Christ Himself.

Humbleness is characterized by the willing to grow in Christ and receive learning and the growth. Peter tells us we ought to be humble toward each other so that you can know the grace of God and not be the opposition of God. Then secondly he says, you better be humble not only toward each other but toward God. This is so straight-forward. This is so essential to be a blessed church, to be a growing church, not in numbers, but in discipleship!

Checkout these passages, they tell us discipleship and mentoring are not an option, but a command: Matthew 28:16-20, Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, Galatians 6:1-10, Mark 1:35 – 2:12. We must follow out of our obedience and mentor in a multigenerational lifestyle, caring for the total person. It will move us from just playing church to being a church.

The effective large church is a convention of smaller churches were each of the members are being cared for by people who are being disciplined, who are being taught, who are being encouraged, and being led. And this is the formula that all churches should follow. The death of a church is when we follow political trends, not the national politics but the patriarchal personalities that want to control people. And when we have a controlling attitude that means we do not allow God to control us, thus we become empty shells and hollow logs. Being hollow means there's nothing working within us, There is no creator of the universe leading and directing our ways, so we become worthless to the Kingdom of God.

Making disciples takes vision and the understanding of scripture. It gives the church a purpose that forms leaders who grow other leaders, an outgrowth of their growth. That the leader who disciples and equips others is a person who is living the faith for themselves and setting goals for their personal growth, before they set goals for others. So that their skills and abilities are growing to be a better worker because they have been and continue to be a better child of God first.

From the character of Christ, will come the conduct of Christ, if we chose to follow. Then those values of our daily walk which will drive our behaviors that in turn will influence others. You can not lead where you have not been, or lead where you do not know where you are going. This is why discipleship is so essential to the aspect of being a Christian. We are called not to just visualize discipleship, but to do it, not to just talk about it, but to do it. The effective church will take Scripture and the call of our Lord seriously then implement it into function.

Jesus purpose for His three years of earthly ministry was the discipleship and equipping of the disciples, this was his drive and where most of His time was spent. He was focused on the teaching of the kingdom of God, to see beyond their situation to the life to come. With His teaching Jesus entrusted His church and people in the care of to the people He taught. And they were to replicate themselves to others and so forth, so that the objective was every believer was an equipper, that every member a minister, that every Christian be involved in the life and gifts of the body to influence the world.

The word must touch us as who we are and transform our very core of being, this is the knowledge that leads and transforms. You can not lead where you do not know the way, and to know the way you must have the knowledge, and the knowledge comes from experience and experience comes from discipleship. The will of God is for us to study His word, this will change our behaviors. A leader must have the knowledge and experience to put in practice the work that needs to be done. The leader will be studious so that they are nourished by the word, getting into the scriptures with study and application, not just reading it like a novel. The word must touch us as who we are and transform our very core of being, this is the knowledge that leads and transforms.

Small groups are the key to make this happen. Make sure that you have a plan to self replicate. Finding and disciplining people in their spiritual gifts will be your key to make and build them!

Sixth is love and care that is penetrating.

"One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this:

'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:28-31)

When we have a grasp of the magnitude of the love we received from our Lord that is totally undeserving, it should drop us to our knees. It also should cause us to see how we are with those around us. If we see ourselves as undeserving and God is willing to love us, then we should do the same with others around us. To be willing to allow that love to flow out of us as well as in us. So when we are loving the Lord our God with all of our heart and with all our soul and with all of our mind and with all of our strength; then, we will love our neighbor with care!

This passage also implies that we are to love ourselves. This may not be popular in classic reformed theology, but Christ does say love others as we love ourselves. Thus if we hate ourselves we cannot love others. So a healthy self-image is important and the image is who we are in Christ, never who we are to others and ourselves.

If, If, If, If, If: five 'ifs' happen in I Corinthians 13 that expound love. The response of the 'if' is to not let be a 'if', but allow it to be true and penetrating. If we allow the 'if' to stand upon itself, so it has no function and is just a stipulation, then we cannot be that church as our Lord called. If is an condition that calls to us a response, one way people leave, the other people stay. Which way will you go?

From the years of research into why some churches grow and why others do not, I found what I believe to be the most crucial aspect that is within our control. That characteristic is how we respond to His grace. That characteristic is how we are loving and caring to each other and our neighbors and the world. When people desire to join a church it is not because of the teaching, or the worship, or the programs, it is because of the care they received. That is why people join cults. Because someone reached out to them in their pain and hurt. People may visit your church because of the rest of these vital characteristics, but they will only stay when your heart is after His and then it is pouring out the love and care that He has for you!

Relationships are what life is all about. There is nothing greater or more important in our lives. No job, or school, or plan or wealth can take the place of relationships. Our relationship with Christ is foremost, then what flows from there is our love for each other. When we love we care. And when we care people will desire to receive that care and reciprocate that care and so forth. People will want to come to a church where they feel welcomed and cared for. People will not want to come to a church where they are not cared for. People will leave a church more often because relationships have not been developed more so than any other reason. They may give other excuses for it, but the fact is they left because they did not feel cared for there.

I Cor 12:26 When we are moving to help others and share with them we are not arguing about the color of the carpet in the sanctuary. No division means we are working together in action with each other, that our eyes are focused upon Him and not

ourselves, so no division will happen. There is no time to do the strives and disease of the church when we are learning and growing together, working together.

The people that stay in a careless environment will not have the impact as they should. Because the desire to learn and grow in our Lord will be drowned out by the noise of carelessness. It will create an atmosphere of distrust and fertile ground for all the diseases of the human sinful condition to grow and flourish. Just like I Corinthians 13 starts off with having the tongue of an angel but have no love we are nothing. When we do all the rest of the characteristics well and good, but we are not loving and caring, then we will accomplish nothing. We will not be the church as Christ has called us to be. We cannot allow the hurt and pain we may have received from the past cloud our call. We cannot allow our misplaced will and desires and sin to mask the cross.

Just ask yourself what kind of church would you like to be in. One that is loving and encouraging, or one that would care less if you were there or not. Cults attract people because they know how to care. They may do it with bad intentions, but the people who are drawn are the ones the church has turned away. I hate to say this but I must. I have some relatives that are Mormon. And I can honestly say I never feel more welcomed and loved than when I go with them to their 'service'. Most of them do not buy into the doctrine, or even understand it. Just engage a 'missionary' in dialogue. Their enthusiasm comes from the acceptance and care they have there. Their passion to give up two years of their lives to peddle bicycles and get doors slammed in their face is because their church is a family, and they are willing to do that for their family. Why cannot ours be that way. We have the truth, they don't. But a lot of people feel more comfortable there than here with us.

There is a thread in the tapestry of Scripture that when removed will cause the whole garment of God's call to tear apart. That thread is love and care. Without it a church cannot function (Galatians 5:13). For us to be a church that is poured out to the Lord and community we must be a place of love and care.

Seventh is leadership development.

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Most 'church growth experts' would place this on top of the list, and there are good reasons for it. However, you cannot have good leaders if you do not have the previous characteristics powering them. After all who wants leaders who leave out any of them, do you want leaders who do not love and care? Surprisingly enough it seems a lot of churches do, as they fill the seats of leadership because who they are in society instead of who they are in Christ. I already have a full chapter on leadership, so I won't go into again.

What is important to know is that being a leader is the ability to lead. It is not a personality or a position. Remember the story of Saul and David. Saul looked like a leader, but he failed every test and opportunity to be a leader. David was a little scrawny shepherd boy, the last of the least to ever be considered a leader, yet he became one of the greatest leaders of all time. David was after God's heart, Saul was after power.

I must warn you that authentic leaders are rare in society and nearly absent in the church. Our radical 60's produced a generation of anything goes, and that has entered the oval office and even in some deacons meetings. When a real leader rises up the in in-power leaders will quickly put them down. Real leadership is a dangerous threat to most people in power. They see it as a threat and not the opportunity to be all that Christ has for us. When you are a pretender and the real one shows up, what does that make you? So how do you know? Just keep Saul and David in mind. Do the leaders seek power or God's heart? Do they seek the best for the bride of Christ or do they seek complacency, and misdirected action.

The other great aspect of effective leadership is that the people/congregation need to recognize authentic leadership. This is essential. If the men who came to David at Ziklag (I Chronicles 12) did not do so, David would not have been king. These men recognized that David was the anointed one of God and not Saul, so they switched sides, not just a few 'mighty men', but over 120,000 warriors dedicated to their God and their anointed king. The church must be able to see who is the real leader, and not allow pretenders in their mist. The real leader cannot function when the people refuse to see beyond the Saul, beyond there perceptions and experience, to who the Lord has sent.

This must also be training and releasing lay people to be the feet of the ministry. Leaders must be able to reproduced and replicate themselves. Thus, people in the church need to be trained and disciple to be leaders. A good idea is to have each leader in the church from elder to small group leader, to Sunday school teacher have a disciple that they are training. And all being trained be good resources and people. As the church grows, and as leaders stand down, others are in the pool ready for action. If the class gets to big then there is a teacher ready to go who then takes a person to disciple and so forth.

Eight is outreach and missions.

"Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God." (Psalm 90:1-2)

Is this the passion and the message you bring. It is supposed to be. Evangelism is the willingness and the action of taking our love of God, and God's love for us to others, wherever they are. We are to proclaim Christ as the Creator and Redeemer of the world.

The church must function from the precepts of I Peter 3:15, to always be ready to give a defense for the hope that we have. So do we? We cannot not allow peoples objections and offense to stop us. We cannot allow our fear to paralyze us from the call and opportunities that lay at our feet. This is simply a must, which we are infatigably called. We have no excuse to not evangelize. We cannot hide behind that I do not have that spiritual gift. We cannot hide behind we do not have the resources. We cannot hide behind our comfort. He calls us all for this task regardless of gift or ability or position. And if you are death, mute, paralyzed and dirt poor you still have the greatest gift to offer that the most richest and complacent person may not have, that is Christ.

We are not responsible for the results, we are responsible is to overcome our fears and our objection and respond to our Lord's imperative. We must be able to see the potential and call that Christ has given us. We must see that the world does not know Him, our neighbors may not know Him, the people next door to the church may not know Him. And people all around the world do not know Him. It is our task to patiently, tactfully, lovingly and with caring compassion show who our Lord is and what He has already done for them. We have to see evangelism as a privilege and not a duty or chore. Our Love for God first loving us should be flowing over to those around us.

We cannot hide behind our theology thinking and saying if God is purely sovereign, then we do not need to evangelize. Because they will come if He wills it. What is missing is through God's sovereignty is we are the means He chose to use to further His gospel. God does not need us nor does He have to use us, yet He chooses to use us. God works through the gospel message, through His Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. The power is not us, it is Him. We are merely responding to His service.

When the church leadership realizes the privilege and call, it should then mobilize itself to accomplish this task. There are a lot of good books out there to tell you how to accomplish this. I have a few ideas in the last chapter under "Strategy for Reaching Out". It is my prerogative to show you how important it is for a healthy church. I read a survey recently that said that 95% of Christians never have lead another person to Christ. And my experience in church growth consulting I have observed very few churches doing evangelism. A lot of churches have committees and even provide funds to mission organizations, and some send out missionaries, but actually doing evangelism is extremely rare. This should be an outrage to you! Because our Lord's last and most fervent command was for us to go and make disciples, yet it is always on the back burner. It must be the banquet we do to invite others to His feast.

Ninth is powered vision.

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for." (Hebrews 11:1-2)

This verse is about empowering vision as well as faith. Because true vision has the foundation of faith before it can be operational. It is the ability to see the potential, the gift that God has given. You need to see it played out in your life first by your

growing faith. So you know its reality and power. Faith gives us the vision to see the path God has for us long before we get there or move others in that direction. Vision is also the preparation that we do as leaders in our walk with God, so we can lead others where they have not been but we have.

This characteristic functions like leadership. In that you need the rest of the characteristics to be in place and functioning before vision can be effective. Most church growth people place this on top. And for the most part they are correct, you have to know where you are going to lead others there. This is the classic case of the chicken or the egg, and who was or in our case, which should go first. But you also have to know why you are going, so that is why it is ninth.

What I mean by powered vision is that vision and the core values of the church must be powered by our Lord. They cannot just come from a book or seminar or parrot what another church is doing. You have to be surrendered to what God is calling your church to do and be. The visionary leader will be able to see what is wrong and where we need to go and do to fix it and grow. Even in the mist of chaos and strife, there is the hope of our Lord that needs to be communicated. A plan needs to be formed and people need to be challenged. We need to be passionate about getting there yet be able to be still (Psalm 46:10) and allow God to work in His time. It is a balance.

Vision and leadership takes the people beyond what they can see, it take them out of their comfort zone into His zone. It is more than just hanging in there. As the Congregation and leaders grow beyond endurance into perseverance. Perseverance is the steadfast assurance that God is at work, were endurance is to be the “energizer bunny” and keep going and going. It is not allowing our fears and misjudgments to get in the way. It is not letting our disappointments to rob His plan away from us (Revelation 3:10). We have to have our eyes on the right thing. We have to be absolutely right before we can call others to go were they may not desire or feel comfortable. If we do not have the right plan, such that it is based on our hope and not upon His hope, we will make a bigger mess that what we had before. True vision has the Hope of our Lord, that where we are going is going to happen in His time. It is not just our effort, but for which Christ stood for, His character.

When we try to push a church forward to our thinking and direction we may miss out on what God really had for us. We miss the true opportunities and wonder, because we placed our interests over His. We may do it sincerely thinking we just want to attract more people and grow His church. Or we may do it with ulterior motives to fulfill our egos. The bottom line is that we need to go in His powered direction and nowhere else. It will be best for your philosophy of ministry to consider the needs of you community, and how best to reach them.

Tenth is effective stewardship.

“Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.” (Proverbs 3:9-10)

Stewardship is often associated with money and giving. This is partly true; however, true stewardship is how we care for all of the resources that the Lord bestows upon us. The resources are often considered again money and facilities. But again this is only one aspect of true stewardship. It is the care of all that God gives us and the most important asset we have is the gifts and abilities we have as a body of believers over the material things we have. Yes, we need to take careful care of money and buildings, but do not think that is all that stewardship is about.

How we treat our wallets is a sure sign on how we honor God and His church. But how do we care for the call he gives us? How do we take care of His neighborhood? How do we take care of His gifts? How do we take care of His Word?

When the church is wet with His purpose, people will be effective stewards, and as a fruit people will give willingly. When a church is dry in despair, paying the utilities will be a chore. This characteristic of giving is a fruit that comes from the knowledge that all we have is His, so we desire to take careful care of it. So all of the characteristics are considered stewardship that produces fruit.

When the leaders and congregation know what true stewardship is about, then the fruit of it will be financial giving. There should be no need for lofty sermon series on stewardship, no thermometers in the lobby, or urgent pleas from the leadership if the church is really on His path. Yes we need to pass the plate, but do it with the sense of gratitude that all we have belongs to our Lord.

There are churches that are very healthy but the people just do not have the means. Perhaps they are in a poor part of town, or have very high rent or mortgage payments. Maybe bad decisions were made and moneys were lost. There are a multitude of reasons why giving may not be making the grade. However, in most cases it is a spiritual problem that the people have not surrendered all to Him. That God has not impacted them to go beyond their needs and comfort to His service. In most cases the church if not a new start or in a poor area should have the resources to meet its staff needs, programs, facilities, and missions with extra that can bless other ministries and churches in need.

When the church has this fruit operating in abundance it is usually a sure sign that the rest of the characteristics are developing and growing to give God the glory. If the church places its focus upon the money and ignores the point of stewardship, it will fail. In the hundreds of churches I have observed, I have only seen one with a lot of giving while the rest of the characteristics were bankrupt. I guess there are always exceptions to the rules.

Eleventh is appropriate programming.

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:12-14)

This is the development of programs to house the characteristics and keep reproducing them. This is done in age appropriate programs and opportunities for people to participate in fellowship and discipleship. This is the ‘operating system’ that allow the ‘programs’ to function. Such as youth ministry, children’s ministry, prayer ministry, small groups, strategic planning task forces such as missions and evangelism. Operational ministries such as building and grounds and worship. This is not almost last because it is least important. It is eleventh because all the characteristics should be functioning so that the programs can function. Again it is the chicken and egg thing, you have to have one before the other, but which one. To develop the characteristics you must have a system to develop them, and to develop them you must have them. Confused, well that is why the power of the Holy Spirit is essential, because He gives us the ability and power to make it work, develop and to function as a community of believers.

Twelfth is replication.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

This is the willingness to give birth to other churches and spread what Christ has given you to other neighborhoods, cities and countries. It is OK to have a big mega church, but that should not be the goal. The goal we find from the book of Acts is the replication and spread of the church. They could have kept it in Jerusalem, or in Athens, or just in the main cities. But God would not allow that, it was spread everywhere, as He still calls us to do the same. When you have a significant amount of people coming to your church from a neighboring towns or locations, then send them off to be a new church. If it does not work they can come back. I’m not saying to force people out, no way, let it be an opportunity, and option to have as a core goal for your church. Do not hog the gifts and blessing for yourself, spread it out and you will receive even more blessings.

These 12 characteristics converge synergistically to form the church as our Lord called. Each one of these builds upon the other, each fueling the other, all working together to be the church. Where our real needs are met, where our gifts are used, because of the teaching, worship and prayer powering people through the work of the Holy Spirit. We are allowing our church to become as it was meant from the beginning, not allowing our prejudice and fears to get in the way. We will have a powerful force for His kingdom.

“Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” (James 5:13-16)

You may not start off the bat with each of these quintessential characteristics in your church. It will be a process to develop them, especially if you are a new church, or even an established church with the, “we have always done it this way mentality”. Be patient and strive to preserve these aspects into your personal life and the life of the pastors and leaders and the congregation. Do not know where to start? Start at the top and work your way down the list. The reason for our being a church in the first place is because of these characteristics, because they glorify our Lord. And the glorification of our Lord is the reason for our being a human, as a Christian, as a church. This is the meaning and purpose of life, to give God glory.

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God-- even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” (I Corinthians 10: 31: 11:1)

Glory is the expression of our love and gratitude, bestowing our best praise with splendor and passion. Because He first loved us. This is why we do church, and when we have this in the forefront of our thinking and heart we will do church well as God attended.

The Responsibility of Those Who Have Been Hurt

The final bottom line is that we are all responsible for our actions, from the action of the person who caused someone to leave a church and never come back to any church. And the responsibility of the person who left the church for good; who took their eyes off God and put their focus on the disease that hurt them. We who have been hurt cannot harbor our disgust and pain that we received as an excuse to leave our Savior and His church. Remember God will take you through pain and suffering, especially if you are righteous, that is what Job is all about. It is not a personal attack, but His plan of glory. We may not understand it, just as Job did not, nor did God ever tell him why. We must stay focused on who He is and who we are. The correct focus will allow us to grow and be better to be used by Him. When Job was given the opportunity to complain to God Himself, God first asked Job where he was when the universe was created. God refocused Job on who “He” is and who “he” is. That is who God is and who we are.

We cannot let bitterness to cause our focus to be on our hurt and not on God, we are robbing God from His plan. We are distorting our purpose and call while causing the very same diseases that we complain about back to ourselves and even others. When we harbor the pain and resentment we not only end up cheating ourselves but also God! Remember the section on Maturity from Chapter XI. Maturity goes both ways and involves the responsibility of all those involved in conflict to seek Him, and not themselves. Being hurt is never an excuse to not obey, living through conflict is not a license to turn our head from trusting our Lord and staying in His church. We may have to leave the church we are at, IM speaking of the church universal, but it is our responsibility to keep the faith and keep on His path.

When it comes down to it, our actions will tell volumes more than anything we can ever say, or anything we could ever know. It comes down to discipleship, if we are being discipled in the Word, then we will be modeling his character. How we are receiving our Lord, how we are, who we are in Christ, is how we are to ourselves, to each other and back to our God. What resides in us will either build the church or tear it apart in strife and conflict. Our agendas will be the vision and direction, weather it is Scripture based or self based, the vision will be the architect design to the church we build. The church the community sees and reacts to is what we make of it. Christ gives us the plans and the call, so do we do it in Him or to ourselves? The apostle Paul knew what it was like to be strong in religious convection and weak, as in I Cor 2:3. Being a person guided by our Lord, allowing Him to be our strength and our will to become weak, then He will prevail, we will prevail.

We must institute the true characteristic of leadership, forgiveness, conflict resolution, hospitality, renewal, responsibility, outreach, worship and prayer. Putting our best forward to give the Lord glory to build up our selves in Him, to build up His church, which again builds us up. We must be intercessors praying continually for people, our church, and how we can grow and be better. We need to be imitators of His character, surrendered and poured out so there is nothing of us that remains, all that we are is who we are in Christ. Then collectively we can be the church that Scripture calls us to be! A heart for our Lord will translate into a heart for His church, for His people, and even for ourselves. So our esteem is not self based but Christ based. So our church is Christ based and not self based!

We do not want churches just going through the motions, doing things out of a sense of obligation. It must be fruits of the Spirit and not work of our will. It must reflect a love bought by Christ, overflowing with a response of gratitude. If not get out of the kitchen! Get help, get spiritual counseling and renewal. Do not be in leadership, do not engage in ministry. Because we cannot do the work of the Lord, unless we are the people of the Lord!

If you are not bringing out the best in people, then get out of the Kitchen!
If you are always critical, then get out of the kitchen!
If you are not focused on Christ, then get out of the kitchen!
If you are not practicing your God given gifts, then get out of the kitchen!

If you are not in the process of growth and learning, then get out of the kitchen!
If you are not in the Word, then get out of the kitchen!
If you are not working as a team, then get out of the kitchen!
If you are not supporting the pastor, then get out of the kitchen!
If you are not learning from failure, then get out of the kitchen!
If you are not open to change that is not compromising, then get out of the kitchen!
If you are not including of others, then get out of the kitchen!
If you are not working under vision and direction from the Word, then get out of the kitchen!
If you are not working in the perimeters of faith, then get out of the kitchen!
If you are not having fun, then get out of the kitchen!
If you are not in prayer then get out of the kitchen!
The kitchen of leadership, and into the hospital of help!

Because God desires for us to have and be that Church of love and care. Where the member or visitor can come in to a haven of rest and encouragement, where they will be lifted up and taken care of. A Church that is a place where their gifts and talent are at work furthering the kingdom of Christ. A place where they are learning, growing and being challenged out of their comfort zone with excitement and wonder. A place where their hearts are poured out in worship, and there excitement is drawing in the people that they know and meet. A place that the care they receive is being transferred to others around them. So a synergistic explosion of love is permeating everyone, with a vision, focus to be our best for His service. That the power of the Spirit is living and operating in high gear, so there is no room for our own misplaced ways. Then the church will be the beacon in the community that points to the love and grace of our Lord. Yes there are Churches out there like that, I have had the honor of serving in them, but unfortunately they are the exception and not the rule. They are the few, when they must be the many. Let us change the way we are and how we are so we can be our best for our Lord's glory!

But, there is a very positive aspect to the church, there are a lot of things we do right, we just need to come to the point in our Christian walk were we have been totally surrendered to God's will and forsaken our own will and desires.

Just look at our 'staying power', what business today will be around in two thousand years? What institution has endured such transitions and tribulations and keeps moving ahead? The church has incredible staying power, a testament to the fact God is still using us in His continually unfolding plan. If God was not using us, we would have folded over a millennia ago. Scientists and even theologians in the late 19th century predicted the demise of the church by the beginning of the 20th century. Saying the church will not stand against sound reason and science, yet we did, we flourished and we are the sound reason. By the way most scientific theories of the 19th century have been disproved, the church has the staying power. I do not believe we need to worry about saving the church, God will do that. All we have to do is be obedient to His

purpose and be committed to holiness, and our staying power will continue until He returns.

Epilog

The church has been very influential in the missions' movement overseas, from spreading the Word to feeding the hungry. The church has been calling people off their rears into political advocacy, where once the church was strong has advocated unlit recently. Some churches is been getting into the inner cites were most churches have closed their doors, others have went in with the gospel in a void of the absence for many years. They are running youth and tutoring programs, painting murals, feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless. The church has been going into the prisons and hospitals with the care of Christ and the message of hope, reconciliation and love. The church has been putting on youth rallies, crusades and conventions, training it's people to better serve the Lord. Youth ministry, children's ministry, elderly ministry, marriage workshops, Bible studies, evangelism, outreach, men's groups, women's groups, political action, sports outreach, building homes for the underprivileged, rescuing the unborn, and the list goes on and on!

The church is doing a lot right! Even through our diseases and self directed desires, God is still using us. The marvelous fact is in spite of our failures and strife, God still chooses to use us. In fact there has never been a religion, country or institution that has done more for people on earth than the church. The church is the message of hope and assurance, of love and forgiveness that brings the transforming power of the gospel for millions, the place of worship and comfort. But there is so much more we can do and so much better in doing it. The Lord chooses to use us, we must chose Him and allow Him to do just that!

We are called to a higher purpose. We are not called to ourselves. Ministry is a dangerous thing because we are before a Holy God. Yes we have grace, but we have responsibility too! Remember churches fail because we place our needs and desires over the Lord's. It is His church and we are His people. Let our focus be on the right target, that is His and not ours!

Go with the power of the Holy Spirit and make the Church as you have been called to do!

Chapter XV Preparing the Pastor and Church Leadership to Grow! A Primer Designed For Use In Leadership Training.

This Primer will direct you through the basics of how to prepare your church for growth, and to be your best for His glory. You may use this personally, to train your leaders, or use with your people to reveal Biblical precepts and ideas on how to run your church effectively. It could also be used for a Leadership Training Retreat.

The goal is to find the heart of the church, what has God called us to do and why! This includes the focus of our purpose and direction, things to avoid, and methods to make it work. This Primer is not necessarily about numerical church growth, but growth in the faith, and growth in Christ, leading to the prime directive for church, which is to worship Christ! When a church becomes strong in the disciplines of the faith and is contagious with Christ, then people will be attracted to that church. The result will be real growth and glory to our Lord.

The church does not exist in and for itself. It is the vehicle to lead and manage the people of God through discipleship, evangelism, missions, spiritual growth, and other programs all pointed to His glory and worship. The quintessential reason for the church to exist is to worship God. Worship is not just to be done during the Worship Service, but is to be a lifestyle. In other words, when we worship (as a lifestyle as opposed to just a gathering for a service) and are obedient to Christ, we will be demonstrating His love and character in how we relate to others. This will be the hallmark of our churches to be attractive for visitors and keep the people we have. This will also be the characteristic for both spiritual and numerical growth! The church provides the means of growth in teaching His direction for worship. Thus, all we do, all we are, must move people toward worship. What often happens is we become so caught up in programs, we forget why the programs are there. If you are the Senior Pastor, the Elder, or the Youth Pastor, you need to ask yourself, "What is the focus of this ministry? Is it toward worship, or is it to function in and of itself?"

This tutorial is primarily for the Pastor and leadership of the church. A suggestion is that a retreat be scheduled with the Leadership Team, using this study and one-third of the time spent in prayer! Give your team an opportunity to read this Primer and pray over it first. Then, come together at a time where there are no other distractions, and go through this primer, keeping the focus on how Christ is working and what He is calling you to learn and do. Once this has been worked through with prayer, study, and discussion, the Pastor and/or church leaders can make the study available to the rest of the church. Remember, you cannot lead where you have not been!

Principle Scriptures: Leviticus 27:30; Psalm 34:3; 122:1; Proverbs 11:27; Isaiah 23:3; Matthew 22:36-40; 28: 19-20; Luke 14:23; John 10:10; 15; 17:1-26; Acts 1:8; 2:1-47; Romans 5:19; 12; 15: 5-7; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 16:2; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Ephesians 2:19;

4:1-16; 29; Philippians 1:3-7; 27; 2:20-21; 3:1-16; Hebrews 10:25; 13:17; 2 Thessalonians 1: 2-4; James 1:8; 1 Peter 1:22; 4:10.

Opening Message: Our Faith Is the Most Important Item We Offer

This statement is “a must” to know and yield to, before you can venture into the arena of “authentic church growth.” You have to know whom you are and what you are in order to do what you are called to do. In other words, you are saved by faith because of what Christ has done, then, you are able to communicate that to others around you. All that we are, and have to offer, is faith. It is faith that will build the church and will be the catalyst to attract others to it. Faith is the prototypical aspect of growing a church God’s way.

God’s Word tells us in the book of John the incredible wonder and power of the Incarnation. God Himself became one of us. The Creator of the universe, who transcends space, time, all that ever was, is, and will be, loved us enough to give up His throne and position to become human. No mere illustration could ever come close to explaining this truth. Even saying that the President of the United States would give up his position to become a toilet scrubber at a bus station would never, ever come close, yet God did exactly that. God sought entrance into the lives of mankind for His wonder: *“The Word became flesh...”*

To illustrate this point, a group of elderly people came together in a rest home, each one disillusioned, angry and bitter from a life of hash trials and tribulations. They each said God has no idea what they went through. One Man who was particularly angry with God suggested they hold a mock trial and put God on trial for all the unfairness that they went through in life! The rest of them agree to this, and one by one they each listed their grievances against the Almighty God. First was a man who was a holocaust survivor from a Nazi concentration camp. He suffered mercilessly for no reason. He was angry and cried out in anguish and said, God you do not know what I have been through! The second was another man who worked so hard with honesty and virtue all of his life only to be ridiculed and disrespected. The third was a women who worked so hard too all of her life to raise her children and give them all that she could only to have her beloved children become selfish and lock her away and do not even visit her. Then another man came in who saw all of the commotion and jumped in with his grievance. He said that he was in politics; he worked hard and was honest and rose in power only to be kicked out of office and desecrated by malevolent political rivals who planted false incriminating information about him to the press. Finally there was a former pastor who served his parish all of his adult life only to see his flock gossip and slander one another and treat his earnest Biblical counseling and messages with contempt. Then their was silence as the pastor realized what all that the others have said and he knew that is exactly what Christ did for me. Then he turned to the others in tears and said to them, that is what Christ did for you.

Our Lord seeks us to be His “change agents,” the presenters of the *wonder* of His message, His Gospel. The people of the church are the front lines that wage not just

the battle, but also the marketing of the message. How we engage in this endeavor will be the biggest testimony for the message of faith. This is where “the rubber meets the road.” The local church is the display case that presents the marvelous *wonder* of Christ’s love through faith. If the display case is dirty, the *Wonder* is hard to see. If the case is broken, or if there are other things occupying the *Wonder’s* space, the *Wonder* becomes cloaked and the viewer’s perspective becomes skewed. The message is the eternal truths of our Lord, the reality of life, and the purpose of existence. The *Wonder* is Christ Himself desiring to live and work in our church and us! The *Wonder* is the Christ who suffered mercilessly, who went through false accusations, sufferings and rejection, not because He was forced too, but because He chose too on our behalf.

How do the people of the church, the visitors and the neighborhood, see your case (church)? How are you displaying the *wonder* of His message? How does God see His *wonder* in you? Is there stagnation, a case (church) that is filthy, where junk, such as pride and political agendas, sit in the place of the *Wonder*, and where the people cannot see the message, so the message does not go out? On the other hand, is the case (church) clean and crisp, a display that lifts up, honors, and cherishes His most precious *wonder*? The message must be lit with vibrant and growing awe because of who He is. The *Wonder* is a living message that must be displayed and used in a living and vibrant body. It sees Christ as who He is, and then responds in gratitude and passion.

- **Spend a significant amount of time in prayer. (For prayer ideas and plans see our Prayer channel!)**

Session 1. Displaying the *Wonder* of Faith

1. How have you been transformed by His *wonder* (such as grace, faith, Holy Spirit)?
2. Is your faith the most important item that you share?
3. Do you know how to lead yourself and others to bring the church deeper in the heart of God to worship and glorify Him?

We need to be willing to discover what weaknesses are within us, keeping us from being in and responding to His glory.

4. How do you offer your faith?

The people of the world need the *wonder* of the message. They have to see it displayed, working, and real before they can accept it. How your church engages in this display will determine its faith and its expectance of the faith. It must be real and authentic; Christ has to be formed in you, and growing with passion, conviction, and wonder.

5. Does your church model the message that it teaches? Do you live the walk and not just talk the talk? Do you practice what you preach?

Concern for the people in your midst will usually determine your love for the Lord. Because we love Him, we desire to serve Him. Our service does not earn us our salvation; it is a response to what He did for us, and the rewards to come in eternity.

6. What burns within you and your church? What is your desire?
7. Does concern burn in your heart for the people in your church and neighborhood?
8. Why? If not, what is in the way?
9. Read Matthew 16:26. How does this apply to your church and its collective desires?
10. Read Luke 5: 4-11. Do you fish? Do you try to fish without casting a line?

We may have the desire to model the *Wonder of Christ*, but doing is more than just desiring. We have to realize that God loves us so much He would have gone to the cross for just one of us. Should we not have a mere fraction of that love flowing from us to those around us? Should we not have just a small fraction of that love for His “other” people?

11. Read Luke 13: 3-9. What needs to be dug around or out of you and your church?
12. Read Luke 14: 11-31. Whom do you invite?

A church cannot, must not, seek a limited “target.” This is unbiblical! We can emphasize age groups and seasons of life such as youth, older singles, etc., but we must never exclude people, saying we are not targeting them. (I once consulted a “Dutch” church that would only target other Dutch people, and refused to honor Scripture and the call of our Lord. That church was dead.) When we exclude the people we do not like, we are excluding our Lord! We do the same when we focus on a specific target and exclude those not in the target. You can focus on targets such as Gen X, but when the neighbors start attending and they are older, of a different ethnicity, or of a different social economic status, you cannot, must not, swish them away like a stray cat.

13. Read Luke 14: 15-23. Do you set up the banquet tables, only to forget to send out the invitations?

Numbers are not the focus of the church; trust and obedience is. However, numbers are important because people are important. Our passion to grow our church must not depend on the increased numbers we may receive, but rather on the love, care, and discipleship of the people He brings us.

14. Read Luke 15: 8-10. Do you look for the coin?

Sometimes we will not find the coin. Finding is the goal, but the purpose is to obey the One who sends us. Our seeking and looking are what matter. We are responsible for the effort, but not for the results. We are called to be creative, compassionate, and courageous to the people God brings us. We need to be creative and innovative with Evangelism. However, it is not enough to just do it; we have to know why. We need to be our best for His glory, to be the best display and model of His character as we can be. It is not enough to pass out tracts and invite people to crusades; we have to pour out our hearts to His glory. We have to literally seek out the hurt, the lonely, and the lost to find ways to care for them. We need to have the acceptance of the people we do not consider a part of us to become a part of our family. Evangelism does not always bear fruit, so, sometimes we give up and say it is too time consuming and expensive. Nevertheless, take careful note of this; *it is our call to evangelize even if there are no results*. It is His call to present Christ, not to achieve results. Remember Jeremiah was perhaps the most unsuccessful person in the Bible, yet one of the most obedient! Would he last more than six months on staff at your church?

15. Read Matthew 9:36-38. Is your church willing to step up to the plate to be the laborers?

16. Read Matthew 10:14. We need to know that we are not responsible for the results; we are just responsible to obey and to do!

17. Read Matthew 13: 3-9. Do you sow? Do you reap? If so, how? How can this be improved?

In the church growth world, numbers are everything. However, in Scripture, numbers are not everything. Our obedience and willingness to serve, and our reaching out are the important things. We are never to focus on the quantity over the quality. **We are not to reach out merely for the sake of gathering and storing more sheep. We are to reach out to grow and mature more sheep, to love, care, and teach those sheep.**

18. Read Matthew 18: 11-14. Do you 'ditch' your sheep?

It is God's Will that our churches be alive and vibrant. When the church refuses to honor its call and becomes stagnate, it slaps the Lord who loves it. The local church must have the passion, vitality, and excitement to be the displayers of the *Wonder*. We are not to ditch the sheep! We are not to be a tree that does not bring forth fruit. We are not to proclaim our Lord without responding to Him. We are not to forget to be harvesters and reapers. We need to look for the coin, set the banquet table, and invite the guests. We are to dig out the rot that is in the way in our lives. We are to be fishers and casters for His *wonder*. We are to have a heart and a desire that burns to serve Him. Our hearts and desires must burn for the lost; what grieves

Christ should also grieve us. We are to be transformed by His *wonder* so that our faith is the most important thing we share. Then we can do it with love and passion because we are walking the walk, and living the faith.

19. Read Acts 4:1-20

Remember we are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Through Him we can be all that we are called to be!

If you desire revival to take place in your church:

- a. What would it look like?
- b. What must you do?
- c. What must happen first?

How much time must be spent in prayer?

Session 2. Determine the Needs of the Church

This is where you do an honest assessment of what is needed in your church, whether it is spiritual growth, programs, facility improvements, leadership training, discipleship, or teaching....

1. What is the principle purpose and reason for your church to exist?
2. What are the needs in the church? Try to list 20. Include such things as discipleship training, fourth grade Sunday School class, etc.
3. Now rate the importance of each of those needs, keeping in mind Biblical priorities over personal ones!
4. What are the demographics of your congregation, such as age, education, social and cultural makeup, etc.?
5. Now take a careful look at the various ministries of your church, even if they are not yet started. Ask what the needs are for each one. You can use our list below or simplify it into four categories:
 1. Worship Services, including teaching and prayer
 2. Fellowship and Pastoral Care
 3. Discipleship and Sunday School classes
 4. Evangelism and Missions.Here is a list of most of the main ministries. Add your needs as God directs.
 - a. Prayer
 - b. Doctrine
 - c. Worship
 - d. Teaching

- e. Discipleship
- f. Bible studies
- g. Leadership training
- h. Fellowship
- i. Missions
- j. Community relationships
- k. Staff encouragement and development
- l. Outreach
- m. Youth Ministry
- n. Children's ministries
- o. Singles
- p. Married couples
- q. Elderly ministry
- r. Sports
- s. Internet
- t. Administration

6. What programs are already in place? Which ones are needed? Which ones are strong? Which ones are weak?
7. What are the top five programs? Do not neglect the others if they are real and Biblical!
8. If these ideas were implemented, how would the church look, and how would it be benefited?
9. What would happen if these ideas were not implemented?
10. Brainstorm how you can meet the needs! Determine the type of programs that can meet those needs.

How much time was spent in prayer?

Session 3. Determining Needs Of the Community Around the Church

1. Determine the demographic makeup of your neighborhood (age, education, social and cultural makeup), and what you need to do to reach them. Are you in a city, countryside...?
2. What do you think God placed your church in this neighborhood to do? (Most church growth people say to move your church to your people, but this is not Biblical, unless there are compelling reasons. The church is to be where God called it to be, to reach the people in its vicinity. If the neighborhood has changed and people are commuting, then plant another church to reach them before you move out. Ideally, it is better to stay and minister. Most church moves have been a disaster to the

neighborhood from which they moved, because rarely does another *successful* church move in!)

3. Why would people in your neighborhood seek to be involved in your church?
4. When you came to the church, how did you feel? What needs were met for you? Would you come as a visitor, and become involved if you were not already a part of this church? Why, or why not?
5. What are the needs in your community? Try to list 20, including daycare, loneliness, etc.
6. Rate the importance of each of those needs, keeping in mind Biblical priorities over personal ones!
7. If these ideas were implemented, how would the church look, and how would it be benefited?
8. What would happen if these ideas were not implemented?
9. Brainstorm what needs are evident and how you can meet them! Determine the type of programs that can meet those needs.
10. How can your leadership and church direct others in order to bring them deeper in the heart of God to worship and glorify Him?

How much time was spent in prayer?

Session 4. Determining the Purpose of Your Church

We have explored some of the basics of what God is calling the church to do. Now we need to study the Scriptures and immerse ourselves in prayer to determine the purpose of our church, what our point is in being and existing. This will clarify what we do, why we do it, who we are in Christ, and His call for us.

The *purpose* of the church is God's purpose, not personal whims, or desires! That purpose will be revealed solely through Scripture and prayer. The core of your purpose will be what Christ has called all churches to as found in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission in Matt 22:36-40; 28: 19-20! These two imperatives contain our relationship to God and one other, what ministry is, that evangelism is a priority; incorporating and discipling the people God brings us. In addition, look for other Scriptural precepts for your call.

Your purpose will be the unique way, your identity, and style, in which you proceed. This will convey the passion of the Gospel and the love for the people in your distinctive "style." Objectify the point and direction of your ministry through understanding God's

call, challenging yourself, and being creative with a *Purpose Statement*. This can be a simple slogan from Scripture, an acronym, a set of priorities, or an all-encompassing action plan. Try to keep it short and to the point. You need to know and be able to communicate this clearly to the congregation.

1. What is the principle purpose and reason for your church to exist?
2. Ask yourself, each leader, and each member this question: “What do you see as the purpose of this church?” Take into account the last three steps! “Why do we exist, and why are we needed?” Spend a significant amount of time seeking input from each person, and praying. (You may use our survey forms or ask people individually).
3. Does the average person in your church understand the purpose for which your church exists?
4. Does your congregation understand the general purpose of the church in light of God’s call?
5. While serving on staff of two churches that have been faithfully serving the Lord for generations, I saw one church celebrate its hundredth anniversary, and the other 125 years of existence. How will your church be remembered 100 years from now?
6. What makes your church unique?
7. What makes your church attract or not attract visitors?
8. Why should the congregation be active in the life of your church?
9. Why should the community come and become members of your church?
10. What programs do you have or have you had that have been successful, that people in the church and neighborhood liked?
11. Do people in your church want others from the neighborhood to come in and be a part of their family?
12. If not, what growth and teaching needs to take place to prepare them?
13. Read the following passages and see which one(s) applies to your niche, style, and purpose. Which Scripture could be your *Position Statement*? You can go over them all at once and list some basic observations, and then one by one carefully, through prayer, seek the one that best fits you, or that God has given you. Also, consider other passages that God gives you.
 - a. Matthew 16:18
 - b. Matthew 28:19

- c. Mark 12:29-31
 - d. Acts 1:8
 - e. Acts 2:42-47
 - f. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4
 - g. Galatians 2
 - h. Ephesians 2:1-9
 - i. Ephesians 4:11-16
 - j. Philippians 3
 - k. Colossians 3:12-16
 - l. Colossians 4:5-6
 - m. Hebrews 10:24-25
 - n. 1 Peter 2:1-5; 9-12
- What others can you list?

14. Now, consider your response to the previous questions together with what you learned from the Scriptures. What do you think our Lord wants your position statement to say? What is He revealing to you?
- a. Write a simple paragraph with a key sentence containing what God is saying to describe your church.
 - b. What do you consider success? What does God consider success?

15. Take a careful look at the various ministries of your church, even if they are not engaged. Ask what is distinctive and unique about them. Include:
- a. Prayer
 - b. Doctrine
 - c. Worship
 - d. Teaching
 - e. Discipleship
 - f. Fellowship
 - g. Missions
 - h. Community relationships
 - i. Staff
 - j. Outreach
 - k. Youth Ministry
 - l. Children's Ministry
 - m. Singles
 - n. Married couples
 - o. Elderly ministry
 - p. Sports
 - q. Internet
 - r. Administration
- Which ones are strong programs? Which ones are weak?

16. Fine-tune your *Purpose Statement*. Make sure that it is Biblical and has your style, philosophy, and unique family personality. Keep it simple so people can remember it.

17. Can you list a series of statements or write a summery paragraph?
18. Expand your statement into a *Mission Statement*, which contains your *purpose statement* with added detail and specifics. Keep it to one page if possible. For larger churches, more pages may be needed.
19. Remember **worship!** You must know how to lead the church deeper in the heart of God to worship and glorify Him!

Remember to pray a lot. You are creating a philosophy of ministry that will be a template for how and why you do ministry. This will keep the focus on the main thing, and hone your energies to the target needs. This focuses the energies of the church to what God has called them to do, so that they do not find other things to occupy them, such as the diseases that corrupt and destroy.

How much time was spent in prayer?

Session 5 How to Develop and Cast your Vision

A *vision* is the comprehensive statement that tells the leaders of the organization what direction they should move, and what they should accomplish so they can motivate the people under them. The church should be and strive toward a *preferred future*, not just to a dream!

People often ask if the vision comes first or if the purpose of the church is determined and the vision honed from it. Both can, and should be done. With the above precepts in mind, can you say in a sentence or two to what God is calling you, or at least the direction He has for you? If so, great! That may be your vision. If not, great too, because then you have to take your blank idea or your fined tuned idea through this process to see if it is just and true. Take those thoughts and go through the process to hone and confirm or to change and rethink until you are certain you are going in the right God-directed path! As leaders, you must be firmly convinced before you can sell it to others!

The Vision takes the purpose and mission of the church and refines it to a simple statement that acts as a guide or slogan for your church. During the Reformation, there were several key phrases that were, and still are Visions such as "Grace Alone," "Scriptures Alone," "Christ Alone," and "Glory to God Alone." Churches today need more than just a word or two. Those words of the Reformation did not stand by themselves; they hooked together as an all-encompassing phrase that captured the richer, fuller meaning they represented. Then they galvanized and motivated the people in the proper direction for the church to go. Vision gives the motivation and the momentum for the equipping ministry of the church. Vision is essential, not because of its captivating aspects, but for what those aspects do, which is to motivate and direct. Then people can be headed in the right direction for God's glory and purpose. Why is

this is necessary and essential? Because, if you are planning to lead a church, you must know the direction in which you are going!

Ideas in writing your Vision:

- Read Nehemiah 1:11; 2:1-18; 4:1-8; 6:15-16! Notice how Nehemiah's Vision begins, develops, includes, and then how it involves others for clarification and confirmation! How does Nehemiah's Vision compare with yours? What do you need to work on?
- Make sure you have a good grasp on the precepts and principles of Scripture.
- A Vision cannot be written from your will, but only from His! The Vision must be God's!
- Remember sin, and our sinful nature and that Salvation is solely by what Christ did on the cross!
- The Vision needs to be simple, yet concise, and fewer than 100 words, so it can be remembered and followed!
- Vision propels us to move where God is taking us.
- Do your homework. Observe, diagnose, ask good questions, know your church, and know where God wants you through studying His Word. This is an exhausting process! Your Vision needs to be well researched, thought through, and prayed about. You may not be able to finish it at a retreat; it may take months!
- Vision is a realization of and a reaction to the working of God!
- Vision requires us to stretch, learn, and change, and even more stretch by the church to learn new skills and to do things out of their comfort zone.
- Vision requires you to be a risk taker and have more faith! You may receive criticism from other well meaning Christians, leaders, and denominational officials. Listen and educate them on the Biblical precepts and your process.
- Do not just copy your Vision from another church. You, the leaders, and then the church must go through the honing process. The Vision must fit your church and neighbourhood. This makes every Vision unique in character, even though the words and principles may be similar.
- Churches that are being planted or are stagnant and need revitalizing must have a new Vision to take them to a new season.
- One of the top 10 healthy and influential churches in the world, that sends more missionaries (over 200, not including short term and part timers) than most

denominations, has this simple Vision: *“We are followers of Jesus Christ, ministers together, empowered by the Holy Spirit and guided by God's Word.”* And their value statement is, *“We are committed to honoring God through worship and personal lifestyle, caring for one another, equipping one another for ministry and communicating God's love to the world.”* This church (Lake Avenue Church, Pasadena, Ca) has over 6,000 members and 35 pastors following this simple decree! Remember simplicity; do not make your Vision or purpose so complicated that people cannot follow it even though it may be great stuff!

Casting that Vision:

- Casting means to empowering your congregation to accept it, live it, and serve in it!
- Preach on the passage of the Vision with power and conviction; have people give testimonies in the service on what their program or neighbourhood could look like. At the same time, do not let the Vision consume your church. Keep the focus on the care and love for the people.
- For a Vision to work, it has to be “owned” by the congregation. This is accomplished by educating them on God’s call through Scripture, your process, prayer, patience, and encouragement. Have your leaders in on the process as much as possible so they can do the field work/grass roots influencing and modelling of it, and positively present it in person, in classes, and in the services.
- Having as many people as possible contribute to the Vision process will enable the congregation in conceiving and shaping the vision. Even though it may come solely from the pastor, people need to feel it is theirs too! The input of others will help you focus, and consider the various options and needs!
- Make sure you write it out short, clear, and in vivid language so someone who has never seen it will understand it. Have people outside your church look it over for clarity. If a stranger who does not know you or your church can understand and run with it, you may have a winner!

Troubleshooting (when people resist or do not like the plans)

- What are the factors that are in your church that can inhibit the Vision? Are there power plays, political agendas, the old guard, popularity of the previous pastor/ leader, poor Biblical knowledge...? How can you solve these issues?
- What church traditions and programs should you maintain? Which should you get rid of? How will you go about it without upset? Remember, listing of and educating about the call and Biblical precepts will be your biggest ally, accompanied by prayer!
- The fear of change and the unknown can be very powerful. People will fight to hold on, and fight to let go.

- Did you inspire and motivate others to follow you?
- Build coalitions but not sides!
- Apathy and complacency will be your biggest foes!
- Make sure people feel they are a part of the process! A vision cannot just pop out of a pastor's office on Monday and be active on Sunday!
- Are you and the leaders perceived as modelling the Vision for others? You have to *walk the walk*, not just *talk the talk*!
- A lot of churches have done their Vision process incorrectly, or poorly, or have it on their wall but not on their hands and feet. You may have members who came from those churches. They, too, need to be reassured!
- Settle any ongoing conflicts quickly and completely. New changes will only temporarily halt the strife, and if not taken care of, it will rise up again!
- How did you challenge the system? Did you ask the right questions without causing additional unneeded conflict? If not, you need to go to people and apologize for not listening all the way, then listen and be able to answer feedback positively.
- Do not over sell it. Allow people to process the new Vision or any change you may make! Allow them to see what you see; the big picture is of a better future and church! Spend the time in listening, building relationships, and trust, especially if the pastor or the leadership is new! Reassure them, it is not as bad as it seems; we can be better!
- Do not overwork your leadership or cause your people to "burn out." Take your time, and do not rush through change. What can be rushed through in six months will not be as impacting as a process spanning over two years! Each congregation is different. Some can handle, and even desire fast change, but most will not!
- Prayer, and the atmosphere that goes with it, are the key to balancing problems and mindsets. Build you methods and strategies with Spiritual power! Teach your leaders, and then your congregation what it means to have extraordinary prayer, how to do it, and how to live it!
- Did you take time to encourage, recognize, reward, and celebrate your leaders and congregation?

How God Tends To Lead Today:

1. **God leads through the precepts and principles of His Word!** (Psalm 119, emphasis on vs. 66 & 105). Precepts are statements that are imperatives, such as commands, (Mark 12:28-31) and passages that are clearly His Will (Gal. 5). Principles are general concepts in context such as character that requires us to make a determination. Think through how to apply them through prayer, wisdom, decrement, growth, and maturity (Sermon on the Mount).
2. **God leads us through the power and prompting of the Holy Spirit.** This will never countermand the Bible! Through our walk with Christ by His Word, prayer, devotions, disciplines, and the teaching of others, we will receive prompting to move us in a certain direction (Psalm 32:8; Philippians 2:12-14).
3. **God leads us through wise counsel of others.** This too will never countermand Scripture, or the Spirit's leading. It will test us to make sure we hear the Spirit correctly, and are on the right tract (Proverbs 15:22; 27:9; 1 Timothy 5). We are to pray and think through issues, considering all options in making a decision. Make sure the people to whom you are listening are walking in His way (Chronicles 25:16; Psalm 1:1)!

When we achieve following all three of these, we need to take a step of faith (Hebrews 11:6). As if we are at a nexus, or fork in the road, we have to choose a path and then go. To follow God, we have to know Him intimately, believe in Him, trust in Him, and then react and do what He says within the character of Christ. Remember, faith is belief, trust, and action synergistically combined. Faith requires us to react. Unsure? God also leads us by giving us peace about our decision. If you do not feel right about it, it is probably the wrong decision or direction (Colossians 3:15). (See our articles on **God's Will**)

Begin Writing Your Complete Purpose Statement!

Your *Purpose Statement*, sometimes called a *Mission Statement* will encompass all of the precepts we talked about, arranged in a logical and systematic order. Remember, God is the One who guides us, and this *Purpose Statement* is the mechanism of communication to convey His call to you and the rest of the church. There is no right or wrong way to do this; you can tailor it to suit your situation. It can even be written as a story. Just make sure you are leading by God's direction!

Suggestions:

- Remember the shorter and more to the point it is, the better people will remember and follow it!
- Start on the top of the page with your **Vision** of no more than 100 words.
- Then move to the **Mission**, which can be a sentence slogan that summarizes the Vision.

- Write out the **Purpose** by bullet points or as a story, however you feel you can communicate it best. This is the main text, so try to keep it all on one to three pages.
- Now write out your **Core Values**. These are the essential beliefs you have. It is not your doctrinal statement, but the essence of your theology as values and virtue. Why does your church exist? Who are you, and what do you do? This can be a few words, or a page of bullet points.
- Now write out your **Goals**, and put them in a time line. “We hope by God’s grace to accomplish...” Make sure the goals are clear and quantifiable statements of how the Vision and Purpose will be accomplished.
- Now you may consider adding a **Distinctive**. This would be a statement or bullet points that say why you are different, and why people would want to come to your church. How is your church different from others in the community? Do not put down the other churches by making yours sound better. We are all the Body of Christ!
- All these statements are your expressions of your call, and reason to be and do in your church family and community. They are to define you and guide you to God’s Will and plan!
- Once you have written these things down, pray over and approve them. Make sure you have consensus in the boardroom. If not, you have more work to do. Once it is approved, make a copy available to everyone. Enthusiastically go over it in an all-church meeting, and be prepared to answer any questions and/or objections positively. Be open to criticism, as many people will not like change. Be prepared to make small baby steps if there is a lot of opposition. It is best to already have gone to key older people in your church, the previous movers and shakers, and get them behind you. If not, you will have a lot of problems!
- Then on a separate sheet of paper write out your strategies. These are the hands and feet to the Vision. What will be the resources, programs, obstructions, objectives, and costs to accomplish your vision and goals? What will be your expected results? Remember God’s timing!
- Have a plan to evaluate and adjust your *Purpose Statement*. As you begin, you will find things you may not have thought of, and you will need to fine-tune it.
- Consider how you will maintain the Vision and its “momentum” over the longer term? (By following the suggestions from *How to lead and Manage the Church*)

Session 6. Going From Purpose to Practice

Scriptures to Consider and Pray Over: Matt. 25: 31-40; 28:18-20; Acts 2:42-47; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Pet. 2:5-10

This step clarifies the steps taken to this point, and suggests strategies on how they can be implemented. Pastors and Elders can do this once a year to make sure you are still on the right track.

There is a difference between what we desire, which are our “felt needs,” and what God calls us to, which are the “ministry needs.” “Felt needs” tend to be what we need personally, such as daycare, or youth ministry. However, “felt needs” can deteriorate into just focusing on us, and not on the Lord. An example might be doing youth ministry in a certain unchanging way, unconcerned of where the real youth needs are, just doing it as you are told to or the only way you know how. Another example would be that needs could become selfish and petty (see Online Bible Study 36, Romans 14: 13-23).

Keep the Biblical principals in mind and never replace what we think we need over what He calls us to do! In order to put application to what God is calling the church is to strategize our needs as revealed after prayer and searching the Scriptures. Spend at least an hour in prayer with the leadership and pastors of the church, and then consider the following:

1. Review what you did in the previous steps. What do you think are the greatest ministry priorities “needs” for your church?
2. What are the strengths and weakness evident in your church?
3. Make a list of at least a dozen strengths and weaknesses; place them according to priority, from the most important to the least.
4. Ask, why do you believe the reasons of what you have listed is important?
5. If the needs were met, what would be the benefit and outcome?
6. There are your anticipated desires; that is what you expect. However, what would happen if the outcomes were not what you expected? Are you prepared to trust in the Lord for His results, whether or not they meet your expectations?
7. If you do not meet those needs, how will the church and the community respond? How would Christ respond if He were in the room with you? Oh, by the way, HE IS!
8. What decisions need to be made about programs that need to be encouraged, fixed, or started to implement those needs?
9. When can the decisions be made?
10. Do you have programs that are not needed, or need to be revamped?

11. Do you have programs that can be reworked to meet those needs?

Consider that for some programs, you may need help, especially if you are a church of fewer than 100, as 90% are! Do not bite off more than you can chew! Baby steps can be more effective than jumping into something you may not be able to pull off! Consider cooperating with another church for community programs, and even in youth ministry if you do not have the people and resources to do it alone. We are all part of the Body of Christ!

12. When can the programs be developed? Keep in mind if you have ones that are working, it is not necessary to fix what is not broken. However, most of the time there is room for improvement!

Set up a timetable; what you will do this month, next month, up to a year, and so forth. For your next leadership meeting, make out a five-year plan. Be flexible and willing to make changes to your changes. Also, make sure you are listening to everyone!

13. What is in the way of implementing those decisions and needs?

14. What could be done to remove those hindrances?

15. Can you now set up a specific timetable and action plan?

16. How much time has been spent in prayer? If not at least one-third of your planning time, you need to start over. Prayer is the key to God's door, and a necessary habit for the leaders!

Now, look at what you wrote for the demographics of your church and neighborhood. Does your church reflect its neighborhood? Do your people live in the neighborhood? Do they commute to the church? Is yours a community church in a suburb, where people in the neighborhood also attend? Is yours a church in the inner city where the attendees drive to from the suburbs? Are the people who live next to your church able to attend without shame, and do the members welcome them with love and care? Alternatively, is yours an exclusive club in your exclusive area?

There must be the desire not only to reach out, but also to welcome people into the family. If you do not want them in your family, do not reach out to them. If you have that philosophy (hey, it is a free county here in the US; do what you want), please take down the sign that says "church" and replace it with "club." Most people in the neighborhood will know that anyway, it just keeps the new people from wasting their time, being embarrassed, and getting a false impression of our Lord.

17. Ask what are the ministry distinctions, such as single mothers, widows, owners of businesses, students, etc.

18. Compare the two lists. Are they similar, different, a combination?
19. What do they have in common, and how are they different, such as interests, activities, occupation, etc?
20. In what areas of the church do the people need to work to be more accommodating and accepting?
21. How can you tailor the needs to be inclusive to both lists, to both groups of people?

Consult with people from those groups to determine, for example, the needs for single mothers. Ask several of them and research it so you will make the best decisions. Do not automatically assume anything; check it out! Lots of churches jump into programs and find out there was no need for them, when they could have focused on a much more needed area. People then get their feelings and hopes hurt and lose the enthusiasm to do what they should have done in the first place. Ask yourselves; do we need a daycare or just a mother daughter night out fellowship, or daily meals on wheels, or Sunday brunch after church?

22. What are the programs that can meet the needs of both groups? This will result in more interaction so that family building can develop.
23. What are the programs you currently have, and how can they be improved?
24. What are the strengths and weakness of these programs?
25. What new areas need to be developed?
26. What must happen to develop programs for specific community needs?
27. What are the spiritual development needs for both of the groups?
 - a. Where are they spiritually, in their journey to maturity in the faith?
 - b. What level of maturity can they grow to be?
 - c. What can you do to help them along the path of spiritual maturity in the areas of teaching and discipleship?

Evaluate your existing programs. How do they meet the people, bring them into the family, and help them grow in maturity and faith?

28. What programs do you now have that can benefit the neighborhood?
29. What can be done to improve them?

30. How do you measure success? Numbers are generally used as a prime indicator. Moreover, most of the time, numbers tell a lot. There are times and situations that numbers do not reflect, such as maturity of the people attending, their desire to grow and reach out, or the temperament of the community. Be discerning. Do not just look at numbers. Look at the passion and love of the leaders, their faithfulness and ability to teach and coordinate, and the situation (1 Cor. 2:9).
31. Do you have programs that are stale, that are not meeting needs and are ineffective? If so, how do you look at non-success? What do you need to do to improve them? Should they be continued, replaced, upgraded?

You have been finding the types of people in your church and community, their needs, both spiritual and felt, and how you can tailor your church personality and programs to meet them. You cannot focus on the “felt needs” and ignore the spiritual “real” needs, or visa versa. The church is called to disciple first, and to take care of the sheep!

How much time was spent in prayer?

For Further Action:

Session 7 How to Start, Develop, and Evaluate Programs

After following the process of determining needs and developing a purpose, programs need to be implemented to meet those needs. Check your denominational resources. Most have excellent materials to guide you.

Basic Guide and Checklist to Start and Develop a Program

Your main goal is to love and serve the Lord with all of your heart, mind and strength...Mark 12:30, and to influence others to do so. At the same time, you need to be effective stewards of resources, including the gifts and abilities as well as the finances and facilities of the church. (see, *How to Lead and Manage the Church*)

1. Name the program, being creative, yet sensitive to the need.
2. What is the principle target, who is it for, the reason?
3. What is the purpose of the program, who is it for, why is it needed?
4. List what the goals are to be.
5. How does the purpose and goal of this program lead the church deeper in the heart of God to worship and glorify Him?

6. Come up with a mission statement and reason for the ministry. Search the Scriptures prayerfully. This will be your main guide, and the “program parameters” for your ministry.
7. List the benefits, liabilities, and possible problems.
8. Out of the liabilities and possible problems, come up with possible objections people may have and be able to answer those objections. Use these objections to troubleshoot what you are doing. If you cannot, then maybe your program is not needed, or, it is not the right time.
9. Remove obstacles and objections. Be creative. Money does not solve all of the problems!
10. Make sure you have adequate insurance, and follow their guidelines and policies. Most insurance companies have good resources for you to use.
11. Come up with an action plan, and put it all down on paper, step by step.
12. Decide who will lead and be responsible for it.
13. Have leaders pick or assign people to assist them. They are to train and mentor them so as the program grows, the assistants become the leaders, they recruit new assistants, and so forth.
14. Establish a system for supervision of the program and its ongoing support from staff and leadership. Do not let it start and then forget about it!
15. Decide what skills and abilities will be needed to run it.
16. How many volunteers will you need?
17. What training will be needed?
18. Have a plan to train them!
19. What are the realistic financial needs versus your resources?
20. Who will supervise?
21. Provide training.
22. Supply resources.
23. Do not feel you have to reinvent the wheel. Chances are, someone else is already doing it, so find them and get to know them!

- Contact other churches in your area, even outside of your denomination and area if necessary, who are doing similar programs.
- Pick their brains for ideas.
- Ask what you need to do.
- Ask what you should avoid.
- Ask for any materials or samples they can loan you.
- Ask what and how they would go about it if they had it to do again.
- Ask what their successes and failures were.
- Ask to come and visit them and see for yourself.

24. Check your denomination for materials. If they do not have any, seek the Catholic, Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches. They have tons of great materials for starting programs. Just watch out for the theology. If in doubt, just get ideas from it. Organizations such as *Youth Specialties Group Ministries*, *David C. Cook*, *Gospel Light*, and many others have good books and materials for all age groups.

25. Outline a plan to meet the needs!

26. Write the benefits to the church and community.

27. Decide what the financial requirements will be, and make out a budget.

28. Have an accounting plan, with checks and balances. Have another person outside the program do occasional cash flow analysis for accountability.

29. Decide how the finances can be raised, or other possible sources of funds available.

30. Make sure you control your expenses and cash flow analysis. This is God's money! Keep receipts, and require two people to approve an expense, to sign a check, and so forth.

31. Develop a communication and advertising strategy to obtain congregational support and to recruit potential volunteers.

32. Make decisions and solve problems.

33. Decide how it will be evaluated.

34. Decide when you will start.

35. Decide on the facility, day and time of meeting, etc.

36. Decide how long the program will be needed.

37. What are your expectations? Keep in mind God's expectations are not the same as ours! We must be wise stewards of our Lord's people and resources!

38. If in doubt, test it. Evaluate it to show the congregation it how it can work or to discover that you did not need it.
39. Implement and manage the program!
40. When it starts, give people time to process change.
41. Evaluate it regularly for fine-tuning and course corrections.
42. Monitor the attendance and offerings each time.
43. Do not forget to celebrate your progress and encourage your people!
44. I trust you have spent at least one-third of your energies and time in prayer!

Once the program is running, plan for a year. Use your annual church calendar for your planning. It is very important to see the big picture. The leadership of the church needs to set aside a time to develop a plan several months before the budget is approved. This gives the leadership team enough time to involve people in the goal-setting and budgeting process so that they gain congregational ownership of the church's ministry plan.

Things To Consider: Effective Planning Before Major Decision Making

1. Visualize where you need to be. Pray and search the Scriptures for your answers.
2. Where are you in your journey of faith and prayer?
3. Evaluate your present spiritual condition!
4. Determine appropriate faith goals for yourself and keep one another accountable.
5. Clarify needs, and listen to as many people as you can.
6. Continue to develop and resource your leaders.
7. Encouragement and celebrating progress is very important!
8. Be willing to make mid-course corrections.
9. Do not be afraid to eliminate ineffective ministries, or revamp them.
10. Beware of pride and political agendas!

11. Once a year, review and update your program's mission statement and reason for ministry.
12. As far as the "sacred cows" go, (programs that people cling to so much they are unwilling to review or improve them) remember we are to honor the past and embrace the future! "Sacred cows" are best tipped by encouraging their founders and leaders that they can be better in a direction they may have not considered. Allow them to brainstorm and help you do the tipping. Share the vision; let them visit other programs. Never tip without help, for "cows" may come down and crush you!

Evaluating the Program

1. Does it have a purpose, a reason for being?
2. What are the needs?
3. Is it meeting those reasons and needs?
4. Does it inspire people in the church to seek the deeper heart of God in worship and to glorify Him?
5. Do not be afraid to eliminate ministries that are not needed, or ones where there is too much focus by others, and make room for what is really needed!
6. Use the same questions as above in, "Basic Guide and Checklist To Start And Develop A Program!" Evaluate it accordingly, seeking what is good and working well, and what needs improvement.
7. Make sure there are goals, and a purpose statement.
8. Did the program achieve those goals? Why or why not?
9. If no goals exist, create some and write them out.
10. What needs to be done to implement those goals?
11. Is this program necessary; should it continue?
12. Should it be modified? If so, how, and why?
13. How effective have the personnel been?
14. How can the leadership of the church better support them?
15. How can they be honored for their service?

16. How can they be encouraged and trained?
17. Do more leaders need to be recruited?
18. If so, develop a plan. Look at the church directory, go over names, and ask them to pick out the ones they feel can do the job. Then, go to those people personally, as well as advertise in the church bulletins and publications.
19. Where can they be trained? Consider denominational training, Para church ministries, books, resources, and other churches.
20. How is the budget? What are the expenses? Can they be increased, decreased, or alternatives be found? Is accurate accounting of the finances being done? Can that be improved, increased, decreased if there is a surplus? If other needs exist but are not being addressed, can the funds be transferred or visa versa?
21. How do the people in the church/ community know about and view the program?
22. What needs to be done to get the word out more?
23. What are the program needs and resources that can improve things? Keep in mind all programs require a plan, time, energy, and money, people to lead, and space in which to do it. Do not just throw money at something. Have a plan and a purpose first!
24. How are the facilities? Remember, people need to be comfortable! If it is too hot or too cold, people will not come. When they do come, they will not learn. Is adequate parking available? Do the people and participants feel at home? Ask a few of the participants for feedback or send out a survey.
25. Map out the successes and failures during the past year. If no evaluation has been done before, go back five years, regardless of leadership changes.
26. Do not put people down, rather use this time to lift up and encourage! Make it a comfortable time. Be open, listen, support the program, and encourage the people being evaluated to do the same. Condescending attitudes of the leadership will cause more destruction than not having a program at all!
27. Brainstorm ideas for changes. Be honest and do not feel you have to make changes if nothing is wrong. If it works, do not fix it! Investigate small things that can be done to make improvements. If it is in shambles, at worst, you may have to start over. At best, it might just need some encouragement! It is easier to sew a patch on than buy a new coat!
28. List the steps toward achieving the goals you came up with.

How much time was spent in prayer?

Chapter XVI A Primer on How to Lead and Manage the Church

Biblical Principles Of God's Call to Manage His Flock

The goal of this Primer is to lay forth to you suggestions from God's Word and from my own experience on how to effectively run a church. These are based on many years of research and study and observing the top 100+ churches in the world as well as personal church growth consulting and pastoral experience. A general overview will be given, followed by a step-by-step plan on how to effectively organize for His glory. Although church growth is the goal, this Primer is not based on traditional *church growth* jargon, even though some of the principles are applied. After years of teaching traditional church growth methodologies, the Word brought me to my senses and face-to-face with what is revealed there. The Scriptural precepts, what works, and how to best manage your church according to His Word will be the basis of this Primer, not the following of the latest trends!

This Primer is for a new church plant, an old church that needs revitalizing, a new pastor, or a seasoned *pro*. These principles may be new or they may just have been forgotten, so you may need some refreshing. Before using this Primer, please read the following articles to see what we are called to do and be as a church. This is necessary before any attempt at edification on how to better lead a church, because one needs to know where he is going before attempting to lead others.

A very brief overview: What the Healthy Church Looks Like

In the *Twelve Characteristics of a Healthy Church* I lay out from God's Word what He requires, and, in addition, observations of healthy churches. These questions asked are the same as McGavran (see article *The Problem With Most Church Growth Paradigms*), but emphasis on Scripture and not experience has led to very different conclusions. Each of these distinctions is extremely important. However, they have been placed in a hierarchal arrangement, that is, the first one is more important than the second, etc. In addition, the first one begets the second, which begets the third, and so forth. Therefore, each one, when practiced, is dependent on the characteristic that preceded it so it can birth the one that follows. However, if any one of them is omitted, your church will not function as God intended it to.

- First, is the clear uncompromising teaching of God's Word. Psalm 119:9-12
- Second, is impacting worship. Psalm 138:1-4

- Third, is passion for the Lord. Phil. 3:7-11
- Fourth is heartfelt prayer. John 15:4-5
- Fifth is Making Disciples. Matthew 28:18-20
- Sixth is penetrating love and care. Mark 12:28-31
- Seventh is leadership development. Ephesians 4:11-13
- Eighth is outreach and missions. Psalm 90:1-2
- Ninth is powered vision. Hebrews 11:1-2
- Tenth is effective stewardship. Proverbs 3:9-10
- Eleventh is appropriate programming. Philippians 3:12-14
- Twelfth is replication. Acts 1:8

These twelve characteristics converge synergistically to form the church as our Lord called it, to lead His people to Him in worship, and to glorify Christ! Each one of these builds upon the other, each fueling the other, all working together to be the church. This is where our real needs are met and where our gifts are used, because the teaching, worship, and prayer all empower people, through the work of the Holy Spirit and to His glory, to worship Him. The church is allowed to become what it was meant to be from the beginning, forbidding both prejudice and fears to get in the way. This will be a powerful force for His kingdom.

The church does not exist in and for itself. It is the vehicle to lead and manage the people of God through discipleship, evangelism, missions, spiritual growth, and programs all centered to His glory and worship. The quintessential reason for the church to exist is to worship God, not only in the worship service, but also as a lifestyle. The church is to provide the means to grow people in His direction for that worship. Thus, all we do, all we are, must point to the goal of moving people toward worship. However, more often than not, we are so caught up in our programs we forget why the programs are there. If you are the senior pastor, the elder, or the youth pastor, you must ask yourself, "Where am I, and where is the ministry? Is it toward worship, or is it to function in and of itself?"

Here are some passages to consider and pray over before you venture into church management: Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:4-5; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 10: 31-11:1; 12; Galatians 6:1-10; Mark 1:35 – 2:12; James 5:13-16; 1 Peter 3:15

If you still take seriously the classic church growth principles, the bottom line question you must ask yourself is this, *Is the Christian movement's expansion a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in new converts, or is it just taking sheep from others?* And what of your church? *Are its beliefs and actions based on the Word or just on research and presumptions?* Be honest! This is between you and God!

Basic Action Plans to Lead and Manage your Church

Essential Principles and Skills for Effective Leadership and Management In Your Church

Scriptural Precepts:

Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:4-5; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 10: 31- 11:1; 12; Galatians 6:1-10; Mark 1:35 – 2:12; James 5:13-16; 1 Peter 3:15

Once you gain solid Biblical precepts from the afore mentioned articles and most importantly from your personal study in God's Word, then you will have the primary precepts to grow a mature church to glorify our Lord. Once you have these precepts at your core mindset, you can acquire further suggestions on how to go about the daily affairs of the church.

The Big Picture and Overview: A Basic Church Management Model

The pastor / church leader wears four hats. Each one of these is essential. If even one is omitted, your church will not grow in maturity, and the people will be left out of their essential needs and call. One person may fulfill all four of these or they can be broken up into teams and/or associate pastoral roles. In any case, at some point any leader or pastor will engage all four. The training, discipling, recognition, and encouraging of the church are all critical roles for the pastor. If the senior pastor feels he does not have the gifts and abilities to equip and train others to do ministry, then he needs to build a team around him that does! If not, the church will fail! Some pastors are great teachers, but cannot do anything else. **A pastor cannot be expected to do everything.** He is not the sole member of the body of Christ. He is the shepherd for it! A pastor must operate in his gifted area, equip others to compensate in the areas where he is weak, and do his best to still give support to the rest of the church and to the wearers of the four hats! (Romans 7:4-6; 1 Corinthians 10:14-16; 12; Ephesians 4:9-16)

1. Preacher/ teacher: Proclaiming the Word From the Pulpit and/or Class

Pastors have differing gifts and abilities. However, whatever his gifts are, his primary duty is to Biblical teaching. A lot of energy and effort has been put into training preachers in business and counseling, sometimes to the extent of forgetting the main thing! In recent years, there has been a shift in preaching style from Biblical exegesis to *feel good* topics. What is popular is not necessary what is best! Never compromise the Word or water it down too much. It needs to be easy to understand, but not compromised! Many churches grow because of the effective and sometimes charismatic personality of the preacher. Make sure growth is a result of the quality of the teaching and not just the charisma of the preacher. Otherwise, the church will be based on a "cult personality" and not on His purpose.

2. Shepherd / counselor: The care of the people in the church, from counseling to the building of relationships.

This function has grown in popularity and emphasis over the last twenty years with courses in Pastoral Psychology and Counseling as the focus in most seminaries. This is good. However, it is a secondary duty. If one does not have the gifts, abilities, or time for this function, he should delegate the responsibility to someone who does. This is still a vital role for the church leaders! Many churches lose people because the pastor

has poor relational skills. If the pastor is a good teacher but poor in relational skills, then he must find someone else who is gifted in building relations with the congregation.

3. Leader/ Manager: Leading the people where they need to go; solving problems from personal and relational to care of the building and grounds.

To manage a church effectively we must seriously take our lead from Scriptural principles and not from popular trends. This has been a primary emphasis over the past twenty years. In fact, it has been over emphasized as the quintessential aspect of being a pastor. This is not so! Necessary? Yes, but not by strong willed personalities or personal agendas over and against the Word. This role perhaps takes most of the pastor's time, for which many are poorly trained and equipped. Leadership (see article on ***The Leadership Challenge***) is not dependent on a particular personality trait, but on skills that can be learned, even when that spiritual gift or personality is lacking. This aspect can be delegated. Many pastors get their pride hurt and refuse to let go, but no one can do it all. As your church grows, so must the people grow in leadership, so no one person is running the entire show.

4. Discippler / trainer: the shepherding aspect of the pastor, involving instructions on what a Christian is, how to grow in the faith and how to lead a Christian life in society.

This is the least focused aspect of the pastor and leader in the church. Yet, this is a most important role! The primary role of the pastor is to train their flock in the basics of the faith and continuing through the deeper waters of the Christian faith. Many pastors do not do this. Perhaps they cannot because either they lack spiritual maturity or they do not think it is their role. In either case, they need to read the Bible. This aspect is not focused on in traditional church growth teaching because it does not bring in the numbers. However, we are called and even commanded to do it (Matt. 28:18-20)!

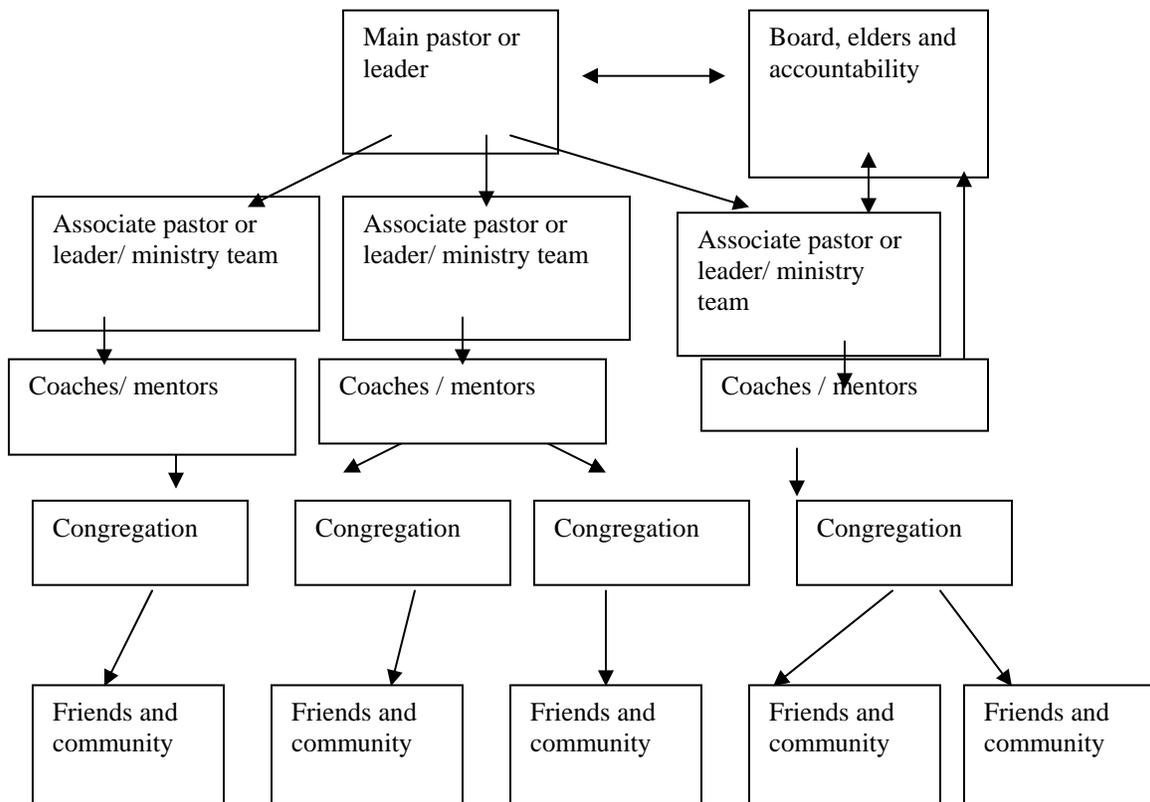
A pastor needs to evaluate his own gifts and his abilities as well as the remaining leadership in the church and their abilities. This should be based on the needs of his church according to each of these four roles, even if he is not the one doing it. It is okay to let go of leadership passions and positions to other godly and capable people. One must be aware of his gifts and abilities, and work mostly within them, lest he fail (see ***How to Determine your Spiritual Gifts***)! Then build the church by allowing each person to function in the gift that he was called and designed for.

Equipping people for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16)

The growth potential of the people in the church will be low when the pastor is the only one who is doing all or most of the ministry. He cannot do ministry to, or on behalf of, the congregation alone. Ministry must be shared through training and encouraging primary leaders, who, in turn, train and encourage secondary leaders, and so forth.

The following is a basic sample of how the church leadership can function best. This model can be molded to fit the needs and size of the church. The primary leader

disciples the associate leaders who then disciple small groups and/or classes in the congregation. The congregation then shares its knowledge and faith throughout the community. The senior leadership and/or pastor(s) are accountable to the Elders or Board. The Board is made up from people in the congregation who are chosen by election or appointment, depending on the rules of the denomination. The church is never to be run by a dictator, no matter how good and skilled that person may be! Accountability is essential! Training and discipleship are essential! If leaders are just being elected and thrown into the job without knowledge and training, how can they be expected to function?



Each Elder and/or leader is in charge of a ministry team, such as Sunday School, Outreach, Prayer, etc. Each has regular meetings with his team. Extra pastors are also in charge of ministry areas with lay accountability and lay elders.

The Leadership Hats:

1. **Focus** on developing the existing disciples in your church before you go out and make new disciples. The spiritual strength and maturity of the church must be developed first. If not, there will not be the ability or maturity to reach out. At the same time, make sure people are not being turned away or ignored!
2. **Leadership** trains and disciples people. One cannot lead where one has not been, nor can we do the work of God until we are the people of God. Clarify your purpose

from Scriptural principles. Determine spiritual gifts and roles. Be ready to interpret changes in your church and society. Equip them for it.

3. **Management:** The church is a living organism, made up with different personality types all incorporating into a group mentality. The church must be adaptive to achieve its purpose within a stated environment. Leaders need to know the culture and the people. Then, they must train and encourage them accordingly.
4. **Decision-Making Process:** Make sure you make healthy decisions based on the Word and character of our Lord and not on personal agendas and political power trips. This is necessary if you are to effectively establish unifying goals, to anticipate and adapt to change, to encourage leadership initiatives, and to ensure that budget allocations are in accord with ministry priorities.
5. **Communication:** Miscommunication is a sad fact of the church. It is part of our nature both not to listen and to place our needs over those of others. Effective means of communication need to be established in order to connect the church's purpose with the leader's intentions. There must be specific channels and means to bring information and encouragement to the flock!
6. **Facility:** One of the good things to come out of the church growth movement is the sensitivity to the felt needs of people. However, felt needs are never to supplant genuine spiritual needs, as they so often do! I am sorry to say this, but most people, including Christians, are not mature. That is why the Bible calls us sheep. Sheep are dumb. They will starve between two bales of hay if not led to feed. They will scratch themselves to death and wander off into oblivion. We are the same, so to speak. (Just ask my wife. I, too, cannot take care of myself!) Thus, we need to create an environment as comfortable as possible. If it is too cold or too hot, people will not come. Even when they do come, they will not listen. So, we need to do the best we can with what God gives us to arrange activities and create an atmosphere in which people feel comfortable. Having convenient parking is an example.

A Pastor needs to sit down with his leadership and go over the above principles, keeping the other articles and Biblical precepts in mind. **How can this work and become a reality?** The answer to that question is to do it through prayer, through seeking the Word, and through brainstorming options and ideas. Afterwards, ideas can be implemented and necessary changes made. Monitor those changes and be willing to listen to feedback. Make changes and never compromise the integrity of Scripture or the character of our Lord!

Remember, as the capacity of the pastor to lead others to do the ministry is increased rather than his doing it all alone, the potential for spiritual and numerical growth will also increase.

Now that you have a general overview, get ready to lead your church to be her best for His glory!

Getting Started: “Seven Keys for Effective Pastoral Leadership.”

During brainstorming sessions, go over each of these keys. Let others show you how the church is doing, motivational patterns, and where the weak and strong points are. Then, use those as a template to think through and strategize an effective way to manage the church. Later, more specific action plans will be offered.

Ask: How can I...

1. Set Goals. Go over the Scriptural precepts and strategize the goals that God has for the church. Keep in mind the principles previously laid out. Go over each one, one by one. Make sure as much time as possible is spent in prayer. Try to have your meetings 1/3 to ½ of the time in prayer! This will allow less time for arguments and circular reasoning, and the meetings might even be shorter! (See the article, *Practical Strategies for Prayer*.)

2. Be Focused on God’s precepts, not just on research and trendy ideas. Those ideas change and conflict with each other every few years, while God’s principles remain steadfast and keep working! At the same time, use the resources and ideas as a catalyst for other ideas. Filter out anything that goes against what Jesus would have done! Keep in mind to manage time and resources to maximize results.

3. Have a Vision. Once you see the goal through prayer, Scripture, and the needs of the church, map out the direction in which God is leading. Keep it simple, and keep it focused on Scripture. Then, strategize on how to communicate it to the people. This is called “casting.” Remember, the primary goal is to cultivate faith and envision where the people need to be in the future with their faith, both personally, in the community, and in the world. How do you bring the church deeper into the heart of God to worship and glorify Him? (See the primer *Preparing the Pastor and Church Leadership to Grow!*)

4. Create Ownership of the ministry, so that the people in charge as well as in the church can feel a part of the process. They need to be reassured that it is their church too! Be affirming to them, communicating important values, but prepared for some people to resist change. It may take time. Congregational prayer and fasting are essential to grow people in new directions!

5. Mobilize the people in the church. Mobilize them by recruiting and evaluating their spiritual gifts. Mentor and equip them.

6. Coach them with training and encouragement. The goal is team-building and supervising, not doing it all alone!

7. Make sure your Decision Making is centered on His Word! Have a plan to evaluate and solve problems. If conflict develops, check the articles on conflict resolution.

Chapter XVII Mobilize the People in your Church by their Spiritual Gifts

After the motivational pattern and abilities have been identified, ask, as we spoke about above (*Seven Keys for Effective Pastoral Leadership*), **“Why are you doing church? What is your call? Why are you there?”** (See the primer *Preparing the*

Pastor and Church Leadership to Grow!) Then, organize the people to fulfill the call that Christ gave! How?

The best way is by determining abilities and resources and matching them to the needs of the church and community. Then, get to it! This is using Spiritual gifts, which is very Biblical for each denomination and church that claims Jesus as Lord!

How to Determine Your Spiritual Gifts!

Q: Did you ever wonder why you are given a gift? A: To build the body!

We are diverging from our normal verse-by-verse inductive study into Romans to give general overview of Spiritual Gifts. It is our intention to give an honest Biblical teaching of this topic without adding into any theological agenda. This is a tough task as there are so many views on Spiritual Gifts and it is an emotional charged subject. But there are also a lot of bad and false teachings of this subject, where people read into their perceptions and agenda without concern to what God is communicating to us.

Romans 12

General idea: Spiritual Gifts, ("*Charisma*" or "*Pneumakitos*" in the Greek, is mostly used by Paul except in I Pet. 4:10) meaning, "abilities characterized or controlled by the Spirit, given by grace." This subject almost always brings out a response from Christian's from all walks of life and denominations. Some are passionate with excitement desiring to discover and use their gifts, while others hide in the fear of being convicted. So what does Spiritual Gifts mean? The term means "a gift of grace." It refers specifically to a favor or a special gift given to a believer (Rom. 5:15; 6:23) in the Lord to empower them with a special talent and or an ability to serve the church and glorify Him better (Rom. 12:6-8; I Cor. 7:7; 12:4-7; 13: 8-13; 28-30; Eph. 4:7-12; 1 Pet. 4:10). These gifts are to edify the church, serve the community, and build personal character and maturity.

These gifts are also a responsibility, as they direct us to sacrificially serve others as He has served us. Yet so often we fight over them, nullifying their true purpose and intent. These gifts also have a supernatural source, the Holy Spirit. And they can be miraculous or normative; however each gift whether it is miraculous or not are all essential to the Body of Christ. Some have a greater need and importance as stated in I Corinthians 12-14. Spiritual Gifts cannot be earned or bought by us in any way shape or form. The Holy Spirit purely and graciously gives them to us for His clearly defined purpose. Thus, they are to serve the body of Christ, His church, not our whims, ideas, plans or greed. They are to be used, they are practical and a church cannot function without them effectively!

Spiritual Gifts have one of two areas of ministry in the church. First are the "**assigned offices**" such as ministers, elders, and deacons, etc. These are the "offices" of (Acts 6:1-6; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Tim.3: 8; 5:17; James 2:15-16), leadership

roles. They must have the appropriate gifts of leadership, as well the gift in their area of ministry (I Cor. 14: 3-40; Eph. 4:7-16; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; Heb 13:17). They must be all working together in love and cooperative unity.

Second are the Spiritual Gifts that are **assigned to each believer**, we have at least one. Spiritual Gifts are the abilities given and characterized by the Holy Spirit. "Charisma" means that they are gifts of God's grace. This is imperative to know, because they are not something we earn or even deserve! They are gifts of grace. Regardless of what you have been taught or what you think the term "charismatic" means. (It means being led by the Spirit, and if you are a Christian, then the Spirit leads you. The Question is, are you obeying Him?) On another note, there actually are no non-charismatic gifts, since they are all gifts of Grace by the Spirit. These are the abilities to do a specific function in ministry to glorify Christ with the display of attributes of Christ's character in a specific function that strengthens the church. Such as "pastor/teacher" for the minister, or "mercy" to those who visit the sick. It is the believer's responsibility to find and develop and exercise the gifts given. Some of the gifts include leadership, teaching, pastoral care, mercy, giving... (See Gift Definitions). Spiritual Gifts guide us on how we are to behave and interact with each other.

We must acknowledge our role in the body of Christ; His church, there are no lone wolfs in Christ! We have a duty to fulfill, and a role to play. We have a duty to find our gifts and then use our gifts for the edification of those in the church and those around us outside of the church. When we refuse to yield to His truths and call we not only hurt ourselves, but each other too, and we hurt our Lord!

Spiritual gifts are alive and well in the world, to deny their existence is to deny the work of the Holy Spirit! It is comforting to deny gifts, because then we do not have to respond to His call and duty, we can be lazy and conceited in our outlook to others instead; of course this thinking is straight from another source other than the Bible and God's call (Matt 28; John 7:38-39; 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; 16:7)!

Fruits and Gifts are not the same. We must not confuse the "gifts of the Spirit" with "fruit of the Spirit." Gifts are services to be performed for others to benefit the church. "Fruit" speaks of the graces and character traits of Christ we **all** are to emulate as a believer to cultivate holiness (Gal. 5:22-23). Both the fruit and the gifts are essential. Both are manifestations of the indwelling Spirit within us.

What is the difference between a gift and a talent? Most Bible teachers say that we are born with certain talents or natural abilities, but when we are "born again" we are given spiritual gifts. This may be true, but I find it interesting that talents being 'natural' and gifts being 'supernatural' are not a separate distinction in Scripture! So the difference between your pastor and secular professor is that the teaching may be from the same talent/gift thus can be used in a church or a secular classroom. But the purpose and glory is completely different. And as we grow in maturity the Spirit empowers us further, beyond just the 'natural' 'talent' (I Cor. 2:14-15; Gal. 1:15-16).

What gifts are more important? A: I Corinthians 12:28 “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.” All the gifts are needed and essential because they all are designed to edify the Church and glorify God. The church is a body, where all parts of the body are important, some are more essential, like the brain verses a foot. The Corinthians had trouble distinguishing the importance of the Gifts, hence Paul’s letter to them. (I Cor. 12:31; 14).

Thus, leaders and teachers are the most important who clearly present the truths of the Christian faith, which the apostles (church leaders) give from the Word. A prophet is some one who keeps the church on God’s path and truth and makes sure we do not slip into false teaching. This is not the same as an OT prophet!

Tongues and miracles may seem great! But they do not meet the basic and eternal needs of the Body of Christ as teaching. To think they are is putting the cart in front of the horse! The Bible does not make the case that they have ceased, although they are not considered important, like milk for a baby; verses the meat of teaching for maturity.

The most important and needed gifts are those that focus is on the Word of God, and discipling the believers because without them the church would fall down (Matt. 28). The teaching and preaching of the Word of God must be more valuable to you than any material or emotional things! Satan does not want you to discover your gifts; he wants you to ignore your responsibility and nurture of one another. *“God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”*

Questions: On HOW TO DETERMINE YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFT(S)

This procedure is much more accurate and honest than just using an ‘inventory.’ Because we have a tendency to read into these ‘tests’ our desires and not listen to our Lord’s leading. Use an inventory like the one attached as another source of information, but not your only source!

MY SPIRITUAL GIFTS _____

(In this place write down what you think they are, and what others have told you)

Read: Rom. 5:15; 6:23; 12:6-8; I Cor. 7:7; 10:31; 12:4-7; 14:31 ; 13: 8-13; 14: 1-40; 28-30; Eph. 4:7-12; and 1 Pet. 4:10. Study the Biblical teaching on gifts, put the emphases on what the Bible says not your experience or presumptions! Go over the Gift Descriptions below, and see which one(s) interest and excite you.

Do the following PRAYERFULLY and PRIVATELY

- List those you are pretty sure you have.
- List those you think you might have.
- Examine Your DESIRES. (Be careful! You must examine your motives as well)

- Examine the EVIDENCE (what you have done or can do, what has been confirmed by others)
- Examine the OPPORTUNITIES (what are the needs?)
- Share this list with someone who knows you such as a mentor or parent who knows the 'real you' for confirmation, prayer and encouragement.
- List where and how can you exercise your gift(s)?

Answer these questions.

1. What needs exist in your life and community or world that is a need that requires attention, i.e., in your family, local Church, city, etc.)? God will give someone, perhaps you, the spiritual gifts necessary to help meet those needs. Ask God what part you should take in helping to minister and serve. Be on the lookout for needs that God can meet through you!
2. What do you think the Holy Spirit is telling you to do? The Holy Spirit has given each Christian at least one spiritual gift. The Holy Spirit wants you to exercise that spiritual gift. You are to be open and sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit in your life. After you determine your gift(s) and the Spirit's direction in the use of the gift(s), you must obey Him!
3. Ask yourself honestly, would you naturally choose what the Holy Spirit is telling you to do or your desires? Usually your desires are a good starting indication, as long as you are honest and grounded in the Word. Usually the Holy Spirit will not cause you to do what you have no inclination to do, no liking and no sensitivity. Thus, He will not call you to Outer Mongolia to be a missionary unless you also have the desire and ability to go!
4. What natural talents, interests, abilities, inclinations, etc., do you have already that God would normally use to begin with? Usually the Lord starts with us where we are, not with trying to revamp our whole personality and gifts. He starts with natural talents and interests, and then adds supernatural abilities as we grow in maturity, and as He wills/leads for His purpose. Are the gift(s) that you are using giving you wonder and excitement or a feeling of stale obligation? If you are stuck, read through the description and Scriptures of the gifts below and then try to experiment with as many gifts as you can (such as teaching, helping...) and see if you feel comfortable with one or more! Examine your feelings; what do you want to do more than anything else? But do not rely on just your feelings! Is the gift you have just the gift you want? Make sure it is God's call not just your own desires.
5. What do you do well already? What we do well already is probably an indication of some sort of gift from God. The Spirit may grant us additional gift(s), but that is His decision, not ours.
6. What gifts do others in the Body of Christ, the Church, see in you? The Holy Spirit does not work with us in isolation from the other members of the Body of Christ. The

others are given insight into our giftedness and we into theirs as means of checks and balances. We help each other to be honest to God! So, make sure you ask others! After discovering your gifts, evaluate your effectiveness with them, as a check and balance to make sure you are exercising the right one(s). But do not give up, like sports or music, exercising your gifts take time and practice!

7. Based on the above, what gifts do I seem to have?
8. Am I willing to check this out with the Lord through heartfelt surrendered prayer (Gal. 2:20)?
9. Am I willing to check this out with others who know me, e.g., my spouse, parents, children, pastors, elders, etc.?
10. How can I begin to use these spiritual gift(s)?
11. How can you now start to be disciplined in these gifts, to get to know them and use them to glorify our Lord?
12. How can you now best use the gifts God gave you in a team effort with others?

Additional discussion Questions:

13. What comes to your mind when someone says Spiritual Gifts?
14. Do you have passionate excitement desiring to discover and use your gifts, or do you hide in the fear of being convicted?
15. Why do some Christians deny their existence?
16. What do Spiritual Gifts mean to you and your church?
17. If you had the choice of any special talent and or ability to serve Him better with what would it be?
18. Spiritual Gifts guide us on how we are to behave and interact with each other. So what happens when we refuse to exercise them?
19. What is your church's position on gifts?
20. How are Spiritual Gifts determined and used in your church?
21. For you to build personal character and maturity, how would Spiritual Gifts help?
22. How would Spiritual Gifts help serve the community?

23. How are gifts a responsibility?
24. Why do Christians fight over Spiritual Gifts when the fighting nullifies their true purpose and intent?
25. Why is the function in ministry to glorify Christ?
26. With the above question in mind, how can you display of attributes of Christ's character fruit and gifts in a specific function that strengthens the church?
27. What can you do if you are a leader or pastor to motivate the congregation from the pulpit and boardroom to find and use their gifts?
28. How can you help others discover their gifts?
29. What can you do to find a mentor who has the same gifts as you with more experience to show you the ropes?
30. How can you set a schedule for accountability with your mentor?
31. What can you do to continue the exercise and growth of your gifts indefinitely?
32. What can you do to explore the possibilities of what you can do with your gifts of grace?
33. What can you and your church do to experiment with as many gifts as you can?
34. What can you do as a church to make sure you all are working together in love and cooperative unity with the gifts?
35. How can the fruits make the gifts work better?
36. What will you do now with your knowledge of your gift(s)?

Remember: Satan does not want you to discover your gifts; he wants you to ignore your responsibility and nurture of one another.

SPIRITUAL GIFT DEFINITIONS AND SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

The following contains suggested definitions of the spiritual gifts as defined by the Bible in no particular order. This is not meant to be dogmatic or final, these definitions and supporting Scriptures do correspond to the characteristics of the gifts as expressed in most evangelical and reformed thinking.

1. **HELPS:** The ability to invest the talents one has in the life and ministry of other members of the body, thus enabling those others to increase the effectiveness of their own spiritual gifts. Mark 15:40-41 Acts 9:36 Romans 16:1-2 I Corinthians 12:28
2. **LEADERSHIP:** The ability to set goals in accordance with God's purpose for the future and to communicate those goals to others in such a way that they voluntarily and harmoniously work together to accomplish those goals for the glory of God. Acts 15:7-11 Romans 12:8 I Timothy 5:17 Hebrews 13:17
3. **HOSPITALITY:** The ability to provide an open house and a warm welcome to those in need of food and lodging. Acts 16:14-15 Romans 12:9-13 Romans 16:23 Hebrews 13:1-2 I Peter 4:9
4. **SERVICE:** The ability to identify the unmet needs involved in a task related to God's work, and to make use of available resources to meet those needs and help accomplish the desired results. Acts 6:1-7 Romans 12:7 Galatians 6:2 II Timothy 1:16-18 Titus 3:14
5. **ADMINISTRATION:** The ability to understand clearly the immediate and long-range goals of a particular unit of the body of Christ and to devise and execute effective plans for the accomplishment of those goals. Luke 14:28-30 Acts 6:1-7 I Corinthians 12:28
6. **DISCERNMENT:** The ability to know with assurance whether certain behavior purported to be of God is in reality divine, human or satanic. The purpose of this gift is to prevent confusion and false teaching from infiltrating the church. Matthew 16:21-23 Acts 5:1-11 Acts 16:16-18 I Corinthians 12:10 I John 4:1-6
7. **FAITH:** The ability to discern with extraordinary confidence the will and purpose of God, and to propel the body of believers into actively claiming the promises of God. Acts 11:22-24 Romans 4: 18-21 I Corinthians 12:9 Hebrews 11
8. **MUSIC:** The ability to use one's voice in the singing of praises to the Lord for the benefit of others, or to play a musical instrument to praise the Lord and for the benefit of others. Remember God is always the audience in worship! Deuteronomy 31:22 I Samuel 16:16 I Chronicles 16:41-42 II Chronicles 5: 12-13 II Chronicles 34:12 Psalm 150
9. **LANGUAGES/TONGUES:** The ability to speak a divinely anointed message in a language one has never learned, but one that is known to the hearers. Its purpose is an evangelistic tool for spreading the gospel. Mark 16:17 Acts 2:1-13 Acts 10:44-46 Acts 19:1-7 (Make sure you follow the precepts of I Cor.14!)
10. **MIRACLES** - The ability to serve as a human intermediary through whom it pleases God to perform powerful acts that are perceived by observers to have altered the ordinary course of nature. Acts 9:36-42 Acts 19:11-20 Acts 20:7-12 Romans 15:18-19 I Corinthians 12:10, 28

11. **CRAFTSMANSHIP:** The ability to use one's hands, thoughts and mind to further the kingdom of God through artistic, creative means. People with this gift may also serve to lead others in forming their abilities in this area. The gift may also be used in the areas of maintenance, care and upkeep for the benefit and beautification of God's kingdom here on earth. Exodus 30:22-25 Exodus 31:3-11 II Chronicles 34:9-13 Acts 18:2-3
12. **HEALING:** The ability to serve as a human intermediary through whom God's healing power is applied to another person's physical or emotional need. Acts 3:1-10 Acts 5:12-16 Acts 9:32-35 Acts 28:7-10 I Corinthians 12:9, 28
13. **GIVING:** The ability to contribute material resources to the work of the Lord with liberality and cheerfulness. Mark 12:41-44 Romans 12:8 II Corinthians 8:1-7 II Corinthians 9:2-8
14. **MERCY:** The ability to feel genuine empathy and compassion for individuals who suffer distressing physical, mental or emotional problems, and to translate that compassion into cheerfully-done deeds which reflect Christ's love and alleviate the sufferings as well as motivate others to help. Matthew 9:35,36 Mark 9:41 I Thess. 5:14
15. **WISDOM:** The ability to apply spiritual truth to a specific issue in a specifically relevant fashion, and to make proper choices in difficult situations, based on sufficient information. Acts 6:3,10 I Corinthians 2:1-13 I Corinthians 12:8 James 1:5 II Peter 3:15
16. **KNOWLEDGE:** The ability to discover, accumulate, analyze and clarify information which is pertinent to the growth and well-being of the body. Acts 5:1-11 I Corinthians 12:8 II Corinthians 11:6 Colossians 2:2-3
17. **EXORTATION:** The ability to minister words of encouragement, consolation, comfort and motivation from God's Word to help others complete their tasks and be all that God want them to be. Acts 4:32-37 Acts 14:22 Romans 12:8 I Timothy 4:13 Hebrews 10:24,25
18. **TEACHING:** The ability to employ a logical, systematic approach to Biblical study and to communicate information relevant to the health and ministry of the body and its members in such a way that others will learn. Acts 18:24,28 Acts 20:20-21 I Corinthians 12:28 Ephesians 4:11-14
19. **PASTOR/SHEPHERD:** The ability to assume a long-term personal responsibility for the spiritual welfare of a group of believers. John 10:1-18 Ephesians 4:11-14 I Timothy 3:1-7 I Peter 5:1-3

20. **APOSTLESHIP:** The ability to assume and exercise general leadership over a number of churches, with an extraordinary authority in spiritual matters, which is spontaneously recognized and appreciated by those churches. Such as a bishop. This is not the same as the original 12 Apostles or Paul! Acts 15:1-2 I Corinthians 12:28 II Corinthians 12:12 Galatians 2:7-10 Ephesians 3:1-9 Ephesians 4:11-14
21. **MISSIONARY:** The ability to minister with whatever other spiritual gifts one has in another land or culture. Acts 8:4 Acts 13:2-3 Acts 22:21 Romans 10:15 I Corinthians 9:19-23
22. **PROPHECY:** The ability to proclaim the Word of God with divine anointing, which brings conviction to the hearers so they recognize that it is truly the Word of God and they must do something about it. A prophet is also someone who keeps the church on God's path and truth and makes sure we do not slip into false teaching. This is not the same as an OT prophet, which existed before the Word was completed! Acts 2:37-40; Mat 7:54 Acts 26:24-29 I Corinthians 14:1,3 I Thessalonians 1:5
23. **EVANGELISM:** The ability to share the gospel with unbelievers in such a way that men and women become Jesus' disciples and responsible members of the body of Christ. Acts 8:5-6 Acts 8:26-40 Acts 14:21 Acts 21:8 Ephesians 4:11-14 II Timothy 4:5
24. **PRAYER/INTERCESSION:** The ability to pray for extended periods of time on a regular basis and see frequent and specific answers to prayer, to a degree much greater than that, which is experienced by most Christians. All Christians are to exercise this, but the gifted person will go beyond. Luke 22:41-u Acts 12:12 Colossians 1:9-12 Colossians 4:12-13 I Timothy 2:1-2 James 5:14-16

Putting your Gifts to Work:

1. **Focus efforts according to gifts.** People work and function best doing what they are called to and gifted in doing. So, if someone has the gifts of Helps, train and encourage them to be deacons or caregivers. The key is to identify their gifts, train them to use them, and place them where they can exercise them.
2. **Encourage** those in leadership, the congregation, and yourself to spend at least 60% of the time spent in service be in the areas of your gift(s)!
3. **Develop a team approach** to ministry. Have people with the same gifts work together. Those with the gifts of helps could work together in care giving! This will complement, add mentorship, and fuel the ministry!
4. **Group together those** whose strengths and gifts complement each other. Do this for yourself, too. This will put a person who has a lot of experience with someone who is just learning. Also, group people together who are strong in their faith with people who are not. This will also help develop mentoring and discipleship.

5. **Develop job descriptions** for each area of service--Prayer, Program Ministry gift needs, Worship, Care Giving, Teachers, etc.--so people will know what to expect and will have a guide they can work with later. Be flexible, as it will change and develop as the abilities, time, and needs of the people change and develop. Delegate appropriate responsibilities. The description should name the position, the basic responsibilities or mission theme, the supervisor's name, the gifts and skills that are suggested, the time commitment, and the list of duties.
6. **Develop ministry assistants.** For every leader in the church you should have an assistant. A small group leader will have an associate leader, a Sunday School teacher will have an assistant, the deacon will have an assistant, and so forth. As you grow, the assistant will be trained and can break off into the new leadership position or take over for the current one to take a break. Qualified people will be on standby who are already functioning and learning in that position. When they break off as growth comes, they will get an assistant, and so forth. This will solve many of the no-training and empty positions in the church.
7. Make sure every leader has a **prayer partner(s)**, someone to pray for them on a daily basis and who will keep a confidence. See our *Prayer channel* for more ideas.

What has God called you to do? A Spiritual Gift Evaluation

This Primer will help determine human resources and their gifts, so that they can be allocated to the appropriate team. After using our *How to Determine your Spiritual Gifts*, use this guide to help your leadership team and then your congregation to see the role they would best fit in the church. Use this for yourself, pastors, leaders, and the congregation. Make sure before you approach your congregation that you effectively teach them the Biblical precepts of Spiritual Gifts. (See our *Online Bible Studies in Romans 12!*)

1. **List** your top three spiritual gifts (usually there is one main gift and one or more that are significant).
2. **List** the three or four ministry positions that you enjoy most, and feel most comfortable and effective in (such as discipling, leadership, teaching, evangelism, administration, etc.).
3. Decide which ministry team you would best fit and be the most effective in.
4. Decide which ministry in the church in which you participated that you got the most out of and can see yourself involved in.
5. Decide which ministries of the church you have seen success in by your contribution.

6. Decide which ministries of the church have you received approval and acceptance in.
7. Now compare the first two **lists**. They should agree, or be similar. The last four instructions will help you clarify. If not, spend time in prayer, seek someone who knows you well, and ask him. Make sure your desires are not fueled by political lust or selfish wishes. The church cannot function effectively with people in positions who are there for selfish and prideful reasons. You have to be in service with a surrendered heart (Gal. 2:20)!
8. With your spiritual gifts and ministry enjoyments in mind along with input from others, describe what you believe God has called you to do.
9. When can you be available for such a service?
10. What areas of training do you feel you need most?
11. What can the church leadership do to further equip you to be a better servant for the Lord?
12. What do you think the church leadership needs to be doing?
13. What do you think the biggest needs in the church are?
14. What do you think the biggest needs in the community are?
15. How long a commitment will you be able to make to serve in the church in your gifting category?
16. Are you willing to be instructed and then instruct and mentor someone else?
17. How can you bring yourself and others in the church deeper into the heart of God to worship and glorify Him?
18. How much time has been spent in prayer during the above process?

The church leadership can take these completed forms, compile them in the ministry categories, institute leadership and training, and unleash the laity to do the work we are all called to do!

You can make a list of the number of people involved in each ministry team, how many people are needed, what training has been done and what training needs have yet to be accomplished.

Suggested Categories for Gift Mobilization

This list is by no means definitive, nor dogmatic, it is just a guide to point you in the right direction. The gifts for the job may vary due to experience and education.

- 1. Teaching and discipling roles:** The main gifts needed for Sunday School Teachers, Bible Study Leaders, and Small Group Leaders are teaching and/or knowledge.
 - a. Sunday School Superintendent: teaching, administration, leadership
 - b. Small Group Leaders: hospitality and/or pastor, teacher
 - c. Children's Sunday School Teachers can have a wider range of gifts, when they have a love for children and patience.

- 2. Evangelism:** the main gifts needed are evangelist, missions, and exhortation. (The gift of evangelist usually appears in combinations with other gifts)
 - a. Here are sub teams that can go under the Main team of Evangelism that other gifts can participate in also: Visitation: mercy and administration
 - b. Shut ins: pastor, mercy/helps
 - c. Personal witnessing/ Door to Door: everyone should try this often, but the main gift is evangelist.
 - d. Outreach: mercy, service, hospitality, helps
 - e. Team leaders can have the gifts of leadership and/or administration

- 3. Elders:** Leadership, pastor, exhortation, administration; and also wisdom and faith. If there is to be an elder from each ministry team, try to have the one representing have these gifts too.

- 4. Deacons:** helps, service, mercy

- 5. Missions:** evangelist, missions, wisdom, service.

- 6. Prayer:** intercession, everyone.

- 7. Youth and children's Ministry:** teacher, exhortation, pastor, hospitality, leadership.

- 8. Counselor:** counseling, exhortation, wisdom, intercession.

- 9. Committee leader:** administration, leadership, and gifting in the area of the committee.

- 10. Treasurer / Finance:** administration, wisdom, learned knowledge in finance.

- 11. Usher:** hospitality and service.

- 12. Nursery Worker:** service, mercy, helps.

13. Church Secretary: helps, administration.

For effective teamwork, these traits are necessary. They are not necessarily spiritual gifts, but they can be learned and developed: Character, honesty, enjoying working with people, knowledge, and the skills in the area of service or the willingness to learn them. Remember, people learn best when they can see a proper model, not just told how. In other words, how you are is as important, if not more important, than what you say!

Remember this is merely a guide. People with other gifts can serve in positions temporarily out of their gift range, or perhaps to develop and strengthen a weaker gift that may not register on a gifts inventory. For example, almost any Gift can usher, but usually the person with the Gift of Hospitality will enjoy it and do it better. Anyone can research and prepare a sermon, but the person with the Gift of Teaching will enjoy it and be able to do it better.

Chapter XVIII Starting to Train your Leaders and Congregation

Training is not just another word for discipleship. Discipleship places the emphases on our spiritual growth, learning the Word and the disciplines and doctrines of the faith, which is paramount for all Christians. Training is the growth and learning in the area of a task that needs to be accomplished in the church to further the kingdom of God, such as a program, service or need.

Training is a formal method of teaching someone what they need to know in the best and most pleasant, encouraging, and fun way possible. There are three areas for this, **formal class**, **mentoring**, and **coaching**. Where teaching is a formal group endeavor, and mentoring tends to be a more of an informal one on one, coaching bridges the gap because you can have specific people assigned who are experienced or are willing to know and grow and show others. The steps for coaching involve presenting, telling, doing, and encouraging. While much can be learned in training groups and seminars, there is no better way to develop skill and interest than the one on one sharing of the skills and abilities by an experienced person to a less experienced person. Therefore, all three avenues of learning are needed and beneficial. Experience has proven that it is best to have general training, one on one mentoring by assigning experienced people with new or less experienced people, and coaches to inspire, lead, and encourage the way, so everyone is doing his best to procedure the best ministry possible.

Consider having the experienced people in your church be coaches to the inexperienced, and mentor them. Perhaps you can develop a complete program for this endeavor!

Beginning Training

Your primary task is to involve and equip people to serve our Lord!

1. First, meet privately with the interested person, get to know them and have them observe a working class or team. Interest can be found from personal recruitment, or evaluation from a gift inventory such as seen above.
2. Make sure they fill out the spiritual gifts inventory and evaluation,
3. Have a training class. Give people an overview of the church's mission and plan; what God has called you to.
 - a. Prayer
 - b. Worship time
 - c. Introduce the team in place
 - d. Go over mission and goals
 - e. Orient them with the position. Testimonies from others in that position

- f. Go over the duties and expectations
 - g. Give clear examples on how to accomplish tasks
 - h. Have plenty of Q & A
 - i. Role play possible scenarios
 - j. Use videos, tapes, and denominational resources
 - k. Go over the job description.
 - l. Provide resources; offer a book or two to read.
 - m. Have a class field trip to another similar program
4. Personally follow-up: Interview them with someone on the team for Q & A, what is expected, etc. Have them observe the class/ team again, and get feedback from them. Keep in mind a team approach, encouragement, support, Christ working in you and them!

Coaching and Training Ideas

Preparing for the training

- **Analyze** the skills and gifts that are needed by listing what is and what could be involved. Talk with several people who do the ministry well, ask other churches, get as much info as you can, then boil it down as simple as possible.
- **Think through** and determine the necessary steps you want the trainee to learn and do and the priority of each. What strategies and plans are you going to develop to make the coaching meaningful?
- **Demonstrate** the process. Show how to lead a small group or how to be a good usher; this cannot just be learned from a lecture. Give the overview and steps, then role-play, put them to work, and come back for Q&A.
- **Keep in mind** that most people respond best to practical hands on training, so make sure you are also providing learning by doing, making the process as interactive and hands-on as possible.
- **What set of observations** could you provide where the trainee can observe the skills in action to give them ideas?
- **Good training and coaching** involves good listening. Coaching differs from teaching in that you walk through the process with the trainee.
- **Set up a library** to provide reading and video resources.
- **Have a good discussion** with the trainee to determine his willingness and readiness for serving. Give plenty of latitude and patience for volunteers.

- **Inexperienced people will need patience** and be personally led in what to do. More experienced people can learn faster by discussion and being turned loose.
- **Make sure the trainee knows** they are cared for and loved! This means you need to have good eye contact and listen to the other person. Give the other person your undivided attention. Show that you care!
- **Do not forget questions** in your discussion and interactions. Good questions should be brief, clear, focused, relevant, constructive, open-ended, and conveyed conversationally. Start your discussion with the usual factual questions. Then move to the descriptive and explanatory questions, but do not forget to ask hypothetical questions such as, What if we did this instead? What if we added this or took away that? What then? Then move to alternative questions where the learner has to make decisions. This keeps the person thinking. Finish your questions by summarizing and clarifying them.

More Ideas:

- Be aware that previous bad experiences by the trainee will cause doubt and mistrust; so, make sure you allow them the time to process.
- Do not put too much pressure on the trainee!
- Assist them in choosing effective methods and Biblical curriculum.
- The training and coaching process should be like mentoring and be a relational process.
- A good coach should realize when to hold people back and when to push them out of the nest to make them fly.
- Good management of people requires listening, patience, tact, and feedback. All relations with the trainee must be made sensitively in love and encouragement! Remember, this is a process, and, as with anything, expect a “learning curve” with the people and the programs in general. It has to be practiced a number of times, thought through and talked through a number of times, and given a lot of prayer before you see the goals you desire.
- Some people learn better with linear curriculum where the steps are carefully listed. Others would rather see the big picture first and then they can easily fill in the details. It is best to have an overview of the big picture and then list out the steps one by one.
- Encourage the trainee to ask you questions, and make sure that you listen carefully to him.

- A coach will need to come along beside the trainee or volunteer if and when they get dumped on or yelled at by an angry person. They are to be protected and have the situation resolved with love, encouragement, and affirmation.
- Be aware that when you mentor and disciple others, you will have an enormous influence on their lives! Thus, to the best of your ability, watch what you say and do, remember the character of Christ, and do your best to model Him.
- Make sure that your trainee and others sense that the goal and purpose is worthwhile and important. If not, effective ministry will not happen!
- Make sure they realize that they are part of the process of bringing the church deeper into the heart of God to worship and glorify Him!
- When the trainee gets more experience and is more comfortable, encourage him to do the task apart from your direct supervision. Never turn people loose without supervision, especially children and youth! At the same time make sure they know that the door is open and they are welcome to ask questions. Take the initiative to follow up and visit the trainee in action, because many people forget or just will not ask for help.
- Make sure the trainee and volunteer can relate well to the age level they serve and lead.
- Follow up with the trainee and everyone else occasionally, asking them for feedback about their role and the program. Some questions might be, "What do you like about your assignment and the goals? What do you not like? What concerns do you have? How can we improve?" Where appropriate, ask others for similar feedback.
- Make sure you reward and celebrate individual progress as well as team progress and success. People need external support and recognition not only from the pastor but also from people outside of their team or program. Recognition and rewards motivate people to do more and give more, but most importantly, it shows that they are cared about!
- Have a system to recruit and train leaders, coaches, and mentors. Usually, these will be volunteers who have served for several years in the ministry for which you are recruiting. Make sure these are open to and capable of learning the ministry goal distinctions and supporting the purpose of the church, as well as being committed, mature Christians, (maturity has nothing to do with age!) and are able to lead and manage that ministry under the goals of the church.

Chapter XIX Servant Leadership

Incarnational Leadership is a Profile of Servant Leadership

Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:26; John 13:2-17; 1 Corinthians 3- 4; Ephesians 4

Leadership has been the big “buzz-word” for the church in America during the last dozen or so years, but exactly what is meant by real leadership? Many books and resources are available on this subject, and to be honest with you, most of them are fluff and nonsense, distilled from contradictory business paradigms and faulty presuppositions that ignore the truths of Scripture! I have spent most of my ministerial career studying leadership as a church growth constant, I even went to Harvard Business School where I pursued an MBA. I thought that would make me a better leader for Christ. But, I gradually came to understand that what makes a leader great and effective is not found in most business schools or even books on leadership. Quite the contrary, those qualities are found in the Person, work, and life of our Lord Jesus Christ. When I “found” what leadership was really about in the early 90’s, I also found that few would agree with or back me up. As a result, my Ph.D. Dissertation was not accepted, and I was eventually phased out of my church growth firm because I was no longer teaching the *status quo* of leadership. They saw leadership as a force of will and personality infused with the most up-to-date trends. I saw leadership as Christ modelled it. I challenge you to reconsider what you think you know about leadership. Get your direction and mold from Christ rather than trends, the latest ideas, or what you think will work. Purely and simply, leadership is learned from being a child of God and a servant of Christ first.

We usually know what the world calls us to, but do you know what God calls you to? The Bible calls us to a higher level of excellence—one of vision, love, integrity, and functionality. That is what I call “Incarnational Leadership.” It simply means that *I will lead the way Christ led. I will not lead the way the world wants me to.* Incarnational represents the view that we are to leave the ways of the world and its ways of leadership, and turn to the ways of Christ. As He was Incarnational, we can be too—not in the mysteries of the God-Man, but more precisely, using how He led as our example and template. As our name *Christian* stresses, we are Incarnational. Christ-like is to be in Christ, not in the realm of the world. We are to be influencers but not partakers, and our modes of leading the church must *follow suit*. We can glean non-contradictory insights from business paradigms, but business theories and practices are not meant to rule His flock. Why? Because Christ built a bridge to us as Christians, and we are to build a bridge for others so they see Him in us. We are to build bridges to our interpersonal relationships as leaders and as followers. It is about caring for people because we are being dependent upon Him and His precepts in order to be real and effectual in Kingdom values and the modelling of His ways to the world (Phil. 2:6-8).

Incarnational leadership is rooted in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, as “He took a towel” (John 13:2-5). He was efficient with people, had goals in sight, but was also relational over being task-driven. This kind of leadership produces a church filled with real purpose and motivation as people are called, appreciated, loved, encouraged, disciplined, involved by mentoring and discipleship before they are deployed in ministry. This is “Christ life” before “ministry life.” Thus, the leadership of Christ is producing a

church of spiritual maturity and involvement so that the people are inspired to be devolved, as in caught up in Christ and with one another to be more admirable in the faith and in the world making Him known. After they are deployed, the equipping and encouraging are to continue. Manipulation, conniving, and posturing are to be absent, as God's Love is the fuel. This kind of leadership sees Christ glorified as our tempers and temperaments come in line with His precepts. It means being imitators of Christ so we go in the direction of the possibilities; we stretch beyond what we think we can do or go, and seek where and what He has for us, even with our limitations and frailty.

Incarnational Leadership is based on values and character, so it is about "how we do things." Who we are as Christians needs to transcend in how we are with one another. Leadership that is effective, even in the business world, is more about how we treat and empower our workers and staff. We are with Christ, we are with one another, and we *bear with one another in love*. It is about being *humble-minded, gentle, and patient*; it is about being truly rooted in Christ so our focus is to glorify Him rather than follow trends or lift ourselves up. It causes us to carry one another with honesty and grace in spite of our personalities and eccentricities. It requires us to be deeper, lasting, and real in Christ so our model of leadership focuses on Christ and not business. It causes people to see Christ at work in us. It is not about control or command; it is about empowerment, listening, and unleashing. As a shepherd, we lead others where they need to go, where we have walked to the destination first, or are on the way. It is not about results, although they are sought and are important. It is about nurturing and empowering people in Him (Prov. 27:23; John. 10:3-14; 1 Cor. 15:49; Eph. 4:1-16; Col. 3:13; 1 Thess. 5:13-14; 1 Pet. 3:8; 5:1-7).

Incarnational Leadership is demonstrated by the people of Christ who go out of their way for one another for a common goal because they are truly rooted in Christ and focused on spiritual unity. It is the operation of the Fruit of the Spirit and character so that patience, courage, sensitivity, and enthusiasm help keep us focused on Him and the wonder He has for us. It stresses how we are called to act so what we do is moved by character. Leadership that is real and devout is not about us; it is all about who Christ is and shows in us personally. It is never about personal agendas, power plays, posturing for power, or control. It sees no ethnicity, no gender, no economic status, and no politics within the church, or who has the best education.

It is never about pride or leading others to us and ignoring Christ. If so, it is not biblical or effective leadership! Pride blinds leaders as well as the others who are to follow; it misleads, oppresses, and keeps us complacent when we are called to be revolutionaries to the world. We are called to adjust our thinking and style to pick up a towel and not a whip. We are to take Christ, and unselfishly make the best of our goods, resources, and situations to move a church in the direction He called us to before we were born—to be a revolutionary (Jer. 1:4-10; Gal. 1:15).

A big problem in a lot of our churches today is that way too many strategies have been borrowed from the business world and touted to be the way a church should be managed and led. Consequently, the management of staff and volunteers in devising

plans and visions comes from business development. Thus, the family and Christ-like characteristics become secondary as we strive to be a successful CEO or marketer of a church rather than a servant as Jesus exemplified and called us to be. We are to be led by the Shepherd to be shepherds for Him. Having a business model in our churches is a sign of success and of “you have arrived” in the twenty-first century. Therefore, the pastor becomes the CEO, and concentrates only on strategic thinking, thus losing touch with people, prayer, care, character, and Christ. Such churches have little teaching causing discipleship and ministry to be absent in their community and world. This is pathetic as compared to the real potential in numbers, call, and opportunity. As we have seen in the news recently, the business model has not worked well for many businesses, even the big ones. Thus, it cannot possibly work for the Bride of Christ! Even now, the business world is looking for new effective paradigms and models because of so many failed techniques. And, “Servant Leadership” is creeping its way to them!

Yet, most Christian leaders still tend to use the business model for managing volunteers and staff. The head pastors in many churches are forced into a business model because it is expected and, as a result, they lose touch with the people and the other leaders. In addition, they definitely lose touch with Christ! An elder of a church called me recently asking for a pastoral candidate profile with the emphasis on a pastor with the gifts of marketing and communication. I could not find those gifts listed in the Bible. Yes, marketing and communication are important factors in church leadership, but they are tools to be employed, not the means to lead and pastor. I had to tell that elder that no such profile existed, because what the church was seeking was neither biblical nor productive. Their focus needed to be on what Christ has called us to do. The elder was not interested. This is very unfortunate, because although some good principles can be attained from a business model, the church is not a business. It is a family in Christ!

What is Servant Leadership?

So, how can a church be led if not like a business? The Bible shows us how. That “how” is called *Servant Leadership*. Jesus and Paul clearly taught and modeled the *servant* form for leadership through the entire scope of Mark, and 1 Corinthians 3 & 4! Servant Leadership is simply following the character of our Lord into a management model. Some business principles can still be applied as long as they do not conflict with biblical ones. To be a Servant Leader means being an “effective” and “effectual” *pastoral* leader who *shepherds*, no matter what the size of the church. Then, the church focus and goals are centered and led from the perspective of being effective for His glory by having, as the definitive focus for success, the serving of others in care and love. Fundamental. It is what Jesus did and what Jesus would have us do. A business model typically just leads and manages with the attitude and priority of obtaining goals by whatever means. Conversely, a servant model equips, models, and cares, with the attitude of serving others and the prime goal of glorifying Christ.

Jesus, in Mark 10:41-45, gives us a principle precept on leadership. He tells us

that the corrupt Gentile leaders *lorded it* over the people. In other words, they led people by means of clever micromanaging and manipulating, and they sought to subjugate and control people for their own agendas, interests, or personal gain. Focusing on ideas at the expense of people is the guidance of the world, not the guidance from God's Word and comes from following values that are not Kingdom-based. These are the very same means many pastors use in their churches, forgetting the virtues of love, discipleship, and humility. In order to have control, many will seek power to obtain places of honor. Jesus tells us to do the opposite; in order to have honor and be great, we have to be a servant of others. Leadership that is real and effective is not measured by how many people serve us; on the contrary, it is about how many people we serve for Him. How did the Creator and Lord of the universe lead His followers and model for us to do and be? By being a servant! We must aspire to give our lives as he gave His! If we do not desire to lead in this way, we are seeking our own will and self, not Christ and we will be pride-based, not Kingdom-based.

The language of the New Testament does not give us simply clues on how to lead, but specific frameworks. In Romans 16:1, 1 Timothy 3:8, and 3:12, the Greek word for someone who leads is *diakonos*, which appears almost 100 times. Translated usually as *deacon*, it really means *servant*—someone who ministers to another or performs practical service for another. In Mark 10:45, John 12:26, Ephesians 4:13 and Philippians 1:1, the Greek word used is *doulos* meaning a slave under subjugation with little to no rights. In Philippians 2:7 the word used is *huperetes*, which denotes slavery. These conditions of being a servant are also in the realm of meekness (2 Cor. 4:7-12).

The running themes in these passages do not mean that we sell ourselves to another; rather, we seek to serve without the recompense of respect or honor from others. Our focus should be on honoring our Lord, not on what the world thinks or even church members to a degree—at least the ones who are not lined up with the Word. The theme of serving means being subordinate in Christ. What does this entail? Real, authentic leadership is never a force of will, personality, or control. It is not to dominate, subjugate, oppress, subvert, or lead by authoritarian means, persuasiveness, or manipulation. Servant leadership is relying on God's authority, empowerment, and power. It is about how we respond, and how we are toward others with a task and goal in mind that is running in His direction and precepts. It is being influenced by Him so we can be influencers for Him. Servanthood and meekness are not about being weak. They are the means of focusing and developing others for Him. Style and personality in leadership are not the main issue as long as the leaders are working in Christ with His character and Fruit flowing through them. But, remember it is not just about the goal; it is about equipping and empowering people, training and equipping them, and allowing them to follow their call to minister to others in loving supervision, allowing for mistakes so they can learn and grow.

Doing What is Popular or What is Christ?

We church leaders need to go from our head knowledge of what we think we should do according to popular models and trends, to practicing, as Christ did,

Incarnational Leadership, more popularly referred to as *Servant Leadership*. These principles are key to modeling a biblical role for the church so all of the leadership will be trained and encouraged in this biblical model! All those in leadership must make being a Servant Leader the prime parameter from which to attempt any organizational or leadership venture. Remember, goals are important, but they are not the main focus! The task and vision are still at hand, but the focus is on people and Christ over task and goals. It is how we *are* to one another. Just look up “one another” in a concordance or see the Bible verse references in our Pastors Page channel.

Take heed. The business model will isolate the leadership from the people, their potential, call, and from the Word through which we are called to influence! Yet, many Christian leaders and churches are reluctant and reticent to embark on servant leadership, thinking, as one prominent church leader told me, “they will lose the edge of effectiveness and be too *wishy-washy!*” Christ and Paul were, in fact, not *wishy-washy!* Real effectiveness will be increased, not reduced, as some church growth paradigms would have us believe. However, remember that the effectiveness Christ has for us is not what the world or the business model will have. Do not measure success by increase in numbers, but by increases in faith, character, spiritual formation, obedience, service, and most important, a worshipful attitude through following biblical precepts! The numbers will then follow!

Incarnational Leadership and Servant Leadership Principles

Servant Leaders are the managers and administrators who do the hands-on work of the Lord by being the people of the Lord. Incarnational Leaders are people who are more *visionary*, the ones who set the tone and empower the Servant Leaders. Incarnational Leaders are the visionaries, entrepreneurs, architects, and builders of the church. They lay the foundation and, with love and care, equip others for the details. They provide the building materials in leadership from their spiritual formation and growth. They give positive direction and engage one another in caring, effective relationships so the church will be operating on Kingdom principles. Servant Leaders are genuinely contributing to the life and ministry of the church. They are proactive and hands-on managers and administrators. Each leader type realizes he/she is not about gifts and personality; rather, each is a temple of God operating in Fruit, character, virtue, and serving Christ and one another.

Here are a few bullet points with ideas for you to consider with prayerful contemplation. Read the passages at the beginning of this article and here in parentheses, and then look at each point and discuss. The veracity of each of the principles below applies to both Incarnational and Servant leaders:

Ask yourself or Group:

1. Are these working in you and in your church? If not, why not?
2. What would your church look like if these precepts were functioning?
3. What can you do to instill Incarnational Leadership in yourself and your church?

Hint: it starts with modeling them! And, don't forget, *lots of prayer* (Romans 12; Galatians 1:15; 2:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 2:11; Philippians 2-3).

- Incarnational and Servant Leadership are about being humble-minded! They are never negative, condescending, or scheming.
- Incarnational and Servant Leaders will have the enthusiasm and willingness to be virtuous and positive to all of the people they touch, both in their family and in the church.
- Incarnational and Servant Leaders are not insecure, but secure in whom they are in Christ. They recognize that life does not revolve around them, but rather on relationships, first with Christ and then with others. Their focus and motivation are not on their ideas, but first on Christ and then on others. In contrast, bad leaders are distinguished by their pride, boasting, self-absorption, self-protection, and self-interests.
- Servant Leaders give priority to others and value their opinions. They do not compare or criticize others.
- Incarnational and Servant Leaders are, first and foremost, loyal to Jesus Christ. They are never concerned about serving their own interests, manipulating, or seeking personal gain or control.
- They are people who have the attitudes that Jesus had!
- They are people who have been transformed by Christ, with faith as the core of their being, and fuelled by Christ, not self!
- They are people who place the needs of others first!
- They are people who have eternal values and God's timing in mind!
- They are people who place integrity ahead of ambition! (1 Tim. 3:2a & 7a)
- They are people who see glorifying Christ and serving Him as the measure of success!
- Servant Leaders of Jesus Christ and His church have His "basin and towel" attitude (John 13:1-17; 1 Corinthians 9:26, 27)!
- Servant Leaders do not neglect their families!
- Incarnational Leaders do not allow themselves to fall away from their responsibilities and call.

- Incarnational Leaders will have a deep sense of purpose that comes from God, with His direction, identity, and eternal destiny in mind.
- Servant Leaders are not weak—they are meek (strength under control)! They are willing to challenge the system, ask questions, take risks, and, when necessary, they are willing to change.
- Incarnational and Servant Leaders, above all, desire to pursue their Christian formation to become excellent both in character and spirituality.
- Christian leaders and followers must not allow personal agendas or power issues to get in the way of God's Word or of reaching the goal of the church (if the goal is biblical).
- Servant Leaders think strategically, like a quarterback does in football. They see the big picture and what is needed to run plays, then see possible options and defenses needed in order to better glorify our Lord in life, programs, and the church.
- Incarnational Leaders do not seek power and/or influence; rather, they are revolutionaries showing that the world's ways are ludicrous and ineffective (Mark 9: 33-37)!
- Servant Leaders know how to lead themselves and others in order to bring the church deeper into the heart of God so to worship and glorify Him!
- Servant Leaders are not willing to compromise truth or the Word just to be more effective!
- Incarnational Leaders tear down sin and Satan's strongholds and pull the weeds of strife away from the flock.
- Servant Leaders should be able, while modeling the way, to get others to follow, empowering them to grow spiritually and in ministry.
- Incarnational Leaders do not compare or judge one another. They see each church and leader who is operating under God's call as unique and purposeful. They do not seek to become what they are not, nor cause division, strife, or conflict.
- Incarnational Leaders do not leave conflict unresolved or festering. They are proactive and *nip* potential problems in the bud by showing others the vision that Christ has given and seeking how all can work together more efficiently to help build His Kingdom.
- Servant Leaders will include the team in all major decisions and strategic planning for the ministry.

- Servant Leaders keep in mind Barnabus and his relationship to the disciple, Paul. The early church leadership, a model that we need to apply, linked them to each other.
- Incarnational Leaders promote the atmosphere of unity as well as diversity. The unity is in Christ and the diversity is in race, economic status, gifts, abilities, and call. They are also willing and able to deal with disunity and divisions before they become rooted in the church culture.
- Servant Leaders work primarily within their call, gifts, and Scripture, while at the same time are willing to be challenged. They will take up the slack in areas in which they are not best equipped until a better replacement is ready.
- Servant Leaders are open and motivated by the Holy Spirit, which is not just a *charismatic* thing! (2 Tim 1:6,7)
- Incarnational Leaders honor, respect, trust, and support one another as joint-heirs and partners in service to the Body of Christ (Rom. 8:14-17; Titus 3:7).
- Servant Leaders never micromanage or manipulate others; rather, they exercise their power in constructive ways to serve others and empower them to be more effective and character-driven.
- Servant Leadership is a team approach! The teammates know that working together means giving without receiving, as well as growing spiritually, both personally and corporately!
- Incarnational Leaders are realistic and are willing to take risks within reason.
- Servant Leaders do not forget to support the church's overall vision and purpose statement, nor place personal feelings higher or in place of it. Each team and Servant Leader is a working part amongst the other parts. Just as a car cannot go anywhere with just an engine, each team and leader contribute to the overall mission and purpose of the church.
- Servant Leaders always tell the truth, stand for biblical convictions and values, and work to change what is not healthy in the church.
- Servant Leaders know that loyalty, harmony, unity, trust, and commitment come from a collaborating and encouraging environment.
- Servant Leaders realize they will face criticism, unpopularity, and risks, as well as public and private verbal rebuke and gossip. However, they are still willing to stand strong, because they do not stand alone. Christ is with them. He is never with the gossipers!

- Servant Leaders listen to everyone, not just the ones in power or ones who have the influence!
- Servant Leaders and Incarnational Leaders listen; they never brag or boast, except about Christ.
- Servant Leaders are extremely important! All of the pastoral staff and board need to be servant leaders, as they will set the tone for the church.
- Incarnational Leadership seeks to make sound, logical judgments that glorify Christ. They try not to jump ahead of God's timing and plan, or jump to false conclusions.
- Servant Leaders know that the effectiveness of their empowerment, training, and supervising of the team will determine the effectiveness of the ministry and church.
- Incarnational Leaders uphold and promote a vision that motivates, encourages, and inspires the church to accomplish the mission Christ gave. They encourage cooperative objectives that promote Kingdom agendas.
- Servant Leaders can and should expect that Satan will not be happy with them, and must be aware of his various ways of distraction and confusion, especially when success comes which infringes on his ground. The church is Satan's ground all too often!!
- Incarnational and Servant Leaders know that Jesus walked the earth as a revolutionary. He did not conform to this world, nor did the Apostles. Our Lord's teachings were conveyed with tender confidence, controlled power, and with passionate truth. He was not influenced by the rich and powerful of His day, as He rebuffed them and never backed down from His convictions. Jesus did not measure up to what they thought He should be, while at the same time, He was also threatening to those in power.
- Servant Leaders will resist the latest fads and leadership trends that are unbiblical! Yet, they will use techniques that are in the character of our Lord to make them more effective! Examples might be budgeting and time management.
- Servant Leaders are never prideful and do not take themselves too seriously! They will never have inflated feelings about their importance or thrive on attention and admiration!

These principles will take time to learn, as they cut across what we may have learned in seminary, at conferences, or from high-priced consultants. Nevertheless, we are called to run a church this way—His way. We can learn it and implement it! In so doing we will be excellent and successful in what really matters, serving by trusting and obeying our Lord Jesus Christ!

Servant Leadership Checklist

We have to ask ourselves whether we are being an agent of change or being manipulative and controlling. We have to ask ourselves if we are empowering people or scheming to get them to do what we want. Are we leading from our authentic spiritual formation or from an idea of what we think we should be? Because, to be a leader for Christ, we must put off our own personal agendas and adopt His will and ways! An Incarnational and Servant Leader is a servant of Christ and a servant to others above all else. So, do you follow the above servant leadership principles? Incarnational Leadership is servant leadership. It is about our personal and spiritual growth and that of others. It is being an example and imitator of Christ so not only are we planted, growing, and thriving, but we are planting seed and cultivating others to do so, too (Philippians 3:10-17; 1 Timothy 4:11-14; 2 Timothy 2:15; Titus 2:6-8).

1. What is working?
 2. What is not working?
 3. What am I doing wrong?
 4. What am I doing right?
 5. How can I put these precepts into practice?
- The job of one who is committed to Servant Leadership is to model and facilitate trust in God and in one another. You must be committed to a stress-free environment in your team relationship! A good leader will always be actively listening and courteous. Your appreciation, love, and recognition of the contribution of others will encourage respect for one another because, as a team, all are growing together!
 - The leadership must show a real, genuine sense of being Christ's servant and modeling it, and recognize the people in their care as His children. This is *Servant Leadership Development* (Galatians 2:20-21; Ephesians 4:11-13).
 - The Incarnational Leader is focused on the glory of Christ, not of self! Thus, he does not fear losing authority when He is our authority. It is about who can do the job the best with dignity and character, not the fear of losing control.
 - Is your leadership mindset from God's Word or from the latest trend?
 - Do you encourage creativity and unity, or conformity and uniformity?
 - Is your heart excited for what Christ is doing in you and in your church? Are you willing to be excited? Will you bring excitement from your heart and mind so it mentors others?
 - Good leaders, who are servants, are relational and not loners.
 - An Incarnational Leader does not posture himself to the detriment of others, or

squelch the enthusiasm and call of others.

- Good leaders are available to others as Christ was (Mark 1:32-39).
- Good leaders empower and employ others as Paul did (Rom. 16:3-7, 9, 22; Col. 4:7, 10-11; 2 Tim. 4:20; Tit. 3:12; Phil. 23).
- Are you about ego and selflessness, or equipping and releasing others?
- It is essential that as leaders, we get along with and like others and have compassion. If not, we need to go to another avenue of service. Christianity is a social religion; it is not individualistic.
- Do you have clear goals and a biblical purpose, or are you engrained in personal goals for personal reasons?
- Do you have a method to monitor the performance of people without being condescending?
- Do you rely on your or someone else's charismatic personality or on what Christ is doing?
- Do you rally people for Him or for your own ideas (no matter how good they may be)? Our ideas can be used only when they are rooted in Scripture and so long as we do not regard our ideas or self as sacred or supreme.
- A shepherd needs to be clear in his communication. Clarity is a must as is flexibility. Being indecisive breeds contempt and disunity. People need to feel secure. Our security and direction must be in Him.
- Do you realize you are not indispensable, that we are all the people of God, called by Him who does not need us, but chooses to use us anyway?
- If we are claiming Christ as Lord, we need to be living the life—not just talking about it or just showing up for the club meetings (church)!
- We need to see what He has done for us. He brings us to God, He makes us alive, He cleanses us, and He is our continual Example! Therefore, we do not need to waste any more of our lives with evil desires or evil deeds. This will translate into our conduct and our prayers (as these will become more serious), as well as our fervent love for one another (John 16:33).
- Sometimes we need to be firm; but, we are always to be friendly.
- The Incarnational Leader is supported and kept stable by Christ and must see life as a mission. We are here to learn and grow in Him not in the world, and to be infusers

and influencers to the world, not from the world.

- Do your goals include your spiritual growth and that of the team?
- See and evaluate all new ideas according to God's Word; if there are no contradictions, give it a try.
- Give constructive feedback not criticism; give abundance of praise and *catch* people doing things right!
- It is about the people not the program. Make sure people are given encouragement and follow-up. If not, you will lose the best ones!
- Good leaders, even those with the kindest hearts and the most patience need to maintain accountability to and for others. Reasonable deadlines need to be enforced.
- Do you have clear job descriptions and lines of command? Do people know the vision, and has it been "caught?"
- Good leaders are vulnerable, admit mistakes, and take blame. Never rationalize misdoings or sin!
- Good leaders persuade and promote their church to be hospitable, as hospitality is one of the main reasons churches grow. People need to feel welcomed, cared for, and usable!
- Good leaders reward people, making them feel important and loved.
- Good leaders do not take themselves too seriously. They communicate that they are in a process, too. Be real and relevant.
- Do you spend the time to encourage your team on to spiritual growth?
- Do you know how to lead yourself and others to bring the church deeper into the heart of God to worship and glorify Him?
- Leadership is learned more than it is born. It is a gift and a call that is to be followed and cultivated. Strong willed personalities are born; biblical leadership is formed by being in Christ. It is far better to form leadership in a timid person who is receptive and teachable in Christ, than what we consider is a natural leader who is prideful! Because we are called to be strong in Him not just in ourselves!
- Leadership is not a privileged class of people. Rather, it is the bottom rung of the ladder that motivates others to move up the ladder to serve and to do.

- Do your team members have prayer as their focus and possess the competence, abilities, and skills to carry out goals?
- Do your team members have a deep reverence and love for the Lord, so it infuses them and their personality and spills out to others around them? (Keep in mind the different personalities and spiritual maturity of team members.)
- If we are claiming Christ as Lord, we need to be living the life—not just talking about it!
- Do the goals of the ministry take a back seat to service, love, and care?
- Do you have a personal agenda that occupies your primary focus?
- Do you have a sense of unified commitment within your team so that they all feel a sharing of the ministry, or is one person running the whole show?
- Is there a sense of love and trust within the team?
- Do you hold regular meetings, listen, and welcome the input of others?
- Does your team trust you and know that you care and listen so that they share their perceptions and give you feedback?
- Do you encourage improvement without imposing pressure?
- Does your team have the necessary resources, supplies, and support needed to get the work done?
- Does your team feel appreciated?
- Do you build on one another's strengths as well as protect and offset one another's weaknesses?
- Do you allow your team the freedom to fail without judging or showing condescension?
- Does your team support you and help you achieve goals, or is there competition and back-fighting? Good leaders are good communicators; they inspire trust and confidence, they have vision, they know the goals, and they empower people in the right direction (Heb. 12:1-5).
- Do you have the ability to confront sin and take risks, setting the example for the team?

- Be enthusiastic (Prov. 22:29; Rom. 12:11; 2 Thess. 3:13; 2 Tim. 2:15)!
- Do you listen to new ideas from your team? Be proactive with the attitude of Christ.
- Does the church and upper leadership, including the pastor/pastors support you and your team?
- To be a healthy church, it must be both focused inwardly to equip and edify the people and outwardly to reach the community. Doing one without the other is a prescription for ineffectiveness and is courting disaster. Each one needs the other to be effective. We cannot do the work of God unless we are the people of God. We cannot do the work of God by ignoring Him!
- God NEVER asks us to violate His commands in order to accomplish His will (1 Cor. 9:22)!
- Have you spent adequate time with training?
- Be one who delegates by respecting, supporting, and equipping others, not micromanaging them. Affirmation and listening will foster cooperation and unity (Prov. 12:25; 20:5). People stop their service in the church when they feel they are not needed, empowered, trained, or respected. This is the real reason why churches have problems finding people to serve. It is not because they are not out there, but because they have encountered too many barriers and have been squelched!
- Are you open for improvement? If not, how can you develop an attitude to accept this? Always be reading and challenging yourself, and have others do so for you and to you.
- Good leaders are proactive, practice realistic and sound judgment, have initiative, and inspire others with their tenderheartedness and example. Bad leaders lead by a force of will.
- We are called to show compassion without regard to a person's status, to have the "strength" to walk beside others and minister the love of Jesus without condemnation. Godly meekness means showing grace to others because we understand the grace we have been given.
- Good leaders are teachable. To be a person who can teach, we have to be a person who is teachable, who is a learner and can pass it on, who can share insights and what has been learned with others to disciple them. It never means being condescending or thinking we know it all. This is not the spiritual gift of teaching. Rather, it is the ability to pass on God's love and insights to others. It is first being a learner, absorbing and applying what God has for us, then replicating that in others (Ex. 33:13; Psalm 25:4-9; 86:11; Proverbs 9:8-9; Matthew 7:28; 11:28-29; 28: 19-20; John 7:16; 14:26; Mark 4:2; Luke 5: 1-11; Acts 16:1-4, 18:5, 19:22, 20:4; 1 Thess.

3:2-6 2 Tim. 2:2; 2 John 1:9).

- How much time are you and your team spending in prayer, both personally and collectively? If prayer is not occupying at least one-third of your meeting times, your priorities are off-center!
- Humbleness is essential in leadership (Job 41:34; Psalm 10:5; 18:27; 101:5; 131:1; 6:17; Prov. 16:18; 21:4; 30:13)!
- Leadership exacts a heavy toll from us. Make sure you are fed from His precepts, have a mentor, take care of your family and self, eat right, exercise, take vacations, and always be accountable! Billy Graham told me this is how he operates! Pride will say you do not need this, but you will then fail as a leader and cause havoc in your church and ministry. Our confidence in God's work and power will spill onto others around us and be the frame of the church on His Foundation as the rest of the church finishes it (Psalm 5:3; 57:8; 61:2; 88:13; 119: 15, 147-148; Mark 1:35)!
- And do not forget to *let go and let God*. Do not be weary in doing good when people come against you (Gal. 6:9)!

Servant Leadership is exercising real, godly leadership as Christ did when He used a towel, and influencing, equipping, and empowering people to accomplish God's purpose and plan. It is serving others unselfishly while influencing and empowering them to grow in a Christ-centered, purposeful direction. This was an uncommon trait in Jesus' time, just as it is in ours; do not let it be uncommon for you! Being a leader in the church, or in the home (for a husband) is never a force of personality; it is *earning* that respect because of your love and care (1 Kings 3:9; Luke 22:25-28; Matthew 25:21; Mark 9:33-37; John 5:19; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Timothy 2:24; Hebrews 13:17).

What happens when we do *not* do this? *We will be lording over* (1 Pet 5:1-4). This includes haughtiness, arrogance (which is to abuse one's power), controlling, not leading by example, to *lord over* rather than encouraging, to micro-manage, and not serving. This will cause us to fall into the trap of manipulation, political, self-centered agendas, and exploitation, all of which are opposites. These types of leadership models may be the common approach—so it seems—but they will fragment and even destroy a church. The leadership for the church must come from the Jesus model, not the business model! Rotten leadership is more destructive than a legion of demons, as it corrupts godly principles and displays a skewed understanding of our call to follow Christ. It seeks its own, not the Word.

Jesus clearly tells us that a leader should behave like a servant (Luke 22:26). We are not in leadership for power, control, or for personal gain. Rather, we are to point others in His direction by our example. Jesus *took a towel* and washed His disciples' feet. This is an act we can easily glance over, missing its significance. But this was God, Creator of the universe, performing the lowest job in that culture—washing someone's

feet. If the President of the United States came over to clean your toilet, it would be a pale comparison! This is an example for us; we are never too high in our position to perform the lowest tasks because, it is not the task, but our servant attitude that is important.

Samson was a Judge for Israel (Judges 13-16). His primary responsibility was to lead his people, and defeat the Philistines. He chose, instead, to party and pursue women that were not right for him. The end result was that his strength was taken away; he was blinded and powerless. Only at the literal end of His life did he call upon God. He wasted his leadership and abilities on foolish, meaningless gains and manipulation. How sad that so many of our church leaders do the same. We are given precious opportunities and we squander them, pursuing trends, personal needs, and desires rather than God's Will!

Real, biblical leadership for the church is never a force of will or personality. Leadership embodies the fruit and character of our Lord. It requires your being a servant before you attempt to direct others. If a leader just directs and never serves, there is a good chance he is not a real leader; rather, he is a pretender, exercising his agenda and not God's call and will.

Being an Incarnational Leader Means to be a Good Leader

First Peter 5:1-4 has some direct calls for us to be Incarnational Leaders. We are called to follow the Good Shepherd in order to be a good shepherd! Peter is addressing those in church leadership who had the same problems we have today. Thus, he extols them to clue themselves into Christ and follow His example by caring for and pastoring others with excellence and fortitude. Peter does not ask them to do something that he has not done; rather, he uses himself as an example and points them to the Ultimate Example.

The Church has always been riddled with strife and conflict because our fallen nature causes us to fight with one another using the ways of the world, while the devil also uses us for his means. When we do this, we forget who Christ is, and we forget what the Church is here to do—to know Him and make Him known. We leaders can easily be tempted to chase what is not godly. So, when we are not following the Good Shepherd, we are not being a good shepherd. We will then get our lead from our own desires; consequently, we will seek means to get what we want and not what God has called us to. Then, *wham!* The sheep are in conflict and strife because the shepherd is leading them astray.

One of the prime ways we can cause dysfunction in the Church is to “lord it over,” to see people as puppets to do our bidding by micro-managing them, and seeking to belittle, exploit, and manipulate while we are clearly called to lead by the example of our Lord. We must use leadership as a means of helping people draw near to Christ as we eagerly seek to know Him better ourselves so we can be a good example. The fruit of this will be a sense of willingness, of humbleness, unselfish servitude, and

encouragement by discipleship (Matt. 20:20-28; Luke 22:26; Gal. 5:19-26). It is all done with the goal of sharing in His glory in eternity!

I urge you to seek God's will by recognizing God's love for you. In that way, you will be able to apply biblical principles to help you become a much better leader. Additionally, if you are already a leader, you can use the principles of His Word to spruce up your attitude so your character becomes good in action. You can take a look at what you have done wrong, and then correct it by removing your false thinking and realigning your behaviors.

Conflicts buffeted the early church; the Apostles were seeking to restore their churches to a proper perspective and call. The leaders were also experiencing the first waves of persecution and were the ones being tortured and imprisoned. The call is simple, yet so not followed in most churches! The call for us is to exercise watch and care over God's people, and to encourage and shepherd them in a godly direction from a godly example. Leadership is never about what we get out of it or to force our inclinations on others; rather, it is about the mobilization of His precepts from His Word in our lives so it flows and it is "happening" onto theirs! We will have an eagerness to know Him more powerfully so we can serve with more humility. Remember, it is all about how we are to others rather than what we do for the church.

We are called to be Shepherds. This is a term that had great depth and meaning for an agrarian society. It is how Christ led. He exemplifies it in how He cares for and gently guides us. He, as God, serves as our prime example, the One to whom we are responsible for the people He has entrusted to us. We can trust Christ to lead us (John 10:11; 1 Pet. 2:25), and thus lead others in the same manner. *Sheep* and *shepherd* are often-used words in Scripture; they denote a concerned guide who honors God, the church, and His people (Ezek. 34: 1-10; Luke 15:3-7; John 10:1-18; 21:15-17; 1 Pet. 2:25). A shepherd does not lead by being harsh or the sheep will refuse to go with him, and perhaps will even die. Rather, he leads and guides them in the right direction with gentleness; then the sheep will follow him. The sheep do this out of a need to be protected, and to be led to food and water that they cannot find on their own. Humans are to lead others to the precepts of His Word and character. We are to lead by being a shepherd. This means we lead *not by compulsion* and *not because we must*. Many Greek philosophers and teachers and some Jewish leaders were very strict and controlling; this created a negative, non-enriching atmosphere that led to discord and strife. Real leaders are real examples that exemplify true virtue (Matt. 16:24-27; Mark 10:42-45; Phil. 2:6-11; 2 Thess. 3:9; 1 Pet. 5:1-4)!

Be examples, in 1 Peter 5:3, means to show others and influence them—not just tell them. We are to shepherd the flock of Christ with wise conduct through the exercising of humility and the demonstration of wisdom. The light we use to guide others needs to be His Light, not ours. Our light is *pride* versus the Light we are to follow, which is Christ (Mark 10:42-45; John 13:1-17; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Tim. 4:12). As leaders, we are responsible to care for God's people with faithfulness and honor, and never out of severity or improper motivations (Matt. 23)!

If you are in leadership, then be a good leader! Be Incarnational and a servant with your leadership. Our attitude and behaviors will be closely watched and mimicked! We are the ones who will either encourage others to seek and know Him more, or distract them away from the church and our Lord. We must be growing in the faith with conviction and fortitude so we will have good motives. Good motives are essential to good leadership; otherwise, all you have are power plays, strife, and dysfunction! Churches that have problems, for the most part (in my experience), are mainly because the leadership has forgotten who Christ is in their personal lives, and they do not practice His precepts. They are not willing to be good followers and therefore end up leading the people with personal agendas and trends. Christ is left out of the loop (1 Kings 3:9; Luke 22:25-28; Matthew 25:21; Mark 9:33-37; John 5:19; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Timothy 2:24; Hebrews 13:17)!

Incarnational and Servant Leadership embodies the fruit and character of our Lord. It must be Christ-directed in a godly, purposeful direction. It requires being a servant before attempting to direct others. The leadership for the church must come from the Jesus model, not the business model! It is never a force of personality or wills; it is earning that respect because of your love and care. It must come from Him, disseminating through our personal disciplines of growing in Him by faith and His Word, and modeled from good mentorship. This will mean we serve unselfishly so we influence, equip, and empower people to accomplish God's purpose and plan. Disintegrating or bad leadership is more destructive to a local church than a legion of demons, as it corrupts godly principles and displays a skewed understanding of our call to follow Christ. It seeks its own, and not the Word.

If we do not have a desire to pursue the will of God with Incarnational Leadership, we need to ask ourselves *why?* and *what is in the way?*. Most, if not all of the time, it is the desire of sin that blocks us. Sometimes, we may not recognize sin and perhaps sometimes we rationalize it away, especially when it is *dumbed down* and shown as OK in the media and entertainment at our disposal. Don't *dumb down* the Truth of His Word or lead in the ways of feeble men!

- Here are positive examples from Scripture: John 13:1-17; Acts 13:1-5; 1 Corinthians 16:15-18.
- Here are negative examples from Scripture: Genesis 30:25-43; Judges 13-16; Ezra 4:8-23; Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 22:24.

Chapter XX Designing Constant Meeting and Action Plans

Every church has meetings. Some are formal. Others are leisurely and informal. Some are very skilled, with strict rules of order and procedures laid out so specifically that the meeting is the ministry. Other churches just may meet on a whim, ignoring procedures, trying to do damage control, and finding their way through the chaos.

In order to cultivate a living, growing church that is poured out to His purpose, there must be regular, organized planning times. These meetings are essential as are the reasons to have them. If you have them for the wrong reasons, strife and confusion will occur. If you have them for the right reasons, community and action will synergistically combine to serve the Lord!

Your church must never have meetings only for the sake of the meeting. For example, if you are on the evangelism committee, when you serve on that committee, you are doing evangelism. The meeting becomes the ministry, thus, no actual *real* ministry such as evangelism is done. Your focus as the leader is to realize and teach that the committee is like using a football huddle to plan the game. The game is the task that the committee is assigned to do. If you just meet in the huddle and then sit down afterwards with a satisfaction that you planned the game, but then forgot to play it, you will lose! It is the same with a committee. **The committee is strategy and brainstorming in session to get the work done.** It does not exist in of, or just for, itself! Therefore, when the evangelism committee meets, plan strategies of how to do and implement evangelism, and then go out to do it!

To prevent this “the committee is the ministry” mentality from strangling your church, there must be a clear and effective mission statement, clear on goals and duties. Training and encouragement, as well as supervision and accountability, need to be provided. (Ephesians 1:21-23; 3:10; 4:15; 5:23; Hebrews 10:19-25)

Have the meeting focused on the mission of the church, along with the meeting agenda. In addition, be in prayer for at least one-third of the time! It may be rough in the beginning, but the more it is done, the easier it becomes!

A typical meeting is an hour and a half a month. As additional focus and organizing occur, your meeting time will be shorter! This time should be reserved for most committees and teams. Some will need to meet more often and others, less often. Reserve a half-day per quarter for training and prayer, and a two or three day retreat each year to seek the Lord's Will in life and ministry. Consequently, the focus can be on God's Will, setting goals, and strategizing for the year. Your efforts will comply with His, and the goals of your call can be accomplished.

Meeting times are often wasted by not following agendas and by needless arguments. As a solution, have the agenda made out a week in advance and given to each member. Encourage members to consider what they will say along with their

feedback and ideas before coming, and to be in prayer about it. Do not allow interruptions among the members. Insist on raised hands if necessary. Listen and encourage. When the mission and purpose of the church is clear in an atmosphere of prayer, most meeting problems are muted, and the meeting goes faster!

Principle Scriptures: Proverbs 11:27; Isaiah 23:3; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 1:3-7; 27; 2:20-21; 3:1-16; James 1:8.

Typical Meeting Schedule

1. Pray

2. Devotions

3. **Opener**, statement of the church/ program from the pastor/ leader.

4. **Mission:** Spend a few moments going over the mission of the church and any denominational articles you have for the elders / goals/ team building/ vision & mission discussion, if you have not done it for the program meetings. Use this time for teaching leadership principles, and challenging one another in spiritual growth. Concentrate on how you can inspire one another, instruct one another, and build better relationships with one another!

5. **Reports:** First, briefly review notes of the last meeting. Then, have each team leader, and/or elder, give a report on his area of ministry. Keep it short--how it is going, the needs, what to pray for, any problems, and if they are brainstorming with the team on how to solve them.

6. **Principle agenda** and feedback: What needs to be accomplished. Do it orderly, and be prayerful as to how this will honor Christ and fulfill the objectives of the church!

7. **Set goals:** Once a quarter and on your retreats set goals and prioritize them. Brainstorm your thoughts and ideas of where you and your church will be in three to five years. Write them in each category and assign each a priority number of 1-10 for relative importance, then give them a target date to start.

8. **Brainstorm and dream:** In your regular planning and strategy meetings, brainstorm and dream about the future. Where are you and where do you need to go?

9. **Learn to think big!** Yet, be wise, patient, and expect His timing. It is the nature of God to bless His people (1 Chronicles 4:10; Ephesians 3:20-21)! Ask this question at least once a month: "If you knew for certain you would not fail, what would you do for the Kingdom of God and His service?"

10. Incorporate the feedback of others into your planning process. Make sure you are listening to the needs of the church and community while staying on a Biblical approach and course.

11. Close in Prayer: Spend one-third of your time here!

Other things to consider in your programs and meetings for effective planning before making major decisions: (1 Corinthians 14:40; Titus 3:2b)

1. Visualizing where you need to be, praying and searching the Scriptures for your answers.
2. What are you in faith, prayer, and worship?
3. Evaluate your present spiritual condition!
4. Determine appropriate faith goals for yourself, and keep one another accountable.
5. Have a clear sense of purpose for the meeting and the goals of the church accordance to Scriptural precepts!
6. Do not have a meeting unless you have a good reason or an agenda to cover, unless you are meeting for prayer. Remember, during the summer months, people are gone, so you may need to meet less often or not at all.
7. Follow the rules. Most meetings in the church and community in the US are run by *Robert's Rules of Order* (see our article on it or go to www.rulesonline.com). You should make this book your second best friend! Make sure everyone has a good working knowledge of these rules. They are simple and you can type out a condensed list that reflects your needs.
8. Be committed to clear and accurate communication, be open and honest, and do not have any hidden agendas or feelings! Your job as a leader is to build solid relationships and a cooperative climate!
9. Make sure everyone understands the importance of listening to one another!
10. Always speak to one another in love. Attack the problem, not the person. Attack the idea, not the motivation!
11. Listen to understand, and speak to be understood!
12. First person communication, not third person!
13. Agree to disagree!

14. Ask questions to clarify so as to better understand!
15. Everyone needs a clear job assignment and boundaries. Do not follow personalities, but rather focus on the issues!
16. Know when to break the rules. There are times when a teachable moment comes, so the pastor can preach a little during a business meeting. Use this only when necessary, and do not overdo it or spend too much time on it!
17. Sometimes, it is not a good idea for the pastor to be the moderator or leader of a meeting. The moderator, by definition, is to be moderate, and not a strong willed, overbearing personality. If you have an intimidating personality, people will be afraid to speak up, and they will lose interest and passion for the church. In addition, by not being the moderator, the pastor will have an extra layer of protection and accountability. The church can be seen as congregationally run and not a dictatorship. Look to your denominational guidelines. The pastor can still speak up and remind people of issues of the Word and issues of the mission of the church and issues of people's feelings. In addition, remember those teachable moments.
18. Have someone record notes/ minutes!
19. Have a clear time, place, and duration for the meeting that that is published at least one week in advance so everyone will know. If the meeting is for an emergency, make every effort to get in touch with everyone on the team/committee!
20. Have a system for positive procedures and decision-making (if you do not use Roberts Rules of Order), focusing on good attitudes. Most meetings will need to have a consensus for the decisions.
21. Stick with the agenda (unless moved by the Spirit and as a group agree to diverge) and keep to the policies and goals of your team. Keep the meetings running and moving and on time.
22. Encourage people to think through the best way to organize their presentations, discussions, and reports, preferably before they come.
23. Your goal is to create a win-win attitude atmosphere. Seek out your decisions with a consensus, not a compromise. Most compromises end up displeasing everyone! The secret of win-win is simply following the order and process, prayer, making clear presentations, and laying out options for a group decision/ consensus. Do not negotiate with one another before meetings for votes (you are not an Olympic French judge). These never lead to win-win scenarios in churches as it did in the Olympics setting.
24. Have people be committed then respect the decisions and do not subvert them later with gossip and in fighting!

25. Clarify needs and listen to as many people as you can.
26. Make sure your own manner is positive, relaxed, and poised!
27. Be committed to God's timing for events to happen. Do not rush people who are not ready.
28. A leader may need to suggest alternative procedures, or to table an item until next time if there is gridlock or lack of consensus.
29. Continue to develop and resource your leaders.
30. Have a system to manage conflict or the potential for conflict when feelings and agendas collide, or when people feel they are not being listened to!
31. Celebrate progress.
32. Be willing to make mid-course corrections.
33. Do not be afraid to revamp or even eliminate ineffective ministries.
34. Monitor church attendance and offerings weekly.
35. Beware of pride and political agendas!
36. Make sure the finances are "above board!"
37. Once a year, review and update your church's philosophy of ministry.
38. Make sure you orient your new leaders and committee people before the first meeting!
39. Publish condensed notes from the meeting for the upper church leadership/ pastors, and make them available for the whole church, and for elder meetings. They should be publicized in the church newsletter or other public forum. There should be no secrets unless when confidentiality is at stake.
40. Be aware that meetings can be the pivotal points in which the course of the church can be pushed in a good Godly direction, or derailed into Satan's meadow. The leader is the key in handling such situations. It is a delicate skill to be firm enough to put down ungodly agendas, pride, gossip, hypocrisy, and strife, while listening with a soft touch. This is what it means to be meek.

41. Evaluate your meetings with other leaders. Ask, "Did we get the results we wanted? Did we get it done the way we wanted to? Are the meetings productive or flat? Do we stray from the purpose?" Always keep in mind Biblical precepts and character!

42. Key words that destroy a meeting's effectiveness are personal attacks, gossip, pride, confusion, manipulation, abuse of power, bad communication, unclear roles, negative attitudes, wheel spinning, poor planning, personal agendas, no minutes, bad, or no procedures, avoiding problems, and refusing to handle conflict Biblically!

43. Key words that build up the effectiveness of a meeting: good agenda and procedures, focus on the issue, building of relationships, Godly direction, encouragement, dealing with problem personalities, setting boundaries, participation from everyone, listening, teamwork, and prayer!

44. Encourage everyone to be in intercessory prayer for one another!

Pastoral and/or Church Staff Meetings

Follow the same formula as above with these additions:

1. **Set faith goals and establish priorities.** Faith goals include where you need to grow, being sensitive to the supernatural, and being realistic. Make sure that goals are measurable. Prayerfully prioritize goals in accordance with God's will for life and ministry.
2. **Challenge** each person to read at least one book a month in the area of his or her ministry, along with something in another area of interest.
3. Once a month, challenge one another to consider areas of strengths, of weaknesses, and action steps for growing and/or improving in these areas: Personal, Family, Church, and Vocational. Remember, part of growth is failure, so allow people to fail, but make sure they are repentant, reticent to blame others, and willing to grow and learn from mistakes and setbacks.
4. Follow the procedures in the article, *Church/Staff Conflicts*.

Chapter XXI Goal-Setting Strategies and Budgeting Ideas

Goals are very important to setting up objectives, targeting opportunities and action plans, and strategizing on going from one point to another in personal life as well as ministry. Goals are tools to assist growth and to better our call to Christ and our service to one another. However, goals are not the focus, nor are they the ministry. Too many churches put all of the “eggs in the one basket” of goals, ignoring everything else in ministry care and love. Concentrating on goals as the principle endeavor causes them to become an idol of worship, not the tool they should be. Guard against allowing goals to cause myopia so that everything and everyone else is ignored! At the same time, make sure the plans are not so loose that there is no direction or purpose. Either situation is counterproductive!

These are basic goal setting exercises, which can be used in all phases and aspects of the church, from the mission statements of the Pastor and elders, to those of the nursery workers.

Ask questions and listen carefully. Will Rogers once said, “*The greatest compliment you can pay a person is to ask them a question and then listen to their response.*” The key is to be a good listener and build relationships, and, after listening, to make sure something will be done about it. Do not just listen and walk away. If there is a problem, find a solution!

List all the goals that come to mind, and then start to prioritize those goals.

Plan for a year!

1. Use your annual church calendar for your planning cycle.
2. The leadership of the church needs to set aside time to plan the entire year, listing all the major activities. This will show the big picture. Provide a good daily management tool for the church, such as a controlling calendar that creates clear church communication of events, resources, programs, and facilities.
3. Involve as many as possible in the planning! Conduct surveys, have a church meeting, have each committee submit its input, randomly ask questions by calling and visiting members. Do not ignore anyone--have an “open door policy.”
4. The typical church is made up of factions with opposing philosophies, loyalties, turf conflicts, differing perspectives, and agendas. Identify and listen to the key “opinionated people” in your church in each faction. The leadership of the church is not always in charge or on the board! Know whom the real movers and leaders in your church are by observing that they have followers and others who listen to them. Leaders function as either movers or blockers. Sometimes members do not have the time to serve officially, or they have the “gift” of dissention and strife. Alternatively,

they may be too shy or humble to be in leadership. Whatever the reason, be sensitive and listen, build relationships and bridges! Your goal is to get them on board in a Godly direction, to let them see the big picture, and to get their input and then strategize on how to work tighter, together.

5. Make sure you find and listen to the people who have left the church because they usually have key information. Do not just go to them just for information, but try to build a bridge and solve the issues to bring them back! If you wait more than three months after a person or family leaves, it may be too late to bring them back but not too late to listen to them!
6. **Take time to process people.** You cannot just set goals and expect the people to comply and be enthusiastic. They have to be involved in the process, and have ownership in it! It is a lot easier to lead a group of people if they are behind, pushing, rather than trying to lead them where they are afraid to go or where they feel they have no input.
7. Listen to Pastors and leadership who have moved on to other churches, and get their feedback.
8. People tend to become committed, excited, and involved in what they help develop. They will ignore and even fight against even a good and needed goal if they feel they were not listened to. A leader needs to find a way to involve as many people as possible without compromising the Scriptural purpose and goals of the church. People need to be heard! Of course, make sure your goals are the right goals, not ones motivated by agendas other than being our best for His glory!
9. Your congregation must see what you see before they can agree on the plan and purpose you bring to them. Communication is key! Make sure possible objections are explored, and be able to answer them with possible solutions.
10. Focus on the opinion of Leaders who have the pulse of the church and God in their hearts! Be wise to selfish agendas and pride!
11. Separate discussion from decision. Make sure there is an atmosphere of trust and listening. Have forums after church services for feedback. Share ideas in several stages so people are allowed to think through and process change. Then, provide opportunities for further discussion. The greater the change, the more time and information people will need in order to process and take ownership of that change.
12. Distinguish between needs and ideas. A bad idea might be expressing an unmet need. On the other hand, a good idea may be one that you did not think of, but to which attention needs to be given.
13. Most conflicts arise because people were not listened to! (See our articles on *Conflict Management!*)

14. Do not be afraid to ask someone to seek another church if they are fighting against the church leadership and are not motivated by Godly principles! Never force people out just because of differences of opinion, because iron sharpens iron. Seek causes and motivations by listening and through prayer. (Matthew 18; Romans 16:17-18 & Titus 3:9-11)
15. Give the people permission to fine-tune the goals and proposals being made.
16. Make sure there is adequate time for each team and pastor to involve their team as well as input from the congregation in the process.
17. Make out your budget according to goals.
18. Maintain an effective financial control system with checks and balances, and accountability.
19. Control your expenses and cash flow analysis.
20. Have a church wide congregational meeting once a year to go over the year plan, restate the church's mission and purpose, and present the budget and programs for approval. In this way, the process will reflect the needs of the congregation. People need to be heard, even if they are not in leadership; we are the body of Christ. The average person in the pew needs to have a degree of ownership in the church's ministry plan!

Managing the Pastor's/ Leader's Time

Manage your time to maximize results.

With the principles in mind from *How to Lead and Manage the Church*, and what we discuss below, the Pastor and Leader need a system to keep them on track to manage the church effectively. To do this effectively they need to **have a schedule!** Why? Just to see all that is on your plate in ministry as well as personal life and how to juggle it, control it, and do the best for His glory! There must be a system of time management. This is part of stewardship. Our time is precious and God given, so, we need to find a way to be our best at using it. We must make the most of our opportunities and relationships, so we do not ignore anyone or any opportunities in our rush to accomplish something that was not thought through or planned well!

Focus on doing the Will of God.

You can find Scriptures and questions to ask yourself from our channel on *God's Will*. Here are three things to keep as a mindset whenever plans and action occur:

1. The key to success is to find out what God wants you to do, and then do it. This can be done through knowing His Word and with prayer!

“Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” (Ephesians 5: 15- 17)

2. Look at how Jesus prioritized and managed His time.

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” (Mark 1:35)

“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.” (John 17:4)

3. Remember, there is always enough time to do God's Will, there is never enough time to do yours. WWJD was very popular a few years back. What would Jesus do? We may not know the mind of God, nor can we ever second-guess Him. However, we can know what direction He would have us go by focusing on Him and His character. Let this be your guide!

4. With the above principles in mind, evaluate how you spend your time.

5. Develop and keep yourself to a schedule!

Good management is “Proactive Scheduling,” which produces results. “Crisis Management” does not! Proactive Scheduling is being well organized and making plans by budgeting the time so daily pastoral crises and realities of life that come up can be dealt with, while still maintaining your call and goals. By setting priorities and keeping a calendar of your appointments and activities, you will be able to stay focused on the goals and mission of the church, while still being available to pastor and shepherd the people.

To accomplish this you need three very import items: a calendar, a “to do” list, and a phone list. Experience has shown that it is best to have all three in one, and have a back up with an assistant in case you lose it. If you use a PDA or other electronic devise, back it up!! Although those things are fun to use, they are very unreliable and are often stolen! In order for you to be an effective Christian leader, your calendar and “to do” list should reflect those priorities discussed above. Effectively organizing all the details of your life and ministry will allow you to relax and keep focused on Christ and the call He gave you, while still having the time to be a pastor and a Shepherd. Details and responsibilities will be accomplished and not “fall through the cracks” of disorganization!

Here are some ideas:

- Have a well-organized **Appointment Book** to keep a time log of activities. This is an overview of the year, month, week, and day. Go over it once a week to see how time is spent. What needs to increase? What needs to decrease? Observe which “time wasters” can be eliminated. Use this procedure to evaluate your own spiritual condition. How much time are you in prayer and in the Word? Make sure to develop a system of follow-up on meetings, appointments, and commitments made. Do not count on remembering everything, because you will not!
- Use the appointment book to keep track of places to go, people to see, and main things that need to be done during the day. In addition, this calendar can be used to block off time for the family and your personal spiritual growth time! Keep track of planning time, personal and family time, study and sermon preparation, pastoral care and counseling, appointments, meetings, projects, staff management, time with your leadership team, fellowship activities, telephone calls, email and other correspondence, and errands. Also, schedule interruptions and break times.
- Pastors and church leaders should keep a list in the appointment book of the leaders, people and volunteers for whom they are responsible. Have a system to “flag” them for when and what you are going to do, to pray, encourage, check up on, and so forth!
- Use your calendar to develop a "Standard Week" with when meetings, and family time are, etc. Thus, you can be prepared to take on more responsibility, or to say “no” when your book is too full!
- Have a well organized “**to do**” list. These are the details of the appointment book. Make a list with three columns: 1. What needs to be done (give this the most space, and allow room for notes. When you make notes, use another color of ink; this will keep you from missing something!). 2. Time needed to get it done. 3. Priority of tasks.
- Check out a stationary store to find a good system that will incorporate these two together. Find one that works for you.
- Group similar activities together, such as email, phone calls and a meeting all on the same subject. Then, you can make notes about them for your follow-up.
- Have a **portable telephone directory** of important numbers to keep with you.
- There is always ways to improve oneself in time and spiritual management!
- Concentrate on the priorities listed above.
- Consider that your planning is a *spiritual process* because you are seeking to serve Him. He is your prime directive. Make sure you discern God's Will for your life and

ministry. Take the time to plan and establish faith goals and priorities. **In addition, do not forget or neglect your family!**

- The top management consultants teach that the successful executive needs to be responsible with his time by organizing it, and then delegating it and/or disposing of what is unnecessary. This is also a great idea for church leaders as long as the focus is on a listening ear and a heart for God!
- Do the first priorities first, and do not procrastinate.
- Do one thing at a time!
- Publicize your main schedule in a church publication so people know when to reach you and when to leave you alone. Make sure if you are unavailable, someone else is taking pastoral care calls! Never leave the sheep unattended, but do not be the only one attending them!
- Have a system to highlight priority activities and appointments in advance.
- Have someone watch your calendar if you are not good at it.
- Make sure you regularly schedule, at the very least, one afternoon a week to meet with church members on a regular basis. If at all possible, and depending on the size of the church, visit each family once a year. Make sure each leader contacts the families under his care once a month, by visit, letter, email, or fellowship gathering!
- Get involved in a pastor's fellowship. This will give opportunity to vent, to bounce ideas around, to be refueled, and encouraged by others who will listen to you!
- The secret of good time management is concentration. Keep your desk neat and organized. File things right away, and do not allow them to pile up.

Other ideas for time management

- Develop a good file system by subject.
- File your letters and correspondence by subject, not by title or whom it was for or from. This will enable you to retrieve it more easily!
- Try to handle papers once. When papers, magazines, or mail comes in or anything else that comes for you to handle, do not just put it in your in-box. Deal with it as soon as possible. Do not put it aside unless you are waiting for something. In this case, put a "post it" note on it and use the in-box!
- Before you make phone calls or email, think about what you need to say first. This will save you a lot of time.

- Go through your files every year and get rid of what you do not need. If in doubt, place it in a file box and store it. If you do not get into it during the year, you can safely throw it out.
- Deal with hate mail, even if it is anonymous! Most pastors throw it out, but consider that it gives you a sense of what might be wrong in the church. Do not let it bring you down. Do not respond out of anger. Pray, and wait before you respond! You can copy it with your reply and then post it in the church somewhere! That way, the anonymous mail will stop, and the people will know that you are not afraid to deal with their issues. (Luke 12:3)

Manage your teaching schedule too!

- Come up with a general teaching/sermon plan for the year, such as Bible books and topics you will teach and cover throughout the year. Divide the year by weeks, and then give a very rough outline for as many as you can. At least, write out the verse, read the passage, give it a title and main theme/ topic sentence, and your first impressions and thoughts. Then, set up a file for each category. For example, if you are teaching in the book of John and in Colossians, you will have two main files. Set up a file for each lesson. Throughout the year, keep your “radar” out for illustrations, ideas, references, and anything else you can think of that comes to you from prayer and devotions. Then file them in those categories.
- This system also works for meetings and other projects!
- Try to get your church to give you a paid week or two off a year just to work on this! Write out all teaching outlines for the year. You will find preparation much faster and more efficient, because you can have your entire year of sermons and teaching outlines in advance! For ideas, use our “Into Thy Word” method. This will greatly liberate you for other management and pastoral duties, so you are not working on your sermon on Saturday evening or, worse, on Sunday morning!

More Pastoral Management Ideas

1. Make sure the Pastor is encouraged and equipped to do the work he is called to do.
2. Pastors should, on a regular basis,
 - a. Realize that he or she, (the senior pastor) is the “pace car.” He has the power of the pulpit to significantly promote, and endorse programming, and equip the church!
 - b. Know how to lead himself, and others, to bring the church deeper into the heart of God, so to worship and glorify Him!

- c. Go to seminars, conferences, and other group training sessions for ideas, refreshment, and edification! Be open to new ideas and at the same time be able to discern what is “hogwash” and what is Biblical.
 - d. Take other leaders to your seminars and events so they may be edified, too.
 - e. Allow time to do your own research and study.
 - f. Allow people in the congregation to bring you sermon, curriculum, staffing, facilities, yearly planning, vision casting, planning, and teaching ideas!
 - g. Spend time planning mentoring, and equipping the board and leaders.
 - h. Be aware of the shifts, and trends in ministry, but only use what you need and what is Biblical! That way, when people want to move in a new direction that may be hazardous or unbiblical, you can educate them.
 - i. Make sure that people with broken relationships and special needs are included in the church.
 - j. Emphasize family but do not leave out others in the church, such as singles.
 - k. Do not allow some leaders to maintain the perception that their ministry corner is more important, or that it needs more attention than the other ministries. Every season of life is important, and needs to be met by ministerial programs filled with love and care! We are all parts of the Body. Be aware of “turf,” and political agendas.
 - l. Both the senior pastor and the rest of the pastoral staff must support the church and its programs publicly as well as privately. If there is a disagreement, take it to the boardroom!
 - m. The training, discipling, recognition, and encouragement of the church are critical roles for the pastor. If the senior pastor feels he does not have the gifts and abilities to equip and train others to do ministry, then he needs to build a team around him that does! If this is ignored, the church will fail! Some pastors are great teachers, but cannot do anything else. A pastor cannot be expected to do everything, for he is not the sole part of the body of Christ. He is the shepherd for it! A pastor must operate in his gifted area, and build others around him to compensate for the other areas where he is weak and do his best to still give support and the rest of these bullet points (see *The Four Hats the Pastor Wears in, A Primer on How to Lead and Manage the Church: The Big Picture and Overview!* (Romans 7:4-6; 1 Corinthians 10:14-16; 12; Ephesians 4:9-16)
3. To be able to make his support public, the pastor must be convinced that the concept and purpose of the program/ ministry is necessary and real.

4. Pastors cannot do everything but must be a good model of Christ's character wherever possible!
5. The pastor should be plugged into the main fellowship and community events for support. "Work the room" in people contacts!
6. The pastor should lead the church in a celebration of serving Christ outside of worship as the progress and growth of the ministry is recognized, and the volunteers are thanked publicly.
7. When the "chips are down," the pastor must support the team leader, find out the cause and motivations for personal attacks, be in prayer, and be wise. The other leaders need to do the same with the pastor(s)!
8. If misconduct allegations are made against a leader with someone under 18, that leader needs to step down immediately and temporarily, and the allegation investigated, even if no wrong was done. Most of the time, such allegations end up being false. However, you have to protect the children and the leader from further allegations, and seek the truth! Afterward, restore the person to leadership and publicly clear the air! If there is misconduct, the authorities must be involved as well as your denominational leaders, since there are strict procedures and insurance guidelines that must be followed, such a person should never be allowed in leadership or around people under 18!!
9. The pastor needs to be sensitive to the gifts and abilities of leaders, so he can equip and encourage them to work as a team. They can "cover" each other, those who are not gifted in certain areas with those who are. Ministry and the Body of Christ is all made up of different parts, thus we have to work as a team to be effective.
10. The senior pastors and leaders should regularly exercise "random acts of encouragement." A personal note in the church or home mailbox, or well-chosen words at a public meeting and/or in a private conversation would be good ways to accomplish this!
11. **Very important:** Have a system of pastoral care to train your staff and leaders so when they hear of a church member, or of another leader, (many churches neglect their leaders, thinking they are OK, and do not need anything!) or someone in their family with a pastoral need or emergency, that they get immediate response to that need! Assign a key person to be in charge of it in 24-hour shifts, with a contact list and trained deacons or care workers to be on stand-by. No one is self-maintaining. We all need support and care! Make sure there are caring people able to get there in a timely manner! (1 Corinthians 13:1-8; Colossians 4:5; 1 Timothy 3:14-15; Hebrews 12:14-15)

Chapter XXII Church Growth Principles that are Real, that Work, and are Biblical

We all desire to have our churches growing. If not, there is something wrong. Your call and profession might need a review. Growing a church is Biblical, and an imperative from our Lord. However, we also need to discover what it means to “grow a church.” Most people consider numerical growth, and for good reasons. Numbers means success most of the time, and the more you have the more to whom you are ministering. Nevertheless, is that the main reason for growth? Well, see for yourself. Carefully read Matthew 28:18-20. Diligently examine each word. What does it say? The emphasis is on spiritual growth! Discipleship! When we are reaching all we can, all over the world, we need to be teaching them, not just corralling, and counting them!

These principles take into account the American way of life and our culture. It is sad, but true that most Christians are not mature in their faith. Over 80% come to church just to sit in the pew, either because they do not have the time to be further involved, or they do not want to be convicted or bothered. In any case, the secondary goal of the Christian life and experience is to grow in maturity and sanctification. This is rarely sought. The first goal should be our salvation and acceptance/election of our soul. Thus, the primary goals in church growth are the spiritual growth of the congregation, and growing in the Lord. When this is taking place, the numbers usually follow, because people are following the Lord and reaching out.

When I say, *immaturity*, I am comparing U.S. Christians to the early church, and the people in the world wide persecuted church. There is a vast difference between Christians suffering in Sudan, in mortal danger, meeting in tents and basements to worship Christ, versus the Christian in the U.S., who complains about the color of the carpet and then is attracted to a charismatic personality, unconcerned about Biblical truth.

Because of our immaturity, we have to realize how our culture works and work within it while still being true to the Word. We must also cater to people’s comfort level. If people are not comfortable they will leave. You do not want people to leave for merely immature reasons. We cannot expect Christians, even those who may be mature, to have the focus and strength of a Christian in the underground church in China. Now, this is not to say that these things are shallow or wrong. They are not; they are facts of life. A genuine, committed Christian may or may not desire to spend all day on a cold floor, or meet in a basement. He may prefer to be in a comfortable room. We must strive to provide a comfortable environment, so that it can be conducive to outreach, since people are drawn to comfort rather than discomfort. (I need to say that this may sound harsh, but keep in mind that I work with and minister to and visit pastors all over the world for this ministry. There is a big difference in having visited a worship service in a cold, damp basement with members hiding from political authorities in a Middle Eastern county, people willing to risk their lives for the faith, and then coming back to my church here and hearing people complain because the room temperature is five degrees off!)

To use these Growth Principles suggestions, ask yourself, your leadership team, and your people this one question, “What Does a Healthy Church Look like?” Then listen for the feedback. Go through each of these suggestions, find out where you and your church are, and what will it take to implement the suggestions. For further help, read *Preparing the Pastor and Church Leadership to Grow!* and, *A Primer on How to Lead and Manage the Church*.

Forty-four Proven and Effective Biblical Church Growth Principles that Work! **Ideas to consider: (Romans 12:18; 14:18-19; Ephesians 4:3; Hebrews 12:14)**

1. The number one reason for church growth is the preaching ability of the pastor. (Luke 3:1-7)
2. The number one reason why people stop coming to your church is conflict and gossip! (James 3:5-6)
3. The number two reason that people leave a church is poor “people skills” of the pastor and/or leadership, because they do not manage the conflicts and gossip! These poor “people skills” will cause the majority of conflicts between that pastor and the people. (Matthew 5:9)
4. The Bible must be taught in such a way that it is real and can be applied to the lives and situations of the people. You are to equip and disciple people, not just in the basics of the faith, but also in how to be Christians in their families, work, and relationships. They must be taught how to be effective Christians, and how to live their lives to His glory! (Psalm 119:9-12)
5. Preach holiness, how to worship, how to deal with sin, how to relate to one another, and how to love one another, while modeling it yourself! Evangelism, stewardship, and discipleship come out of these! As people are transformed, they can be taught and motivated. (Jeremiah 33:6; Romans 7:12; Galatians 3)
6. The best growing churches in the world have solid Biblical preaching at their core. These churches do not water down the Gospel so much that you cannot see the lifted cross! They do not overemphasize the seeker and ignore discipleship!
7. Real, heartfelt, God exalting adoration must be the focus of the worship service. It must never lift up the leaders or be a performance to entertain. It is God who is the audience and we are the people who are to praise and glorify Him! We are still to make our services friendly and innovative, as there is nothing wrong with plays and contemporary themes as long as the service glorifies Christ and is not a medium just to entertain the people. Remember, the congregation is the performer, the worship team is the leader, and God is the audience! Don’t mix these up! This is where all of the church growth and spiritual growth principles

come to their focal point--the reason for discipleship, and maturity. All that we do in the church--from faith, fellowship, and outreach to facilities--come to this point and reason: TO WORSHIP CHRIST! (Psalm 138:1-4)

8. You must have a well thought out, empowered vision and mission statement with a clearly defined purpose, and strategies on what God has called you to do and be. It must be real and authentic, and you must be willing to act on it. It is one thing to write it out, but another thing to act it out (see the article on *Preparing the Pastor and Church Leadership to Grow*)!! (Hebrews 11:1-2)
9. Teach and model passionate spirituality. The Christian life is not meant to be dry and mundane. Even the Puritans were vibrant, just read their writings! Your job is to convince the people in your church to grow beyond just doing their duty to achieving spiritual passion and conviction. (Phil. 3:7-11)
10. The training, discipling, recognition, and encouragement of the church are critical roles for the pastor. If the senior pastor feels he does not have the gifts and abilities to equip and train others to do ministry, then he needs to build a team around him that does! If the training is not done, the church will fail! Some pastors are great teachers, but cannot do anything else. A pastor must operate in his gifted area, and encourage others who will compensate for him in the areas where he is weak. He must always strive to give support and to do the rest of these bullet points! (Romans 7:4-6; 1 Corinthians 10:14-16; 12; Ephesians 4:9-16)
11. Have a system of pastoral care to train your staff and leaders to immediately respond when they hear of a church member, especially another leader (most churches neglect their leaders, thinking they are OK and do not need anything!) or someone in their family with a pastoral need or emergency. Assign a key person to be in charge by 24-hour shifts. Have a contact list and trained deacons or care workers to be ready to act when the need arises. No one is self-maintaining. We all need support and care! Make sure you have caring people to be there in a timely manner! (1 Corinthians 13:1-8; Colossians 4:5; 1 Timothy 3:14-15; Hebrews 12:14-15)
12. Confront sin, evil, and heresy in the church immediately! The leadership must put down conflict quickly, whether it involves political agendas, the color of the carpet, how to say an offertory prayer, what songs to sing, or who is to be in leadership. The church must move in purpose and unity. This is tough, but possible! (Philippians 2:14)
13. The church must be willing to spend at least one-third of its resources of time, talent, and money in outreach and missions. (Psalm 90:1-2)
14. Political agendas that are contrary to God's Word and Will are the second biggest disruption to the church! (John 13:35)

15. The church should strive to be effective. The best way to do this is by following the precepts of Scripture. We can organize the church by mobilizing the people according to their Spiritual Gifts! So few churches do this, even though it is so Scripturally clear! (Romans 12)
16. The church can achieve the extraordinary when the people serve in their area of their giftedness in a team manner. The quarrels and apathy will dry up as the energies are redirected and channeled in a Godly way. People will function less in their own strength and more in the power of the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12-14)
17. Good Biblical teaching and preaching will provide the Holy Spirit with *fuel* that energizes people and facilitates growth. The biggest growing churches are the ones who preach the Word with power, conviction, and in truth, such as Calvary Chapel (Acts 2:17-39)!
18. The leadership must have a real genuine sense and modeling of being Christ's servant, and the people in their care as His children. This is *Servant Leadership Development*. (Galatians 2:20-21; Ephesians 4:11-13)
19. Leaders of growing churches empower the people in their care. They do not see or use volunteers just as helpers, but as the tools and the prime resources with which to glorify God, and enablers of the goals of missions and needs to be reached. They do this by encouragement, training, and organization, all centered to have the people of God growing in and receiving the Spirit in order to reach the full potential that God has for them. If a pastor, coach, or key supervisor gives special recognition and encouragement even once, that leader and/or volunteer will usually remain very faithful and loyal to the church! (Romans 12; John 4:23; Colossians 1:24-29; 1 Timothy 4:15-16)
20. The leadership must be able to steer the church through rough *white waters*! (See our articles on *Conflict Resolution, Gossip, and Hypocrisy*, and Matthew 18)
21. The best plans and calls of the Lord will stall out due to conflict! God's voice is the first one muted--read the book of Amos! The Holy Spirit cannot work effectively when *ill will* and *ill desires* are running the roost. You must drop to your collective knees and pray for revival. That will work! However, church growth, spiritual or numerical, will never work in an atmosphere of conflict! (Philippians 1:6-8)
22. The best way to deal with conflict is to combat it through love. When people know that you love them and will listen to them, it is difficult for them to be mad. Love, indeed, covers a multitude of sins! (Proverbs 10:12 1 Peter 4:8)

23. Warning: do not *agree* when you do not! (Proverbs 9:8; 17:27-28; 26:20; 3 John 9-12)
24. Be careful about taking on too many negative people! Spread the load out. Delegate. There is only so much you can take, so guard your own heart too! (Proverbs 4:23)
25. If you want people to like you, then be nice to them! Interesting people are interesting because they are interested in others! People like people who like them, so be kind, thoughtful, listen, be polite, and do not forget to smile. Make sure you are *real*, for if you are not, then you are in the wrong position or profession! You must enjoy people and be interested in them to be a good leader or pastor. Being prideful and/or obnoxious only serves Satan! (James 1:2; Colossians 3:13)
26. Sometimes people just will not like you if you are modeling Christ, and some do not like to be led to Scriptural principles. These people are happy in their will and desires, and will not like the Fruits of the Spirit working around them. They are the weeds in the wheat. Let those people go, and focus on the ones whose hearts are after His! (Romans 16:17-18; Galatians 1:10; Titus 3:9-11)
27. Listening, without arguing or defending yourself, is extremely important! This requires prayer and self-discipline. If you cannot do it, you may be in the wrong profession. Have someone do it, just get it done! Your task is not to persuade people to accept your view, but to communicate Biblical precepts and get them to catch it! You are to make them feel heard. When they feel they are listened to, then their defenses will come down and relationships can be built. Then it will be a pleasure to lead them. They will respect and love you more, and will be more likely to be led by your goals. (Romans 8:31; Ephesians 4:25-29; James 3:1-12)
28. If, and when you use surveys, make sure you are determining between perceived *felt* needs versus *real* needs and what God is calling you to! Otherwise, you will take your church down a *rabbit trail* away from God's call! (Ephesians 5:8-21)
29. A leader must be willing to make improvements and change, even if it steps on the toes of others, but stay firm and be uncompromising to the Word. At the same time, allow people to be in the process with a listening ear, so they can catch the new direction and take ownership of it. (Colossians 4:7-8; Philippians 4:8-9)
30. Are you and your leadership learning and growing in community with one another, willing to go beyond your prejudices and fears and embrace what Christ has for you? (Colossians 1:24-29; 1 Timothy 3:14-15)
31. A church's spiritual health is a matter of focus. To develop an action plan, to change the pew-sitting church into the Christ powered church, you have to go

beyond talking about it and actually do something! This requires a focus on Christ that turns into passion and conviction. That passion must come from growth in Christ. If it does not, you will be working for yourselves and not for the Lord and Creator of the Universe! The focus must be on Christ, not the church. That focus determines whether you have a survival mentality or a service mentality. Do you have a church filled with competing agendas, or one with a purpose that is poured out to our Lord? (Philippians 3:10)

32. A church must disciple, and small groups are the best means to do this. Arrange, train, and lead your small group leaders to teach the Bible clearly, going beyond just discussing passages to applying it to their daily lives. Make sure these groups focus on prayer, allowing healthy interaction, so people feel free to express issues, ask questions, and discuss the concerns of life, as the leadership encourages as well as teaches. (Psalm 119:9-12; Ecclesiastes 4:8-10; Matthew 6:33-34; 28:18-20)
33. Teach and model Discipleship, so that personal disciplines are in the Word, and you are filled with excitement and wonder, willing to train, share, and/or teach others what you have learned. (Matthew 28:18-20)
34. If the primary emphasis is on maintaining your building, or on getting more people involved, or on money, this is sure evidence that the focus is on survival. Do the people have a willingness to serve? If so, this is the greatest gauge of a Christ centered church! That willingness to model Christ in the community will only come out when it is done to others in the church first! That focus can only come out with a servant-focused attitude! (Matthew 28:18-20)
35. Pastors, who are real, and authentic, lead healthy churches. This builds trust. Real, authentic leaders will never grandstand, make up problems, or blame others, but will take responsibility, and tell their stories honestly. In wisdom, they will disclose truth, tempered with listening. Be open, and encourage the other leaders to do so too. Authentic leaders can be vulnerable and sensitive at the right times in the right places, and yet wise enough not to give out too much so as to be perceived as weak and needy. Real Christians will forgive you for your mistakes when you are honest! (Acts; James 5:16; 1 John 1:8-10)
36. All too often in the American church, we try to offer people community without cause. The Seeker sensitive, watered down gospel says nothing and inspires people to do nothing. Without a real cause, the church is just another civic club, such as the Kiwanis or Lions. We have to teach the transformation that only Christ gives. (Ephesians 4:11-13)
37. Find out what the image of your church is in the community. To do this, go door to door, and ask people how you can pray for them, then come together as a church to pray for them. While you are asking them for prayer requests, ask if they know about your church and what you can do to improve. By doing this, you

will get a feel about how the community sees you and then you can know what areas need improvement and work. This is a great project for all ages, especially youth groups! This prayer task can also be turned into a very effective way to reach out to people and transition into a “Lighthouse of Prayer.” (Matthew 10)

38. Communicating the gospel in a postmodern context can make us feel forced to compete with the entertainment industry. Do not let this happen. Most people are over stimulated already, and do not always need the PowerPoint and multimedia show. They need reality. Use media as a tool if you need to, or if your people like it, but ask and find out! (I personally love PowerPoint, but I was on staff at a church that did not, so I did not use it.) We cannot compete with Hollywood. Furthermore, we do not have to! We have the power and presence of the living God! (Isaiah 55:6-11; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 6:3-11)
39. Commitment to loving and caring relationships is essential! Loving relationships that are sincere, real, and practical from the work of Christ in your church will be the quintessential factor that will bring people in far better than any evangelism campaign could ever do! People do not want to just hear about Christ as much as they want to see and experience how Christian love really works. They can do this through you! Remember that Christ lived and taught the principle that people respond when we reach out to them. (Mark 12:28-31; John 3:22; 13:35; 1 Corinthians 13)
40. Organize a prayer base in your church. See our Prayer Channel for details. See the article in our prayer channel, *Leading the Church to be People of Prayer*. (John 13:34-35; 20:19-23; Romans 12:1-21)
41. For successful evangelism, the key is to focus the church’s evangelistic efforts on the questions and needs of non-Christians. Find the need that is not being fulfilled and fulfill it, such as a parent support group, a daycare or an after school program. (2 Corinthian 2:3-4; Colossians 1:24-29; 1 Peter 3:15)
42. Do not be afraid to preach Biblical stewardship and how to handle money. If you do not know how, acquire resources to help you. Stewardship, as well as generosity, is a sure sign of the health of your church. A stifled church, no matter how many are attending, will always have financial problems, where a small, poor church with real conviction and purpose will usually have enough! (Proverbs 3:9-10)
43. Make sure your programming is appropriate and needed. (Philippians 3:12-14)
44. A healthy church is prayerful in all of the aspects of church life and ministry. They are reliant upon God's power and the authority of His Word! (John 15:4-5)

Questions to Determine Your Church's Health

Here is a tool to help you assess your church's health. For each question, have your congregation and leaders be open and honest and be in prayer. Consider giving copies to the leaders first, then to the rest of the church. Do not answer these questions unless you want to seek God's Will and make God's changes! You may designate the numbers between one and five for answering the questions, having one as the worst, and five as the best that could be.

As you go over this survey, remember that when people visit your church they consciously or unconsciously rate everything in your church within the first few minutes of their first visit. It might be a good idea to use this survey from the perspective of a first time visitor.

However you choose to use this survey, do it honestly! Incidentally, this is Scriptural. Just read how God rates His churches in Revelation 1-3!

1. Is the teaching of God's Word clear and uncompromising?
1 2 3 4 5
2. Is the Word of God seen as the foundation of authority and guidance?
1 2 3 4 5
3. Is corporate and individual prayer saturating the life and programs of the church (Praise, adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and intercession), and is it being modeled by the leaders and practiced in public?
1 2 3 4 5
4. Does the pastor try to go beyond prejudices, presumptions, and traditions to Biblical truth?
1 2 3 4 5
5. Do the worship celebrations inspire real heart felt praise?
1 2 3 4 5
6. Do the music and sermons glorify Christ, or is it for show? (The emphasis needs to be on content rather than style. The cross and work of Christ has to be the focus with a strong reverence for God and His Holiness.)
1 2 3 4 5
7. Do the worship and preaching present a positive gospel message that people can understand?
1 2 3 4 5
8. Do the worship and preaching leave the people with something to help them face the week ahead?
1 2 3 4 5
9. Are the sins of gossip, pride, and hypocrisy faced and put down? Or, are they left alone to die out? (When sin is left alone it never dies out, it grows!)
1 2 3 4 5
10. Is there confession of sin, openly practiced?
1 2 3 4 5

11. Is there a place to confess sin to a pastor in an appropriate way that is safe and confidential?
1 2 3 4 5
12. Is there an emphasis on grace and forgiveness in the preaching?
1 2 3 4 5
13. Is there an emphasis on grace and forgiveness in the way the staff and leadership operate?
1 2 3 4 5
14. Is there a clear and communicated purpose for the church and a vision that is Biblical and known by everyone who is a member?
1 2 3 4 5
15. Are Bible studies developing where new people are welcomed?
1 2 3 4 5
16. Are small groups growing where new people are welcomed?
1 2 3 4 5

17. Do the classes for children and youth as well as fellowships have the Bible as the center of their curriculum?
1 2 3 4 5
18. Do the adult classes and small groups have the Bible as the center of their curriculum?
1 2 3 4 5
19. Are the leaders listening to the needs of the church?
1 2 3 4 5
20. Are the leaders listening to the needs of the community?
1 2 3 4 5
21. Are the leaders elected on character first and giftedness second, or because they are successful in business and have money and influence?
1 2 3 4 5
22. Do you train and develop your leaders? Or do you just assume when one gets to the office of leadership, one should know what to do?
1 2 3 4 5
23. Do your leaders hold themselves responsible for current or past wrongs, whether or not they were involved?
1 2 3 4 5
24. Do the leaders take their responsibilities seriously?
1 2 3 4 5
25. Do the leaders practice accountability and exercise integrity?
1 2 3 4 5
26. Is the leadership focused with programming that is fulfilling a real purpose rather than "We have always done it that way?" (the seven words of death for a church!)
1 2 3 4 5
27. Is there a balance between evangelism and discipleship? (Spiritual maturity is more important than numerical growth!)
1 2 3 4 5

28. Are people being added to the church by conversion or from other churches?
1 2 3 4 5
29. Is discipleship a principle program in the church to bring individuals to maturity?
1 2 3 4 5
30. Is there a clear understanding of the roles of the pastor, the board, the staff, the congregation, and the denomination?
1 2 3 4 5
31. Are doctrine and spiritual formation solid and Biblical, or based on whatever the new trends are?
1 2 3 4 5
32. Do you sense the presence of God? Is the overall atmosphere of the church, from worship to care, promoting people to become mature and get excited about their faith?
1 2 3 4 5
33. Does the church really reach out to people who visit, and are they treated as guests and made to feel comfortable?
1 2 3 4 5
34. Do people linger after a service in order to visit?
1 2 3 4 5
35. Do people in the church get together for social reasons outside of church functions?
1 2 3 4 5
36. Does the church leadership have a clear way to handle problems and conflict?
1 2 3 4 5
37. Does the church really reach out to people in the community?
1 2 3 4 5
38. How do your neighbors see your church? In other words, are you having a positive impact on your neighborhood and city?
1 2 3 4 5
39. Does your church strive to make a difference in your community?
1 2 3 4 5
40. Are missions a priority?
1 2 3 4 5
41. Is there a system where people are led into a class or small group? Are they known and used?
1 2 3 4 5
42. Does your church have a good structure for finances and wise administration?
1 2 3 4 5
43. Do you feel a sense of community? Despite personal differences, is there a strong sense of unity and family?
1 2 3 4 5
44. Do you have understandable terminology and language everyone is using in the church from the pulpit to the classroom?
1 2 3 4 5
45. Is this church *others-centered* or *self-centered*?
1 2 3 4 5

46. Does your church practice redemptive love that teaches that Christ redeems and accepts His people, and we should accept them in love?
1 2 3 4 5
47. Is there a system to manage conflict (Matt. 18:15-18) with the emphasis to help free people who are ensnared with pride and sin, with the goal of restoring them?
1 2 3 4 5
48. Does your church network and work in harmony with other churches for a common goal? Do you share your resources with other local congregations?
1 2 3 4 5
49. Is there good accessibility and clear signs of where things are and where to go?
1 2 3 4 5
50. Does your church participate with your denomination?
1 2 3 4 5

Please total your circled numbers for all of the 50 categories _____.

250-200: You have a very healthy church, please write in, and let us know!!

200-170: You are well on the road to health!

170-150: Don't give up you have some good things working for you!

150- 100: Your work is cut out for you. What will be your next step?

Below 100? Then Jeremiah 2:13; 7:22-24; 9:23-24; 17:9-11; 30:11-13; 33:6 have the answer for you! Yours is not a very healthy church. You are in a typical church, in Anywhere, USA! Don't give in to despair. It is easier to sow a patch than buy a new coat. It is a time for a lot of prayer and spiritual renewal. Start by humbling yourself before God and seeking His direction for your church (1 Peter 5).

We have two methods for Scoring:

1. To score this survey, compile your results and as a leadership team go down the list to get a *feel* or *atmosphere* of the results. Then, write out where you are, and where you need to be. Then, come up with a method to take each category and strategize how to make it better. You cannot do it all at once, so take baby steps and keep going, and be positive. The top 100 churches will fail at some of these, and the average church in America will score below 100, if the survey is done honestly! There is no perfect church until He comes back. However, we still can strive to be our best.
2. If you must have numbers, then take the totals of each category from each sheet and add those numbers to a master sheet next to each category of the circled numbers. (This will take a lot of man-hours! That is why we recommend the first method) Then, add the totals of each sheet and divide by the number of forms you have. That will give your total average.

We at **Into Thy Word** are here for you. Use our tools. That is why they are here, for you to use cost free! These tools would cost thousands of dollars if you hired us or any other consulting firm. This way, you can do it yourself!

For further help read “Preparing the Pastor and Church Leadership to Grow!” and, “A Primer on How to Lead and Manage the Church.”

Chapter XXIII Church Diseases

A Healthy church needs to develop an immune system to resist disease, else the church will get sick and perhaps even die. We do not mean the diseases of viruses, such as whooping cough, but ones that are even more destructive to our soul and future in eternity! It is much more sensible in our physical health to eat right, reduce stress, and exercise to prevent illness and live a longer, better quality life. If we do not, we get sick and miss one too many sick days and are fired from work, or get that one disease that may take our earthy life away. Yes, no one can add days to his life, but he can add a healthier more energy filled life. The church is a body too. The church needs to eat right and exercise by building love and purpose. Then, when a disease comes along, the church's white blood cells of good leadership can recognize, and get rid of it. For more information on building the church's immune system, see the articles, *The Twelve Characteristics of a Healthy Church*, *The Leadership Challenge*, *The Three Essential Priorities for the Church*, and, *What the Healthy Church Looks Like*.

The Most Common Diseases That Infect the Church

Genesis 12:2-3; Psalm 15; Proverbs 17:27-28; 26:20; Matthew 18:15; John 14:12-14; 15; Acts 2:38-47; Romans 12:4-8; Galatians 5:22-23; 6:1; Colossians 1:15-23; 2:6-7; Ephesians 1:21-23; 3:10; 4:15; 5:23; Hebrews 4:16; James 4:17; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Revelation 1-3)

- 1. The Disease of Diotrefes:** (3 John) This disease is a reign of tyranny through gossip and slander in the name of Christ. John makes a strong and decisive stand against gossip, as does the rest of Scripture, yet this is the foremost problem in the church! John is representing the presence of Christ and gives us a stern warning in loving encouragement for us. The cure is that we must replace the temptation of spreading gossip with the love of Christ. (Psalm 5:9; 12:3; 52:2; 109:2; 120:2; Proverbs 9:8; 10:19; 17:4; 18:8; 25:23; Jeremiah 9:8; Ephesians 4:25-32; James 3:1-12)
- 2. Prideful Me, Me, Me, and Only Me-ism:** The leadership, and even the lay person thinking they are the quintessential aspect and key to the church cause this disease. There is usually one or even a few leaders who refuse to share the power. They also tend to be puffed up with themselves and refuse to see others as children of the Lord! The cure is to confront them in love and educate them on the priorities and mission of the church and their role in it. If they refuse to get on board in Godly terms (Matt 18) rid the church of them as if cutting out a cancer. (Job 41:34; 2 Chron. 26:16; 32:26; Psalm 10:4-5; 18:27; 31:18; 56:2; 59:12; 62:10; 73:6-12; 101:5; 131:1; 6:17; Prov. 8:13; 11:2; 13:10; 16:18; 21:4; 24; 29:23; 30:13; Isa. 2:11-21; 13:19; 16:6; 23:9; Ezek. 28:2; Ob.1:3 ; 1 Cor. 1:6; 2 Cor. 5:12; 7:4; Gal. 6:4; --and these are just a few!)
- 3. Hypocrisy-ism:** This is disease is extremely deadly and is caused by not living an honest Christian life as we should. We, who have been filled with the Holy Spirit, and

who know the Scriptures should have no problem with honest living, yet we do! People with this disease are experts on seeing the hypocrisy in other people, but they fail to see it in themselves! The cure is to not to **play** like a Christian, but to **be** a Christian. Our actions must respond to the transformation of Christ's grace by living honest lives. We must allow Christ's amazing grace to root out all the evil within us, especially the hypocrisy that causes so much destruction. (Job 8:13; Matthew 23:23-33)

4. **My-Church-ism:** This disease is caused by the leadership thinking that the church belongs only to them. It does not! They are the stewards to God's bride. The cure is to build interpersonal relationships within the church and neuter codependent and mutually absorbing mentalities. Strong teaching about the purpose of the church and the body of Christ, as well as about spiritual gifts is necessary. If the church ignores the neighborhood and world around them, then the church programs will become stagnated and meaningless and serve no real need. (Mark 9:33-35; Philippians 2:3-5; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Peter 3:15)
5. **The Dieing Mentality:** This is a disease usually found in churches whose membership has an average age of 50 or higher. The older members refuse to reach out and invite newer and younger people and/or refuse to share power, so no one is coming in to stay. Another symptom is that they are over- focused on the past, and will not look to the future. This disease is also found in younger churches where apathy and arrogance have taken over the Crown of our Lord! The cure is revival, prayer, and seeing the church as the body of Christ where each one is unique and essential, and cooperating to build the Kingdom. (2 Corinthian 2:3-4; Revelation 2:4-5; 3:1-6; 3:14-18)
6. **Snob-ism:** This is a disease caused by directly refusing to relate to others outside your social economic status. It is a refusal to know and understand the differences and similarities between various people groups within the church's community and even inside the church itself. Prejudice is a sin! This disease causes evangelism to die and missions to be stopped! The cure is massive humble-ism by strong preaching in the character of Christ about how we are to emulate Him. (Proverbs 2:7-19; Galatians 6:2-5; Colossians 1:24-29)
7. **Committee-ism:** This disease has the people serving on a committee believing and feeling that the committee is the ministry. Symptoms include having meetings for the sake of the meeting and for no other reason. For example, if you are on the evangelism committee, you think that when you serve on that committee you are doing evangelism. This disease will cause no actual ministry, such as evangelism, to be accomplished.

Cure: Realize that the committee is the football huddle in the game. The game is the task that the committee is assigned to do. It is as if all you have is a huddle, and then sit down with the satisfaction that you planned the game, but forgot to play it! A committee has the same purpose. The committee is the strategy and brainstorming session to get the work done. It does not exist in of, or just for itself! To prevent this

disease, have a clear and effective mission statement that outlines goals and duties. Provide training and encouragement as well as supervision and accountability. (Ephesians 1:21-23; 3:10; 4:15; 5:23; Hebrews 10:19-25)

- 8. Koinonia-itis:** This malady can be fun and inviting for a while only to those in a certain cliques in the church. This disease occurs where the people in power will not let others in the loop, or share resources or even refuse to build relationships with others. Some people may congregate in such tight knit groups/cliques, that outsiders are not welcome to join. They shut themselves out from their own church and community. This disease causes the death of the church through attrition as people leave and there is no one to come in and take their place. Nothing gets done in a church like this. The cure is to make sure the church has a defined purpose and mission that all the people have agreed to, so the church is the body of Christ working together, open to, and reaching others. Teaching on the precepts and character of Christ, and discipleship groups with open seats to invite friends and neighbors are essential. (Ephesians 4:29-32; Colossians 3:12-14)
- 9. Stuck-in-the-mud-of-Strangulation:** This disease is caused by words such as, "We have never done it that way before." The church with this disease will not try new things or even surrender themselves to the precepts of Scripture. They may have solid theology and just have it displayed on the wall but not in the heart and will, and definitively not on the hands and feet. On the other hand, they can be liberal and use their theology as an excuse to do anything, such as hyper-Calvinism or liberalism. This disease will cut off the flow of people into a church to a slow crawl and even in reverse, so the back door will grow bigger than the front door! The cure is solid, non-compromising Biblical teaching, with application! (Colossians 2:6-7; James 4:7-10)
- 10. I-do-not-want-to-grow-ism:** This is a disease caused by refusing to make changes in the facilities, so the church becomes bottlenecked and grid locked. This malady can be seen in churches that grow so fast they cannot keep up, or do not **want** to keep up. This kind of mentality will slow down the rate of church growth, as the people exceed the capacity of the facilities available to accommodate them. The people will get frustrated and leave. This disease is found in both good churches with good preaching as well as in small churches with small thinking. They either refuse to accommodate more people, or are so prideful with their facilities they do not want to make the necessary changes. The cure is to pray, and strategize on ways to accommodate people, while being sensitive to the facilities and the people who built them. (John 13:34-35; Acts 2:42-47; Ephesians 4)
- 11. Hyper-spirit-ism:** This disease is caused when a church has an over emphasis of the work of the Spirit, over and against the Word. Often, they focus too much on emotionalism to the detriment of sound Biblical teaching. Experiences become more important than the Word. The cure is to try to get people to see the Biblical precepts of truth, and teach the works and roles of the Spirit from Scripture and not from experiences and emotionalism. This disease is very tough to beat, as it is unlike

other diseases that drive people away. This disease will cause people to flock to your church so you think you have a revival, when in fact you have a counterfeit revival, or even a cult. As a result, the true purpose of the church is lost, resulting in no discipleship, no healthy Biblical teaching, just crazy stuff, like holy laughter. The cure is to switch to sound Biblical teaching and let people who refuse to yield to the precepts of Scripture leave. (Isaiah 55:8-9; Jeremiah 17:9-11; Mark 8:34-38; Colossians 3:12-14; Philippians 4:6-7; 19)

- 12. Legal-ism:** This disease makes up all kinds of rules, whims, and procedures that distract people away from the true gospel. This can take the form of constricting theology that elevates man's efforts and works above grace to a series of actions that have to be done in a certain way, such as a certain dress, or the certain look, or knowing the right words for prayer or a hymn. Rules such as not playing cards, or not dancing become the focal point of what it means to be a Christian, and not the character and work of Christ. Therefore, people with this disease pronounce harsh judgment and sentencing, and are then careless of the consequences because they think they are right in their thinking. However, they are not in tune with our Lord. There is nothing wrong with rules, as long as the rules are not the things being worshiped or distracting people away from Christ. The cure is to teach a Biblical view of the law that reflects God's character as HOLY and JUST! Our responsibility is to reflect this character in our actions, as well. We are to model the deepest desires in life and the pleasures of living a life dedicated to please Christ! (Psalm 10:4; Hosea 13:6; Matthew 7:3-52; Galatians 3:1-3; 13-15; 1 Timothy 6:18)
- 13. Arrested Spiritual growth:** This disease is caused by the exact opposite of Hyper-spirit-ism, as the church with this disease refuses to recognize the Person and work of the Spirit. They deny spiritual gifts or the supernatural work of God. (This is not about tongues or the assigned gifts). This will prevent people from spiritual growth, so they cannot grow in their relationships with Christ. This church will stagnate into a club and will not be able to grow. The cure is abundant, surrendered prayer for renewal! (Romans 8:5; 1 Timothy 3:14-15)
- 14. A Personality Addiction:** This disease happens when the church is monopolized by a single personality. This could be a popular pastor who may be solid as can be, but the only reason the people come is to hear him. This is not always a bad thing, but when that person moves on, the church quickly dies into oblivion, often to the point that they cannot pay the electric bill because so many people have left. This disease can also occur if a dysfunctional person takes the helm and attracts others to be codependent on him. The cure is to make sure the church has a purpose and mission that all the people have bought into, so the church is a body of Christ working together and not addicted to a single person. (Romans 3:22-24; Ephesians 4:15-16)
- 15. The Saint Disorder:** This disease happens when Christians become Christians in name only. They feel that they are so good that their faith becomes a habit. They do not get into the Word, or exercise the disciplines of the faith because they think they

do not need it! Other symptoms are that church participation is mainly just going through the motions and the service becomes meaningless rhetoric. This disease can happen in multigenerational churches where no others come in, and only the people who were born there attend. Being a part of this church is nothing more than a family tradition or social club. The cure, Romans 13: 1-14, put on Christ and **wake up!** There is one God and you are not He! (1 Timothy 3:14-15)

16. Hyper-Cooperative-ism: This disease happens when everyone is responsible for everything in the church and no one is in charge or in leadership of anything. The rule is to do as you will and please. Too much is focused on being a big, happy family, and there is an aversion of rules and regulations, so they overreact and it stifles the people. In addition, if evangelizing is to be done, everyone is encouraged to do it. However, it is not done, because there are no teams, no direction, no vision, no purpose. This is a Christian equivalent to anarchy. Another aspect of this disease is a church that is so liberal that anything goes. No virtue, no solid doctrine, or real spiritual direction occurs. The cure is developing a good management system, training for leaders, and developing teams for ministry. In the liberal church, find God and repent! (James 3:2; Hebrews 13:7,17)

17. Grievance-ism: This disease is caused by keeping a careful list of grievances and refusing to forgive. This is the cancer of the church disease inventory and will rot out a church very quickly. Churches become crippled because members go around harboring that list of wrongs. These lists of wrongs turn into resentment that grows and grows until you have a church filled with people harboring resentment, all attacking one another. The cure is to respond to God's call to pursue peace with all people despite the temptations we may face, or the evil that is done to us. As Christians, we must purge ourselves of the desire to get even with one other! (Proverbs 25: 21-22; Matthew 18:21-35; Romans 12:19-20; Hebrews 12:14-15)

18. Apathy-itis: This disease is caused by being overwhelmed with all the stresses and struggles in ministry to the point of shrugging our shoulders and giving up, but still going through the motions. This is apathy. Another symptom of apathy is thinking the greatness is in the past, and the past is then worshipped and adored. All views and passions to Christ are rooted in the past and the vine is now withered. It is our human nature to consider comfort and security a primary concern. There is nothing wrong with that, as long as it does not make us complacent and take us away from the goals and reasons we are in the pulpit, or in leadership. If we are too comfortable, we become apathetic, not wanting to stretch ourselves in our personal walk. This, then, becomes a slippery slope of not desiring to stretch the congregation, or being afraid of making any challenges that may offend someone's pride. This disease will produce no growth, no serious discipleship, no serious Bible studies, no serious teaching in the pulpit, just basic stuff to please and police people. The cure is to **Wake Up!** We need to be on guard for stressful and overwhelming situations, for pride, and for being too comfortable in our positions. When we are not growing, and not on our guard, then we will venture into the land of apathy, and that

is one place that will not grow any fruit or give any glory to the Lord. (Matt. 13:25-26; Hosea 13:6; Romans 13; Revelation 3:1-6; 14-18)

19. Ethnic-ism: This disease is caused by a fear of an ethnic group, or a church in a transitioning neighborhood, such as a white church where its members once lived in the neighborhood, but over the years, people moved away so everyone is commuting. Then, people of a different social economic or ethnic class surround the church, and the church does not reach out to them. Eventually, the neighborhood sees the church as aloof and unfriendly to them! The church then becomes a commuter church cut off from their mission and place in the community. This church will grow stagnate as people are unwilling or unable to commit and be involved, because the time and distance is too much. One cure is to move the church. However, this must be the very, very last resort, as it is usually way out of God's Will. Only consider a move if you plant or help another church take your place. Then, give them your facilities, and hand the keys to someone else, as the church belongs to God and the neighborhood, and not to you! A second solution is to break down social fears and get involved. Encourage staff and leaders to move back, take a risk, and reclaim the neighborhood for Christ by modeling His character and care. Have a shared ministry with another church, or share your facilities with a pastor that speaks the language and/or culture, and cooperate with them as a team. (Mark 12:30-32; Luke 6:27-31; Ephesians 4:29-32; Colossians 4:5; Hebrews 12:14-15; 13:1-2; James 4:7-10; 17)

Do not be afraid to ask someone to seek another church if they are fighting against the church leadership apart from motivation of Godly principles! Never force people out because of differences of opinion; iron sharpens iron. Seek causes and motivations by listening and through prayer. (Romans 16:17-18 & Titus 3:9-11)

Our hope: *“Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security.”* (Jeremiah 33:6)

Chapter XXIV Managing our Personal Lives in Godly Terms

When I was with a church growth-consulting firm, we did a major study of pastors, and came up with some startling statistics. We found that 90% of pastors work more than 50 hours a week. One out of three pastors state that being in the ministry is clearly hazardous for his family. One out of three pastors feel totally burned up within the first five years of ministry. Over 70% of pastors do not have someone they would consider a friend, and very few pastors had any close friends. Ninety percent of pastors feel they were not adequately trained to cope with ministry coordination and the demands of the congregation. Seventy-five percent of pastors experience a significant crisis that was directly due to stress in the ministry. These are reasons why the divorce rate among pastors is rising, and pastor's children rarely stay in the church or keep their faith. Forty percent of the pastors reported serious conflicts with their parishioners every month. This happens because the focus is lost or misplaced, accountability is skipped (thinking we are above it), and families become cluttered in confusion. How tragic!

Accountability is extremely important in the life of the church, especially for the leadership. Leaders are mere stewards to the Bride of Christ, the Church. It does not belong to them. It is not their stomping grounds or their toy. It is not a building, nor a set of programs, or even a set of ideologies. The Church is the people of God. If the people are at McDonalds, then the church is at McDonalds. The building is the building, which belongs to God, too, and for which we are entrusted with its care. The building may be called the church, meaning a place for gathering, but never forget that the Church is the people who dwell in the building to worship and grow in Him.

Because of our stewardship responsibilities to the care of His flock, leaders are never to see themselves as exempt from the daily concerns of life, thinking they are above it. You are not. We are all called to engage in the life of the church with our full endeavor, and to guard ourselves from rationalizing that since we are in leadership, we are better than anyone else. We are not!

Questions for the Pastor and Leadership to ask themselves and one another:

Q: Are you too arrogant to see the adventure of normal daily life?

If so, then you will not have a grasp on the small things, and you will fail on the larger things of life. Life is not to be looked at as being mundane. Let us see ourselves as His children, embracing the small before we seize the large. Let us see that we become men and women of true faith, set apart for our Lord's service, regardless of if the task is too small and insignificant for our ego and perceived position.

Q: Are you so eager to venture in new experiences of life that you ignore what is right in front of you?

If so, you will not engage in the responsibilities that God calls you to. What are the responsibilities? You will discover this by knowing your spiritual gifts and natural abilities, and growing in the maturity of your faith through Scripture, Biblical teaching, prayer, and worship.

Q: What are your priorities and motives? Are they Christ centered or self centered?

Q: If you are having success in your career or relationships, are you prideful of them? If so, why? Does God want you to be prideful? For the answer look up the word *pride* in a concordance!

Q: Do you have a grasp on your personality and your areas of strength and weakness?

Q: Are you accountable to a group of people or person who knows you well?

If not, you will soon fall off the road of life, crash, and burn.

Q: Is your head full of Scripture, and your heart full of sin and contempt?

Remember Psalm 10:4

Q: *Knowledge puffs up, but love and care builds up.* Do you agree with this?

Q: Do you know how to lead yourself and others deeper into the heart of God, to worship and glorify Him?

Q: Ask yourself, if your role is more important than the growth and well being of the church.

Scriptures on which to ponder and meditate:

Psalm 87:7; Proverbs 14:16-17; Isaiah 40:28; 16:32; Matthew 13:25-26; Mark 8:34-38; Ephesians 4:26-27; James 1: 19-20; 29-31;

Q: Is your deepest desire in life and pleasure in living dedicated to please Christ? Can you take a hard look at your life and see how others see you, how God sees you?

Q: Are your actions in life the result of your will, your desires, your inspirations, and your motivations; or are they the result of your living a life pleasing to God?

Q: Is there a distinguished reality of the Lordship of Christ, versus the menagerie of living the lie of your desires?

We must be set apart to be promoters of our Lord's Kingdom and Grace, to live a life of distinction, a life that honors Christ and motivates and encourages others.

Setting Boundaries

I cannot tell you how many countless times I will be on my way home to my family when someone just shows up at the office to talk. Sometimes it is a crisis, but most of the time it is loneliness. Some times they show up at my home or I meet them by chance at the grocery store. I love people, and naturally will spend all of my time and efforts to be with them. This is one of the main areas I love about pastoral ministry. That was all right when I was single, but now, as a married man, I have other priorities that need my attention. As ministers of God, (and as Christians, we are all ministers) we need to be attentive to others, be listeners, and encouragers. However, we also are not to neglect our own web of relationships and family. We cannot trade the fracture of the family for poor management of His people, thinking we are doing our best for ministry. Poor ministry and misguided self-management will fracture your family and ministry more completely than just about anything else. Thus, we need to set limits, or boundaries.

A boundary is a fence to ward off potential problems and to protect those in its guardianship. It sets a parameter to be a guide, as in computer programming where parameters keep the program in the right areas of operation. When we have those right areas of operation in our personal and ministerial lives, we will be more effective for His service. In addition, these principles are not only for all Christians, but also especially for pastors and leaders because they have more responsibility.

Developing limits with your time and church relations will not happen overnight, because you have trained your church and yourself in very ingrained patterns. Yet, it is a must-do. We have to reform, before it is too late.

Questions To Ask Yourself

1. Do you spend adequate time with your family? Do you have a regular date night with your spouse and separate family night with the kids at least once a week? If not, you are giving them over to Satan and the world!
2. Do you have a ministry that trains and equips others, or do you run the show?
3. Do you try to be too much to too many? Or, do you not only train others but also delegate?
4. Do you have unrealistic expectations for yourself as well as for others? We need to have vision and passion, but also be temperant, and allow God's timing.
5. Do you say "No," (with love and tact) and allow others to do ministry? Pastors and leaders cannot do everything or be everywhere!
6. Do you have a system of time management? Even Jesus took time off!

7. Do you take regular time off? Pastors need at least two days off a week and four weeks off each year!
8. Do you take care of yourself physically, such as eating correctly and exercising? Remember, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, so do not defile it!
9. Do you have a good system to calendar and keep track of events and dates?
10. Most important, do you spend adequate time with our Lord? Do you give Him, at the very least, an hour a day?

These questions will determine how you manage yourself and the ministry God has entrusted to you. If any of the above areas are neglected, you are possibly headed for breakdown and sin! Be encouraged that we are not to be perfect, but we do need to be the best we can. Let these questions challenge you and spur you on to the right direction. Set up the boundaries. Boundaries are not a fence to keep others out, but are to keep good neighborly relations. They will not eliminate all of the interruptions, because for a pastor or church leader, interruption comes with the territory. We need to embrace and love our call and not be hermits to the people in our care. Boundaries create a healthier atmosphere with balance, a church that has leaders who love and care even more, because one person or group is not running the whole show.

Here are some more time-tested ideas to help you guard your time by setting boundaries to better care for your flock:

1. First have trained deacons or ministry teams to respond to the needs of your congregation.
2. Have trained leaders visit everyone in the church twice a year. Have extra visiting for shut-ins, widows/widowers, and those with special needs.
3. Have a good system of time management. Develop the ability to keep track of appointments, and events with some form of guidelines to keep your time secure within a right sense of priorities.
4. Have people trained to be ushers and greeters who can take care of the visitors. The pastor can also visit them and send letters.
5. Have a telephone system, (cell, pager, number--whatever would work for you) set up as an emergency contact, or chat line so people in need can get in touch with someone. If a member needs to have someone to talk to or has an emergency, they can call that number and whoever is on duty will respond. This frees the pastor and enables that ministry to rotate to several different people. I have found that using a cell phone with an extra battery works best, and it is not that costly. The cell phone can be handed off to whomever is on duty.

6. Make sure you have good ways to relax each day (not just TV), to take your mind off the church.
7. Have an attitude that can release the laity to exercise their gifts and abilities. Do not just have a *one-person show* mentality, but be a team of caregivers. Be aware of people under your care who can do some of the ministry tasks, perhaps even better than you!

Avoiding Burnout

Pastoral ministry and church leadership is a tiring task. It is filled with all kinds of responsibility and unexpected crises. There have been months go by where I was actually bored, when hardly a soul called on me for help. On the other hand, there have been months where there was one crisis after another, where I could hardly take a breath. Sometimes, we manage our time really well and are just tired. Sometimes, we do not manage ourselves well, and we burnout. We may become tired from a big day at church, a big event, an intense program, or a youth retreat. This is not ministry burnout. However, if we keep this up, without checks and balances, and with boundaries, we will burnout without the need for pride and sin. Our own mismanagement will lead us to ruin. I have found myself on this path too many times, until I surrendered not only to our Lord, but I also learned how to delegate and set limits.

Life today produces far more stress than perhaps any other period of human history. We have more demands, more pressure, more tasks, more information, and more responsibility. At the same time, we have less emotional energy, less support, less encouragement, less help from others, less people listening, and less focus on the “main thing.” We get this way because we are a task-oriented society, and have misdirected thinking. Remember what Elijah went through and what he had to overcome. We have a God who loves and cares for us, thus we need to keep the right focus and perspective. Let our strength be drawn from Him, not from our circumstances. We need to keep the focus away from feelings and perception, and toward whom we are in Christ. We cannot be focused on the negative, with a pessimistic outlook, for that makes a bad situation worse, and we may exaggerate a molehill into a mountain. We cannot compare ourselves to others and have unrealistic expectations. Such thinking brings us down into a performance trap from which we may not be able to escape. Thus, we will be unable to distinguish between our call, our abilities, our gifts, and our strengths and misdirected focus, even when it is helping others. We are not all equal in ability, but we all are unique and have a special place in the Kingdom. We each have a special calling that no one else has. Learn it, embrace it, and live for it! Do not fall into the trap of blaming yourself and others, as Elijah did. Overcome, and be your best for God’s glory as Elijah was later able to do in an incredible, spectacular fashion.

So, how can we tell if we are just tired or burnt out? First, we need to ask ourselves the questions from the previous section on Setting Boundaries. If we are doing it, it is probably just exhaustion. However, if we find ourselves being apathetic,

and detached from our call and ministry, we have a problem. We have to be on the watch for pride, which will produce a superiority complex. It will make us become careless towards others, then, we will lose our perspective, and what God has called us to do. In addition, either the pride, or the refusal to set boundaries, or a combination of the two, will cause us to fall into burnout and even sexual sin. It is up to the leader to determine if he needs an overhaul, or just a good night's sleep. In addition, that leader needs to have others who feel free to tell him if warning signs appear.

What To Do To Prevent Burnout

1. Pray, and pray a lot. Have others pray for you! Let God in on what you are feeling, and release your frustration to Him. You cannot tell God anything new. He already knows.
2. Learn to delegate. Remember boundaries and the diseases and dangers we previously discussed.
3. Keep your attitude in check.
4. Stay healthy, get regular checkups, eat healthily, rest, and exercise. Guard your time off. We are of little use to God if we are always ill and tired. We are on this earth for such a short time, so keep your focus and your health in check. Do not be in a hurry to get to Heaven. You will get there in due time. Stay focused here on earth, and still keep your hope on our life in Heaven to come.
5. Have a support base to keep you accountable, people that you can go to and be listened to.
6. Engage in other interests outside of the ministry, such as biking, hiking, civic events or a hobby.
7. Make sure you have the right focus and call in your life. Many people are in the wrong vocation, so they are not utilizing their gifts, talent, and abilities. Pastors, too, can be in the wrong profession.
8. Realize that you are not God, He does not need you, and He only chooses to use you out of grace. Therefore, you are not the Savior to the church, you, and others, are the people He uses.
9. Be a learner. Read, and go to conferences and retreats where you are not the leader, so you can be refreshed.
10. Most importantly, be immersed in the Word and prayer.

Burnout means that our spiritual energies are totally exhausted, that we have no will or vitality to do ministry or whatever our task is. We are completely worn-out and

spent. Thus, if we stay in our position without being refueled we will just be throwing a monkey wrench into vital components, causing breakage. When the leader is burned out, he becomes the monkey wrench that sabotages the machine of ministry. He may not even desire or be willing to do so. However, because of his lack of availability due to the fact there is nothing left of him, he is of no service, and is, in fact, endangering the vitality and ministry of others. In John 21, Jesus asks Peter to “*feed My sheep.*” We, through the power of the Holy Spirit, are the *feed*, and as *feed*, we need to be fed. People depend on us to feed them, and they may drain us of our feed, personally and spiritually. We have to be careful to replenish ourselves with the right feed. If not, we endanger ourselves and the ministry entrusted to us.

Chapter XXV How to Find Out if Your Church is Visitor Friendly

Seeking out information from the visitors will be one of your best resources. They will see beyond what we see because we become compliant and get so used to the way things are that we do not see the problems and issues that a fresh perspective will see. We become compliant and see things through a “rose colored glasses” perspective. That is, we see our church in the light of romantic nostalgia of what we did in the past and how good we were or are. Thus, we do not see the issues in a fresh way, unclouded with nostalgia or preconceived ideas. When we see as the visitor sees, then we can respond accurately to them as honored guests. We will be able to see their needs and concerns, and meet them with a response and the Gospel. People may think we are nuts at first, because those who are not familiar with our Lord will not understand until the Holy Spirit interdicts. The Holy Spirit uses us Christians as His tools!

This is how you can find out if your church is visitor friendly. Have people visit your church who have not been there before. These can be people you know, or who are from other churches. Make sure that they are anonymous so that your members are unaware. The goal here is to see how they are welcomed, and to see specific issues that can be detrimental to reaching out in your community. Here is a list of questions that your “visitors” can keep in mind when analyzing your church:

1. What is it like to be a visitor at this church?
2. Specifically, what appealed to you?
3. What “turned you off?”
4. What made you comfortable and relaxed?
5. What made you uncomfortable and stressed?
6. What stood out to you, positive, negative?
7. Did you feel the presence of God?
8. Was anything going on that distracted you from worship?
9. Was there anything that you would change?
10. What are the “pros” and the “cons?”
11. (For a non-Christian), Was the teaching relevant to you and could you understand?
(For a solid Christian), Was the teaching Biblical and true?
12. Does the bulletin have enough information so the first time visitor can follow

the service without being embarrassed?

12. Is there some kind of visitor identification system?
13. Are the classrooms and other places to go clearly advertised and posted?
14. Is there a follow up program for visitors?
15. Is there a card to fill out in the pews/chairs with adequate space so the visitor can give you personal information and critique?

These questions will quantify the overall health of your church because, if the people are mature, then a sense of gratitude will overflow from the spiritual disciplines to those around them. In addition, when there is a church that is spiritually mature, new comers will usually see it. Sometimes churches have not thought through a process on how to greet people. Even though the church is healthy, this may not be obvious. These questions will unveil this problem and create opportunities to improve and re-tool the way things can better be implemented.

The next set of questions will allow you to unveil minor issues and develop genuine countermeasures for problems that frustrate people, both visitors and sometimes, members. This will provide future visitors with a church that has a “user friendly” atmosphere, thus they will feel welcomed and accepted.

16. Is adequate and convenient parking available?
17. Are adequate signs for the church and main entrance visible?
18. For the large church, do friendly, helpful guides from the parking lot to the bathroom exist?
19. Are adequate signs and directions to the various meeting sites, such as worship services, restroom, nursery, and classes clearly displayed?
20. Are friendly and knowledgeable greeters on hand?
21. Are friendly and well-trained ushers in place?

Church growth statistics say that visitors will decide in the first few minutes whether or not they will come back. So, the inference is that the visitor will be most impacted by how they are greeted, which will determine how they respond to the rest of the church. Even if you have the best teaching and worship in the world, people will not stay where they are not welcomed. First impressions are critical. If the church does not have a friendly atmosphere, then it will slowly die from unkindness. Kindness is a very important Fruit of the Spirit that must manifest itself from the parking lot to the restrooms, or you will be in a pew by yourself.

Life is full of “whys” and “how comes” that need explanation and truth available in God’s Word, but that is elusive to most people. We are called to share and make His Word relevant. Thus, if they do not want to come to the door, or if the door will not open, then their quest for truth will come to a halt.

We want visitors to see our churches as a place to call home; a place they are welcomed, encouraged, and can take part in. We cannot have our guests treated like “Goldilocks” trying to sneak in and find their own way, only to find themselves in the wrong place, or in the way.

There is no question that the spiritual maturity of those in our churches will determine how we engage the visitor. It will also determine how we are responding to the call of our Lord. A caring atmosphere along with strong Biblical teaching will spawn growth and spiritual maturity, which is the main purpose of the church. A side effect will be the growth in numbers. Now, growth in numbers is important, but NOT the focus! Discipleship is the focus! Growth is the fruit and effect of it, but not the main ingredient. If you want to grow in numbers, then follow the call the Lord gave you by taking care of the people He has already given you, as revealed in Scripture!

The very core of a hospitable church is not how we do things or what we know and do, but it is all about what is in our hearts. In addition, if the care for people is not the blood flowing through our veins, and if discipleship is not our heartbeat, then we will not be building the Kingdom of God. Only the Kingdom of “self” will be laid. It is what is in our hearts that will determine the direction of hospitality and the tone of the church. It will set the pace and set the table of people being welcomed or being shunned.

We are called to obey the precepts of Scripture, the care and needs of the people the Lord gives us; care that makes people feel right at home. From signs and smiles that say we are glad you are here, an atmosphere that says Christ is here because we love Him, and friendly ushers and greeters who are showing the ins and outs, the seats, the restrooms, the classrooms, and the Spirit of our living Lord, comes evidence of that care. People, visitors, and members alike are welcomed, kept in prayer, cared for, not overwhelmed, but encouraged, and invited to a gathering. Then, the visitor can become a member that receives teaching, equipping, discipling, and training for His service. This process can then keep reciprocating to even more people. The call has been given; the response and responsibility is yours!

“As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.” (John 9:4 NIV)

Chapter XXVI Practical Strategies for Prayer

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.’” (Luke 11:1-4)

This passage is not a prayer, but rather a model for us to follow on how to pray, **“Saturation Prayer.”** The closer we follow this passage, the closer we become to our Lord. The closer we attain the fullness of our spiritual potential, the better we pray. As members of the body of Christ, it is our responsibility to always teach one another how to pray, and the best teacher is the one who models it in his life. We are to model this in all of our activities and pursuits in the church! We are to be specific, simple, and follow the above aspects, so that our prayers are relevant and not too general or crude. We must be honest and open to our Lord, so our will is opened on what He has done for us, who He is, what we wish to do, and who we are to Him; sharing our burdens and intimacy by being in depth.

Then, before each activity, meeting, or event, prayer is the platform on which it begins, ends, and rests. Prayer should be at the core of anything and everything that goes on at a church. Remember confidentiality! Prayer requests are not ammunition for gossip!

1. **Begin each meeting in prayer, and spend at least one-fifth to one-third or more of that meeting in prayer!** If you really desire to be used by God, try spending over half of the time in prayer. However, start with “baby steps” and build up to it. You say you do not have the time? Well, most meetings are taken up by poor preparation, not following the agenda, and trivial discussions in circles. By putting the focus on prayer, meetings actually go faster because people are one mind and direction! (Well, mostly)
2. **Spend significant time in prayer between meeting sessions** about the decisions that need to be made instead of just fretting over them. This will put the focus away from our perceived agenda toward His agenda. We then surrender selfish ambitions to what is best for His church.
3. Have a specific **core of people pray before each worship service and event at the church.** So, if the Junior High group is having a “lock in,” then have a small group come before and just pray before the event for safety. Get specific requests from the leaders of the event. Have teams pray before and during ministry programs, such as children’s and youth. While the youth meeting is going on, have a prayer team in another room praying.
4. **Sunday service prayer group;** a small group of people who are there early praying, the longer the better, and praying in authority for satanic removal. This type of prayer

is in authority and in the name of Christ; literally go through the church, casting away demons and any evil curses, incantations, hexes, spells, etc. You would be surprised on the number of satanic and witch groups that are in our towns and cities trying to distort and destroy you in the name of Satan! If this spiritual warfare is too much on the edge for you, just pray!

5. **Have prayer walks through your neighborhood.** That is, divide your neighborhood up section by section, until the whole city is prayed for (within reason; if your church is in LA, not realistic). Pray in authority for your city. Then, in teams of two, go to each house, knock on the door, and ask how can you pray for them. Give none of your church propaganda or even an invitation, just ask for their prayer needs, go back to the church, and pray for them. If there is a request you can fill, then fill it! You may even get a bulletin board for your church narthex and place all the prayer requests on them so the members have a chance to fill them. Have the cards number coded, so they remain anonymous to everyone except the director and people in the loop. This could be for an out of work or single mom desiring a bicycle for her child. It could be a person who needs a job or car, or any number of a multitude of needs. It can even be something you cannot fill, such as someone sick or dying, but if it is our Lord's will, it will be filled; remember the power of prayer! As a body of believers, you should have the resources to fill the requests you receive. Then imagine the power of evangelism when people see Christ in action!
6. Have **assigned people pray for each pastor**, director, and missionary of the church on a constant daily basis, both as individual prayer warriors and once a week collectively as a prayer group.
7. Visit each member of the church in **prayer teams**, and pray for and with them at least every 6 months.
8. Have **Concerts of prayer** on a monthly basis and eventually on a weekly basis, and have a prayer service with directed prayer and silent prayer. Pray for revival, for individuals, for government for...whatever. Practice the classic spiritual disciplines. You can combine this with worship and a short message.
9. Have **24-hour prayer vigils** on a regular basis where two or more people are at the church praying all the time. You should do this in short sessions for about 15 minutes, or no longer than a half an hour, so they do not burn out.
10. **Fasting is for today!** It is not a tool to force God to comply, but for us to comply with His Will.
11. Have a **trained team of people pray for people after each service.** This will insure a sufficient number of people partaking, so no one is being rushed.
12. This may sound on the edge, but it is not, and it is totally Biblical; have a trained team of people to **engage in spiritual warfare.**

13. Have a **prayer team invite city and government officials over for social events** in the church and see if you can pray for them. Be courteous and tactful, and never force yourself on them. See if you can make appointments with them at their offices and ask their permission to keep them in prayer. Pray for them on the spot if they desire. You will be surprised at the response. Most elected officials will not turn you down. If they do, then do as Matthew 10 tells us.

With these prayer events in full function in a real and authentic way, you will see amazing things, as our Lord will infuse you and your church for His glory! Prayer is the key tool to lead the church deeper in the heart of God to worship and glorify Him!

Chapter XXVII How to Recruit Volunteers

Objective: To have a practical, continuing plan for recruiting volunteers in your ministry.

Most churches have a “hunting season” or peak times where the Nominating and or Recruiting committees mass their campaign to lasso people to fill their needed spots. But, do not rely on this; people who are shy, or feel they are inadequate may hide during this time. Recruiting should be a year round process. Finding volunteers successfully is by relational means, person to person, rather than just public announcements and big campaigns. These indirect methods do not work well because people tend to be very busy and/or stay away. They will often glance over, or not listen to the announcements or advertisements. The ones who do read and listen to them are often already so busy they cannot give much more. So, what do we do?

Ideas to consider and apply to your ministry:

1. **Prayer:** Establish a prayer group whose specific task or one of their main tasks in prayer is to pray for staffing needs and their care!
2. **Personal Advertising:** This is the least likely way to get people; however it still has a significant role, as it lets the church know of the need. When you do advertise your need, have volunteers give testimonies in writing and in public announcements. Keep them short and encouraging. For children and youth needs, have the children and youth make the proclamations! Keep them short and to the point and do not occupy too much pulpit time. Instead, go to each adult Sunday school class and do you promotion at your church’s fellowship events. Never resort to guilt trips!
3. **Literature Advertising:** As the above method, this is not very effective, but is still necessary to get the word out so people will start thinking about it. Advertise in your church’s publications, in an upbeat and encouraging way. If you have the resources, consider developing an attractive brochure that tells people who are in the church as well as outside of it about the ministry and volunteer opportunities. Explain what they do and what they are about. Also, make sure you have a well-written and clear job description to give to potential volunteers, that answers common questions. This will help bring new people into your ministry!
4. **Networking:** Let the all of leaders and staff members know of the needs of one another, so to be on the lookout. People who may not fit their need may fit another leader’s need! Twice a year, have all of the leaders and pastors go through the church directory and write out the names of those who might be good at different ministries. You can do this individually or together. Then compare the lists and contact the people. Work at recruiting as a team and NOT as competition! Also, new recruits and new members may know of other prospects, so encourage them to give you ideas on whom to contact. Make sure you avoid having several recruiters trying

to rope in the same people at the same time. Have one leader go to them and see in what ministry they might be interested.

5. **Personal Recruitment:** The best and most effective way to bring new people into your ministry is to personally go to them "face to face!" Be on the lookout for perspective people, but, at the same time, do not be a "land shark" or "hound" people. Be warm and friendly and make sure you are interested in them as a person, not just a potential prospect! When you find someone who is interested, call them the next day to talk to them about the program, and perhaps take them out to lunch, again making sure you are interested in them, not just as a recruit. You are working for Christ, not the army!
6. **Have a plan to bring in and screen people:** Too many churches, so desperate for people, skip this crucial step, and open themselves up to potential harm as well as sin of it's people, especially the children!
 - a. When a potential volunteer comes to you, interview them, check their references, or question people who know them. Have a system of standards and guidelines for your ministry. In this process, be ministering and encouraging to them. Have some specific questions to give them, so they become a part of the process to interview you, too. You are interviewing them as Christ would, not an employer would, yet, at the same time, you need to be wise!
 - b. Give them a *Spiritual Gifts assessment* as well as your guidelines and job description. If the person does not register the gifts necessary for the position and they still desire to get involved, let them try it out. Spiritual Gifts tests are not always accurate!
 - c. Have them visit the ministry to see it for themselves, then re-interview them to get their feedback, interests, expectations, fears, preferences, and how they see themselves as involved.
 - d. Do not force them to commit; allow them time for personal prayer, reflection, and a good decision. Encourage them to make sure their family supports their decision to volunteer. You do not want to cause division or unnecessary stress on their family!
 - e. Get feedback from your other volunteers on whether or not they can work with this person and support them. Affirmation and support from potential co-workers who are already in the ministry is essential. Never throw people in a team without the other team members being a part of the induction process!
 - f. If they will be working with children and youth, make sure you follow your state's and insurance company's child abuse guidelines, such as fingerprinting, and never have one adult alone with the children. The children need to be in plain view, so have windows in the doors, etc.
 - g. If they are unsure, allow them to try it out for a while! If it is not for them, work with the other leaders and pastors to find another ministry they might fit into better.

- h. Have a well thought out orientation for each ministry for a large church or all together for a small church; keep it fun, short, and to the point. Then fold people into a ministry team of caring, enthusiastic people, with mentors to guide them. Include formal training.
 - i. Have a celebration for them for joining the team, such as treating them to breakfast before church or lunch after church.
 - j. Have a training program and/or a mentoring person assigned to them.
 - k. Make sure you have a prayer team to keep this person in prayer!
 - l. If it does not work out, if they do not feel comfortable, encourage and support them, even if they need to check out another team or ministry!
7. **Ongoing Affirmation:** There is a direct connection between the time and effort you put into encouraging people and their loyalty and length of their stay with you. Those nice, warm hearted notes, calls, and visits of encouragement and support are essential to turn a short term volunteer into a long-term commitment! You can never say "thanks" too often or adequately enough!
8. **Commitment to Servant Leadership:** It is your job to facilitate and model trusting God and one another. You must be committed to a stress free environment in your team relationship! A good leader will always be actively listening, and courteous. Your appreciation, love, and recognition of their contribution will encourage respect for one another because, as a team, you are growing together!
9. **Be committed to clear communication!** You should have no hidden agendas. Be open and honest! Your sole agenda is to please God!
10. **Evaluation:** Have a non-threatening, encouraging, positive way to evaluate the effectiveness of the volunteers. People will serve you longer and better if they know where they stand, and have a sense they are doing a good job!
11. **Celebration:** Find various ways to publicly and privately reward your volunteers, especially those who have served long and faithfully!

Chapter XXIX The Problem With Most Church Growth Paradigms

However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" -- but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. (1 Corinthians 2:9-12)

The Church Growth movement has made major contributions to the Church over the years. It has opened the minds and challenged the perceptions and approaches of many church pastors and leaders. It challenged us to be better, to rethink how and why we do things, and to improve the way we do church, especially in the areas of evangelism and missions. These aspects have been good, but there has been a negative aspect in church growth thinking that has done the opposite to the church. This thinking has caused churches to close themselves off to the people God brings them, concentrate on research over Scripture, chase trends to the detriment of what God calls us to, and concentrate on pleasing people and not God.

Most of what has been written in the last 40 years of church growth has, at best, fallen short of what Scripture directs and, at worst, is an abomination. The focus has been on manmade principles defused from business paradigms and comparative thinking. These principles have not always been based on what God clearly defined in His Word. Yes, there have been some good ideas and some of the church growth principles are from Biblical principles. What we need to do is define what the Scripture teaches - the *wheat*- and then get rid of the garbage - the *weeds*.

A Brief Overview of Church Growth

In 1955 Donald McGavran (1897-1990), a third generation career missionary, wrote *The Bridges of God*. His basic assumption was that God wanted His church to grow, which, of course, He does. McGavran noticed that most churches were somehow opposed to this thinking. So, he focused his life on teaching the church that God indeed wants His church to grow. He was a great visionary, and father of the modern church growth movement. He founded the distinguished School of World Mission at Fuller Seminary in 1965. He also passionately woke up a complacent American church to see the vital role of evangelism and missions, saying, "*We must evangelize out to the fringes.*" Which meant we should not leave anyone out, even those in the very far off and rural places of the world. In the area of church growth he asked and then applied two basic questions, which laid the basis for the church growth models: *Why does the church grow in some situations, and not in others? What lessons can be learned from Scripture and contemporary experience to help churches to grow?*

These are two great questions that we all must ask and seek. His questions were correct, but his error was in his methods. Instead of doing careful exegesis on Scripture, he spent most of his energies researching trends, and comparing churches to other churches. He came up with some very unbiblical ideas such as the “Homogeneous Unit Principle” which states a church is to focus on its own culture and race, and ignore the others. One of his primary followers went so far to say, “*Segregation is a desired end.* (Wagner)” A very arrogant and prejudicial stance. He was a great man, but he was a missionary and not a theologian, and he did not have a good working knowledge of Scripture, which we can ascertain by examining his writings. He based his observations and theories on observed paradigms regardless of Scriptural precepts. People who came after him furthered his error by applying business principles and comparative reasoning over Scripture and what God calls us to do. We cannot always compare one church to another, because God may have a different call and purpose for them as opposed to another church (1 Cor. 2:9). Nor, can you compare human reasoning over and against Scripture; we are instead to compare our research to see if it is on par with Biblical precepts. McGavran and others would have been far more successful if they had placed the emphases on Scriptural principles and not on comparative thinking.

Having studied under McGavran and his protégés, I was amused on how often they would passionately express their theories, then a few years later radically change them and passionately extort them, and then change them again and so forth, while the truths of the Word remained stable. I followed their folly, as I changed and kept up with the latest church growth jargon and theories, only to see the churches that applied them fail. We changed the theories while ignoring the Word. The Bible was used as a mere buffet as we chose passages out of context to fit our thinking instead of going to Scripture and defusing what God calls us to do.

Another big mistake made was the concentration and overzealous adoration of numbers over discipleship. A bigger church meant a better church. This is far from true. A better church is based on the spiritual maturity of its leadership and members and what they are doing with their call. A good church base is in the solid teachings of God’s Word, spiritual growth, and the response to both our Lord and to people. I have been to many mega churches that attract people because of the dynamics of the pastor and the entertainment of the service, but they were immature and undisciplined, a very sad sight. On the other hand, I have been to small churches that are on fire with the Word and their call from the Lord, growing in their faith. There are many reasons a church can grow that may not be from God’s blessings.

The perceived success and result of most of the church growth drivel in my 20 years of experience was in “sheep swapping.” People would flow to the “*church of what was happening now* (comedian Flip Wilson),” unconcerned with personal growth and obedience to Christ. As a result, these churches were not growing in the Biblical sense. I have seen churches that did not apply our methodologies, yet grew huge and influential like *Calvary Chapel*, *the Friends movement* in Southern California, and *Saddleback* (in its early years). Thus, the church growth community considered it a

success when a particular church grew under their influence; yet, it was usually an ignominy and an anomaly to those who grew without their influence.

Most of those churches grew because the neighborhood grew and they were in the right place in the right time amongst disease-ridden churches that had isolated themselves. The surrounding churches were not growing because they did not want to, and the people were not growing spiritually. They then flocked to the growing church, even though that church may not have been doing things God's way. These have been successes in church growth, but only because the other churches were doing nothing. There are also those churches that were stagnating, and God used the church growth concepts to awaken them and cause them to re-examine themselves. If the big successful churches were not planted in massive growth areas, but rather in sections of the country where there was little to no population growth, they may have not survived. If *Saddleback* was planted in Huntington Beach or Pasadena, or anywhere in northern California instead of the massive growth areas of southern Orange County and Northern San Diego County, where the churches already in that area were mostly dead, then we would have never heard of it! A better wake up job can be found in Romans 13:11-14 rather than a CEO business approach. Incidentally, most of the church growth originations went under in the 90's and most of those assumptions then dissipated. Only now are they reprising their ugly heads.

Do you have a hard time with what I am saying, does it go against what you have been taught or have presumed? Then, see for yourself. "*What are the Premises and Principles of Church Growth? The premises that have been the heart of the church growth movement are four; that God wants his lost sheep found; that our choices of methods must be based on fact; we must pour our resources into winning channels, and people like to stay with their own people -- within cultural identities. The principles are sevenfold: pragmatic research, scientific research, people movements, social networks, receptivity, priority, and purpose.*" ("Church Growth Principles at a Glance" which appeared in *Ministry Advantage*, Vol.7 No. 4, the hallmark and flagship newsletter of the church growth world)

Most of the principles seem sound - or do they? Look carefully at each of the principles. Can you honestly see Christ teaching them? Can you find them in Scripture?

God wants his lost sheep found? Of course, He does. However, if God is sovereign, and is truly God, are His sheep lost? This is of theological debate, but this is a Biblical and right emphasis for motivating the church. So far, so good!

Our choices of method must be based on fact. Yes, it is. However, what are the facts? Usually it is in the following of categories and not in His Word!

Pour your resource into winning channels. What is working in one church must also work in yours. This is not true, because most churches fail under these principles! Numbers tell us that God is with us, but this is not true either! This is also not Biblical!

Numbers can be misleading, and what we may see as a winner, God sees as pathetic and foolishness. Read the book of Proverbs! God looks for faith, devotion, love, and obedience, which are all missing from this church growth model! Strong leadership never means a strong willed personality, but a servant's heart after God's heart, which is contagious to others. That is God's winner!

People like to stay with their own people: This is as far from the Bible as you can get without setting up alters to Satan! Yes, we do like to stay with our own people, but this is part of our fallen sinful nature that we are to change, not encourage!

Pragmatic research & Scientific research: Yes, we should look to good research so we can be the best at our programs and outreach. However, let this never distract us from Biblical precepts. Always consider what God calls us to, not just what people want!

People movements: Go where the people are, yes, we are! However, we are to be the salt and light without being taken in and effected negatively by those people. We are to never take the philosophy and trends of the culture, rework them, and put a Jesus stamp on them when they are against Jesus' teachings and character!

Social networks: This is one good aspect. We need to strive to be better at being a people, at modeling Christ-like behaviors, so we can be the people of God in the world!

Receptivity: YES! Christians can be cruel gossipers and filled with hypocrisy, and who do a much better job at turning people away from the gospel than a legion of demons. This is also a good aspect, one on which we have much work to do!

Priority: Whose priority? This is perhaps the biggest problem in the North American Church. Our priorities are all skewed, chasing trends and ignoring our Savior and call! Are we being poured out to Christ, or to our way of thinking? Are we in church leadership roles to glorify God or make a name for ourselves? What are our true priorities and are they what God has directed?

Purpose: Whose purpose? Is it God's or yours?

Did you notice what is missing? It is God and His purpose! Do you see what is emphasized? It is mostly unbiblical, slap-in-the-face-of-our-Lord drive! Yes there are some good ideas and place we all need to grow. However, you cannot build His church by your means! All that you will accomplish is what a dog accomplishes when he chases his own tail. It may be fun and amusing for a while, but nothing is accomplished. It is good for a dog, but detrimental for a church! While we need to realize that God does want His church to grow, growth is found in spiritual maturity and in contagious obedience, sharing our Christian faith with others around us. Good research is essential as it can help us make our programs and paradigms better, but these are to be useful tools, not the point of our devotions and emphases. Of course we are to make people feel comfortable and at home, but do not forget that it is all about building the Kingdom

of God and glorifying Him! This prime directive is absent from most church growth principles!

As a church growth consultant, I also propagated some of those principles for many years. I glanced over Scripture and conformed God's Word to my ideas and those of others instead of really bowing to His Word. I shutter to think I asked questions to church boards such as, "Is the pastor a leader and not just a teacher? If not, you have to get rid of him because you must have a leader." "Does the pastor really want the church to grow? Is he willing to pay the price for it?" I did not ask questions such as, "Is the pastor growing in his faith and practice, spending quality time in the Word for himself outside of sermon and teaching preparation?" "Is the pastor surrendered to the Word?" "Is the pastor following the precepts of 1 Timothy 3:1-9 and Titus 1:5-8?" What is real church growth? I believe *Campus Crusade for Christ* nailed it, as we will see in a bit.

What Are the Main Church Growth Models? (Matthew 13: 24-43)

The Traditional Mainline Church: This is the average church on every corner from Reformed to Pentecostal, from liberal to conservative. They hold to good and solid Biblical origination and precepts in their core essentials of orders and doctrine. Even the Catholic Church, at its core, is mostly solid. Some of these churches are vibrant and thriving, living out the call of our Lord, while others are apostate.

The Positive: These churches have good organization principles, and the majority has good doctrine in their confessions (when practiced), as well as history, visibility, and infrastructure.

The Negative: Most of these churches have lost sight of their orders and doctrine. They practice what they think is best and do not seek after God's call and purpose. They do not want to change because they do not think anything is wrong. This leads to infighting, gossip, and liberal thinking, while the neighborhood is unreached, and God's people are undisciplined.

The Purpose Driven Church: This is perhaps one of the best models that I'm aware of. This came out of the teachings of *Campus Crusade*, *Young Life* and *Sun Life* in the 70's, researched and produced by the Fuller Institute In Pasadena, Ca in the late 80's, and popularized by Rick Warren and Saddle Back in the 90's.

The Positive: This model has a good premise, seeking God's purpose, making disciples, focusing on the power of God and His purpose, maintaining effective programs, practicing good values, providing leadership training, and teaching discipleship.

The Negative: Churches tend to make only surface changes. They do not implement needed changes. Like white washing a rotten fence, it may look good for a while, but, unless you fix the fence, it soon it will fall.

The Seeker Model: This came out of Willow Creek Community Church in the 80's. The target is the person who is thinking about God, and feels there is something missing in his life, or is the attempt to bring back those who have left the church in disgust.

The Positive: The basic heart and strategy is good. We need to do a much better job in bringing people in the church. We can pick up a multitude of good ideas from this model.

The Negative: Their theology is off. We do not seek God. He seeks us. Most of the time, it is just semantics. They also water the Gospel message down and concentrate on entertainment rather than on teaching and discipleship. Most of the growing churches are teaching solid expository Bible messages, not just “feel good” stuff!

Meta/Cell Church: This too was developed the Fuller Institute in Pasadena, as well as with Serendipity in the 70’s and is based on small (Meta means small) groups as the primary structure, care, and teaching machine in the church.

The Positive: Small groups are essential, and every Christian should be involved in them! This is a great model! We can dig out an abundance of good stuff here.

The Negative: Unless the leaders are adequately trained, the groups will become social in nature, and no real discipleship will result. Effective care and ministry will not happen. This model over-emphasizes small groups to the detriment of other areas, such as other ministries and calls of the church.

Servant Partners Model: This model developed by Viv Grigg of New Zealand in the 80’s, seeks to bring Christ into the inner cities and to the urban poor with the love and care He has called us all to do. It emphasizes servant hood through discipleship and community transformation with the pillars of worship, evangelism, reconciliation and transformation on the foundation of Jesus the Living Word.

The Positive: This is the church model that Christ would have us do!

The Negative: This model over-emphasizes (if you can do that?) the premise of helping the poor, while sometimes neglecting other areas and calls of the church, such as discipleship. Compare this to spending all of your time working on your car’s engine and neglecting the chassis and drive train. Of course, most churches neglect the engine and only paint their cars while the rest of the car rots! Yet, this is a great model, and we can learn a lot from it. We all must seek to incorporate it in our lives and churches!

Apostolic Movement: This is a new movement that was started by one of McGavran’s protégés, Clarence Peter Wagner. They set up large training centers and what they call harvest meetings.

The Positive: This model emphasizes prayer, which is one of the quintessential aspects of exercising our faith, call, and role in the church! It also opens our eyes to the reality of spiritual warfare.

The Negative: I personally worked with Wagner for over five years. He was a friend and mentor to me. I was at one of his harvest meetings recently, (11/01 Pasadena, Ca), where I was shocked and appalled! They are on the verge of cult status with crazy, unbiblical doctrine. They claim to be real apostles, they search for demons under every bush, and they lift prophecy over and against Biblical precepts. They have a total disregard of solid, essential Biblical doctrine. They ridicule people who hold to the Bible, while they lift themselves up rather than our Lord! If you are very, very, **very**

discerning, you can pick up some good insights on prayer and some other things, but it will be like digging through trash to find bottles!

The Toronto/ Vineyard Model: The Vineyard church started off great, with solid Biblical teaching getting to the root and having God-seeking hearts. Then, their founder, and leader, John Wimber, went insane. This is not a personal attack, but a fact! This was very sad for me as he, too, was a prime mentor to me for many years. He began expounding false doctrines, changing, conflicting and untrue prophecies, and then he died. The church split. Some went back to their roots and the Bible and are all right, while others went totally the opposite, like the Toronto Vineyard.

The Positive: They seek to bring the church to a simpler model of worship and faith. If you are looking for worship insights, this is the place.

The Negative: Many of the churches still hold to untrue, false, and dangerous doctrines, although the denomination is in the mist of reform. Hopefully, the disease-ridden churches will be cut off. The bad churches are in total apostasy, with holy laughter, holy vomiting, false healings that any stage hypnotist can do, and seeking sensationalism, not Christ! Even some of the solid churches have doctrinal errors that seek new anointing for experience sake, and not discipleship. We are to seek His face, not just His handouts. Therefore, be discerning!

Each of these Seven Models have positives and negatives as they are a reflection of our human reasoning in defining God's purpose and call for the church. As a leader, you must be in prayer, be discerning, and be a careful steward of His sheep. Therefore, you have to pick and choose the principles that are Biblical and that work. **To make this easier we have provided you with a compete Primer on *How To Lead and Mange Your Church* on our leadership channel**, with numerous solid Biblical articles to help guide you. There, you can go over the Biblical principles in prayer and develop a model from God's call for your church.

Here is a taste what your model must contain:

Real church growth is found in the precepts of His Word: And these precepts are:

"Fifteen Health Factors for American Churches" from a Campus Crusade Training Manual © 1977

1. PURPOSE: Growing churches each possess a common purpose and a common philosophy of ministry.

2. PRIORITIES: Growing churches have arranged their responsibilities according to Biblical priorities.

3. LEADERSHIP: Growing churches have effective leadership.

4. LAITY: Growing churches have mobilized their people according to their Spiritual Gifts and what is revealed in the Scriptures.

5. **LIFESTYLE:** Growing churches have members whose lives are contagious.
6. **EVANGELISM:** Growing churches emphasize Evangelism.
7. **DISCIPLESHIP:** Growing churches encourage their people to be involved in the process of Discipleship.
8. **WORSHIP:** Growing churches experience corporate worship.
9. **FELLOWSHIP:** Growing churches establish a strong sense of belonging through various fellowship groupings.
10. **SMALL GROUPS:** Growing churches develop deep, interpersonal relationships through the dynamics of small groups.
11. **DIAGNOSIS:** Growing churches diagnose themselves and their communities.
12. **PLANNING:** Growing churches plan effectively and organize their resources efficiently.
13. **PROGRAMS:** Growing churches use only programs that work.
14. **TRAINING:** Growing churches place a high value on training.
15. **PRAYER:** Growing churches can verify the effects of believing prayer.

Did you notice the date? Just imagine what if the church growth people were teaching these principles instead of their nonsense! I showed this list to McGavran and many of the church growth gurus as I went from being on staff with Campus Crusade to seminary where McGavran taught, and I was told this was “*unscientific gobbledygook not based on real research and global happenings.*” Well, he recanted that a year before he died, and said he was wrong, sadly too late for the other church growth gurus to catch on!

I do not want to sound harsh or that I am putting down these great visionary people in the church growth field. In fact, I know and have worked with many of them, and I have great respect for them! Their hearts and desires are to see Christ’s Church grow! They have opened the minds, and challenged the approaches of many church leaders and pastors to see that the result can be better. We can rethink how and why we do things, and improve our methods of doing church. They have helped awaken the church out of its complacency into action. As a whole they almost certainly have done far more good than bad! I am not attacking them personally. I am attacking the idea that anyone can force his will of determination without cause or concern for the Word of Truth. I am not attacking what they are trying to do, but how they are going about it! We cannot elevate our reasoning above and against Scripture, even if it works. We always

have to compare whatever idea or theory we come up with to the precepts of the Bible. If they are good, and concur with the call and character of Christ, then we should use them. If not, we should throw them out! We can do a much better job of finding His sheep if we follow His precepts! Let us get into His Word and not into our self!

I pray you will not make the same mistakes that I once did. Check out our totally reworked Church Leadership channel. We have added dozens of Biblically based church growth articles and tools that would cost thousands of dollars if you hired a consultant. We offer them for your use to learn and grow!

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One Last Thought: Why are there so many disagreements within the Christian faith?

Is not the Holy Spirit giving all Christians the same truth? The Holy Spirit is giving the same truth; the problem is not Him; but us! I had once believed that the many different beliefs in the Christian faith demonstrated that it was not true. After all, how could there be so many disagreements about something that supposed to be true? I found over the years this is easily. And that we have more in common than in disagreement, it is just that we tend to focus on the negative distinctions and not our unity.

Such as, that all Christians agree that we are all sinful. Thus as long as sin remains, it is going to influence how we handle knowledge and truth, even the truth of God's Word. Additionally nearly all of the divisions among Christians are the result of pride. Furthermore all Christians believe that us humans are limited in our abilities to understand what God has told us and even effectively communicate clearly what God is teaching. This is demonstrated by people who are against the Reformed teachings, manly because it was not explained logically or clearly. All through Seminary I denied "Limited Atonement" Because my professes never truly or clearly explained it; since I did not understand it, I denied it. This is the same reasoning why Christians differ over such things as the mode baptism: Who should be baptized, believers or infants...and what is taking place during it.

We contradict each other because scripture teaches us to baptize and gives some examples; but it does not actually provide any kind of specific formula. Thus, we come to different conclusions based on our limited insight and our own determination, that is what we like over what God desires us to do. These differences are going to multiply if no control is enforced on individuals and churches, which is exactly what has happened. That is why our Church Order Manual and "Articles of faith" are so important. The Reformation encouraged all people to read the Bible, before the common person was not allowed. Thus many interpretations have risen, both minor and cultic over the

centuries, and all combined with traditions and expectations. All focusing what we do verses what God calls us to do.

What is important is the agreement that remains over the basics of Christianity by those who believe that the Bible is true. There are individuals and churches that claim to be Christian and reject what the Bible says. I am not talking about them, Just look up the word “reprobate”, and read Romans 1. Most committed Christians regardless of denominational affiliation who believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God have more in common than not; there is a great deal of unity in the midst of our diversity.

We all believe that God is our Creator; that He created us without sin, but that we have all fallen into sin; that our sin separates us from God and we cannot make up this gap; that Jesus Christ is God’s Son who died for us that we may receive forgiveness for sin; that He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven: and we embrace salvation only by our faith in Jesus Christ; that the Holy Spirit is the one who gives us understanding about Jesus and salvation; that Jesus will return some day in glory. These chief beliefs are our essence that have withstood the test of time and the misinterpretations from sinful people. For myself, the many different denominations have increased my appreciation for the gospel, at the same time a passion to teach correct theology. And have given me more of a passion to reach the lost. Consider your neighbor, or the person you work with, or a close friend, or a relative, or acquaintance who do not Know Him. Will your attitude of “my way or no way” keep you from being a witness or friend? Scripture is clear on what we are called to do, are you clear in your understanding and purpose and response?

The gospel that has been adopted and adapted by millions of people from thousands of cultures and people groups over hundreds of generations is not only still recognizable from when first preached by Jesus and his apostles, but is as vibrant as ever, drawing Westerners and non Westerners, the educated and uneducated, the rich and the poor, those raised in Christian societies and those who were raised never even hearing of Jesus, the straight-laced and the indulgers of immorality, and the list could go on. I never cease to be amazed by how the Holy Spirit binds together such a large and disparate group of people. We still sin; we still misinterpret what the Spirit teaches us, and, yet, there is still that bond that keeps us together, which is Jesus Christ. Jesus and worship him in the joy of our salvation. The Truth of Christianity remains in the midst of our conflicting interpretations. That Truth is Jesus Christ. I am the way, the truth, and the life. So Jesus is the truth not us!

Here are some more reasons why we disagree:

Different epistemologies, thus means how we know what we know, where the knowledge comes to us. How did we learn it, why did we learn it? Where did it come from? Are the sources valid, it our interpretations valid. How we know what we know is it rational and so forth. Thus the average pastor goes to Scripture with a preconceived theological agendas instead of doing what we all need to do: Study the Bible inductively, that is what does it say, what does it mean? And how does it teach and apply to my live.

Then how do I teach these precepts to others? **Not what I think it says or I think it should say!!**

Being a Light House is praying, caring and sharing. Sometimes it is even appreciating other Christians, for we are all the Body of Christ. From the Episcopal church burning incense in worship to the fundamentalist church that renounces any form of liturgy, we all still bow the knee to our Lord (John 14:6).

This work is a product of over 20 years of research and development; use it wisely and powerfully to Know Him and to make Him known!



Numbers 6:24

© 1993, 1998, 2001, completely updated and revised 2003-2005 Richard J. Krejcir Ph.D. *Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development*

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