

# Simply Vital

A Jumpstart to Basic-Yet-Complete Church Revitalization

*A Narrative of the M.V.P. Keys:  
– Keys to the Missional Vitality Process –  
– Featured Segments in the GO PROJECT –*

Manuscript Edition

Ken Priddy, Ph.D.

Rev. Kenneth E. Priddy, DMIN, PhD  
Executive Director – GO Center, Inc. (The GO Center)  
P.O. Box 4911  
Richmond, VA 23220  
804-306-7942  
kenpriddy.com@gmail.com  
kenpriddyepc@gmail.com (EPC only)  
www.gocenterinfo.com  
www.kenpriddy.com

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

© 2020 Kenneth E. Priddy

## Table of Contents

Introduction:	The Journey to <i>Simply Vital</i>	5
Chapter 1:	M.V.P. Keys: The Missional Vitality Process	9
	Key Platform	10
	Key Scripture Planks	10
	Key Models	10
	Key Teams	11
	Key Markers	11
	Key Disciplines	11
	Key Paradigm Shift	11
	Key Strategic Tool	12
Chapter 2:	Key Platform: Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative	13
Chapter 3:	Key Scripture Planks:	17
	The Great Promise – Matthew 16:13-18	17
	The Great Commandment – Matthew 22:34-40	19
	The Great Commission – Matthew 28:18-20	22
	The Great Witness – Acts 1:8	26
	The Great Mission – Luke 19:10	27
	The Great Multiplication – Matthew 24:14	28
Chapter 4:	Key Models: Nehemiah Meets the Great Commission	31
Chapter 5:	Key Teams: GO Leader Team, Vision Team, Prayer Teams	45
Chapter 6:	Key Markers:	59
	Marker 1: Self-Discovery	60
	Marker 2: Motivation	63
	Marker 3: Skill-Training	64
	Marker 4: Implementation	64
	Marker 5: Evaluation	65
Chapter 7:	Key Disciplines: Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church	67
	Preemptive Prayer	68
	Basic Bible	73
	Cost Commitment	77
	Missional Multiplication	80
Chapter 8:	Key Paradigm Shift: From Ministry TO to Ministry THROUGH	91
Chapter 9:	Key Strategic Tool: The Great Commission Matrix	95
Chapter 10:	M.V.P. Keys in Review	105
Appendix 1:	M.V.P. Architecture Framework	113
Appendix 2:	GO PROJECT ROADMAP Tracker	115
Appendix 3:	Church Lifecycle Assessment	119
Appendix 4:	About the GO Center	135
Appendix 5:	About the Author	137



## Introduction

### The Journey to *Simply Vital*

I know you're busy and I assume that you're concerned about church revitalization, so, I'll get right to the point. After many years in music and arts ministry and two church plants, I backed into the mysterious world of church revitalization by accident. At least it was an accident on my part, but, in truth, it was God's providence. I have a history of accidentally stumbling into God's providence but I'll save that story for another time. You want to know about church revitalization.

Here's the deal, a very long story made as short as I can. In 1993, I was called into the pastorate of an eighty-seven-year-old church in Phoenix, AZ, that had declined to thirteen members. My assignment, as a church planter, was to join with this small remnant congregation, declaring the thirteen to be the core of a new church, and start all over. That made sense before the fact. My planting experiences in the past involved starting from scratch with no core group and limited resources. In this case, there were already thirteen people in place, a little money in the bank and rental income from owned property and buildings that had been leased to a Hispanic church. I thought we had a head start.

I soon discovered, however, that this head start was an illusion. I've come to express it this way: planting a church is starting a church from scratch; revitalizing a church from near death is starting a church from *less than* scratch. In truth, everything I had learned through the planting of two churches and all the church plant training I had received to date was relevant and even necessary. There was the need to discern God's vision, to cast that vision and build a core group around it, and to create strategies to move that vision forward. There was the need to penetrate a local community, connecting with its needs and interests to forge relationships upon which to share the Gospel and build a congregation. But there was more. There was eighty-seven years of history, a preexisting congregation and preexisting issues that had led to steep decline. These issues had not been fully identified or treated and no plan for the future had been developed. Some years later, I coined an identity for a revitalization pastor as a "Church Planter Plus." The "plus" referred to all the terrain beyond church planting elements that a revitalization pastor needs to navigate.

Now, almost three decades later, I look back on all that I've discovered, studied, and experienced as a revitalization practitioner, and all that I've created through curriculum development that has emerged from observation, research, implementation, the writing of two doctoral dissertations and several books, and over twenty years ministering as a revitalization trainer and consultant. I'm pulling it all together for you as simply and directly as I can. There's no need for both of us to spend thirty years figuring this out. I've been there; done that. You can spend your thirty years on something else that you can pass on, but this document is my contribution. If you will grab the heart and mind, along with the nuts and bolts, of *Simply Vital: A Jumpstart to Basic-Yet-Complete Church Revitalization*, and commit to smart and lean applications of what's laid out here, you will see your church achieve biblical health, growth and multiplication as a revitalized Great Commission ministry. I know this works because I've lived it myself and seen it many times over in others.

This document is part book, part workbook, and part training manual with, perhaps, a touch of manifesto. The title was carefully created and I want to break it down for you. Let's start with *Vital*. It's widely recognized that over 80% of American Protestant churches is in plateau or decline. That's an astounding and heartbreaking statistic that has held in place at least since I heard about it in the early 90s. If we recognize the word *vital*, as does the average dictionary, as pertaining to life and health and vigor, then the American church is the opposite of vital, closer to dead or dying than alive and kicking. The objective, then, is to *return to vital* or *to revitalize*. Imagine the dynamic impact the church at large could have if just half of that 80% that's in plateau or decline returned to vital. In this objective, you find the central core of my personal ministry and that of the GO Center.

Why? What lies behind the objective of widespread church vitality? Behind this objective is the biblical outcome of gathering the harvest of souls that is ripe for entrance into the eternal family of God. A return to vitality is not about a given church's longevity or survival. It's about a given church's increased effectiveness in laboring in the plentiful harvest that surrounds it. It's about finding who's missing from the family of God and bringing them home where they will find redemption for their souls followed by growth and maturity, all to the glory of God. This is the essence of going and making disciples and this the essence of a church that is vital.

The moniker *Simply Vital* acknowledges the importance of alignment in the pursuit of vitality. I resonate strongly with the ministry philosophy spotlighted in *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, and *Deliberate Simplicity: How the Church Does More by Doing Less* by Dave Browning. The complex, corporate, professional, program-scripted church of the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century is proving less and less effective as we progress deeper into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The content of the Gospel and solid evangelical theology must hold fast without compromise, but innovation is the order of the day in terms of approaches, models, methodologies, strategies and tactics. Alignment of ministry that is guided by the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, and that is simple, lean and streamlined for maximum return on the investment of resources, is the road that leads to vitality.

This road, and this book, are outlined in the eight segments of the *M.V.P. Keys*, the *Missional Vitality Process Keys*. The *M.V.P. Keys* are the primary chapter titles of this book and, as such, are listed in the Table of Contents. They identify the spinal cord of the GO Center Process that is at the core of the GO PROJECT, a large-scale, multi-stage training, implementation and research project projected to unfold over the next ten to twelve years. Ultimately, the objective of the GO PROJECT is to move over one thousand evangelical churches through a two-year process of firmly establishing Great Commission revitalization in their ministries. The first stage is the pilot, set to engage approximately thirty churches in effective revitalization, using research data gathering, analysis and publication to both upgrade and scale up to larger second and third stages. *Simply Vital*, in part, is being written to capture the process in narrative in support of leaders who will take the point in moving through the *M.V.P. Keys* as participants in the GO PROJECT.

The subtitle adds further explanation with *Jumpstart*, a word that suggests a quick and powerful spark that ignites movement. I'm not going to claim that *Simply Vital* will revitalize a church overnight, but I will project that seriously committed pastors and leaders, with the hand of God, can make significant gains in a matter of months despite the many years and even decades of downward trajectory that have brought a church to its long-term plateau or decline.

*Basic-Yet-Complete* might seem like a strange, almost contradictory, combination. How can the process be basic and yet complete at the same time? It's because the *basics* of church revitalization do, in fact, comprise *complete* revitalization, i.e. all that's needed. Consider the

analogy of the wheat and the chaff. When the chaff is sifted out of the pile, wheat is what is left, all of the wheat. I suggest that much of what we're doing in the programming of the church is chaff, so I'm calling for a sifting down to ministry basics that, though basic, are complete.

So, there you have it; *Simply Vital: A Jumpstart to Basic-Yet-Complete Church Revitalization*. Don't wait for the future to happen; make the future happen, a future that is *Simply Vital!*

QUOTE:

*The great thing about the GO PROJECT, for me, is that, for the first time in my twenty-two years of ordained ministry, I feel like I am taking the fight to the enemy.*

Rev. Dr. Rufus Burton  
Senior Pastor  
First Presbyterian Church  
Martinsburg, WV



# Chapter 1

## M.V.P. Keys: The Missional Vitality Process

<p><b>8. Key Strategic Tool</b> The Great Commission Matrix featuring Outreach, Evangelism &amp; Discipleship Movements</p>
<p><b>7. Key Paradigm Shift</b> From Ministry TO the Congregation to Ministry THROUGH the Congregation</p>
<p><b>6. Key Disciplines</b> <i>Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church</i> Preemptive Prayer Basic Bible Cost Commitment Missional Multiplication</p>
<p><b>5. Key Markers</b> <i>ROADMAP to Missional Vitality</i> Marker 1: Self-Discovery Marker 2: Motivation Marker 3: Skill-Training Marker 4: Implementation Marker 5: Evaluation</p>
<p><b>4. Key Teams</b> GO Leader Team Vision Team Prayer Teams</p>
<p><b>3. Key Models</b> Nehemiah Model Great Commission Model</p>
<p><b>2. Key Scripture Planks</b> The Great Promise: Matthew 16:13-18 The Great Commandment: Matthew 22:34-40 The Great Commission: Matthew 28:18-20 The Great Witness: Acts 1:8 The Great Mission: Luke 19:10 The Great Multiplication: Matthew 24:14</p>
<p><b>1. Key Platform</b> Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative</p>

*The M.V.P. Keys Chart outlines 8 Keys to the Missional Vitality Process from the bottom up, featured in the GO PROJECT. This highlights the importance of Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative as the foundation upon which all else is built and upon which all else sustains over time.*

Chapter 1 outlines the 8 M.V.P. Keys that categorically lay out the Missional Vitality Process that will be referred to from this point on as the GO Process, the beaten path of the GO PROJECT. The word "GO" is incorporated into much of the GO Center's nomenclature as a frequent reminder of the centrality of the Great Commission to biblical revitalization. The "GO Center," as the name of the primary ministry I serve, is shorthand for the "GO and Make Disciples Center." The 8 Keys to the GO Process provide simple and clear guidelines as to how to navigate the ministry of Great Commission revitalization. Each of these eight categories is covered in synopsis in this chapter so that the reader will have a sense of the whole and how the 8 M.V.P. Keys align with each other. Having presented the GO Process in outline and synopsis form in this chapter, the following eight chapters go deeply into each of the Keys, respectively, with thorough treatments.

**1. Key Platform:** The GO Process promotes healthy, holistic revitalization that embraces both the Great Commandment and the Great Commission by building two platforms: Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative. Church leaders tend to lean toward one or the other, but when combined, Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative, centered on Great Commission Ministry, sparks sustainable multiplication that builds congregations from within and reaches communities from without. It is of paramount importance that church leaders engage revitalization both spiritually and strategically. One without the other will not produce balanced, sustainable, positive impact.

**2. Key Scripture Planks:** The Great Promise in Matthew 16 is that Jesus is building His church. The focus of our affection is to love God and love people, the Great Commandment of Matthew 22. That love is expressed in obedience to His command to go and make disciples, the Great Commission of Matthew 28. Our Great Witness begins in the center of where we are and then extends further and further outward, as explained in Acts 1:8. Luke 19:10 identifies the Great Mission of Jesus. He is on a search and rescue mission to seek and save the lost, and we are to join Him on that mission. The Great Multiplication recorded in Matthew 24:14 promises that when the message of Jesus is fully multiplied throughout His world, He will come again.

**3. Key Models:** The Nehemiah Model reveals what happens when Spiritual Renewal meets Strategic Initiative. Concerned over the state of Jerusalem, Nehemiah wept and mourned, fasted and prayed. Then, with the hand of God upon him, he took action. The ultimate result was that the people of God were restored through this tandem of Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative.

The Great Commission Model reveals that we move in the authority of Jesus Christ when we follow His command to go and make disciples. More than evangelism, we are called to teach obedience to the commands of Christ and to rely on His presence through the Holy Spirit, always.

**4. Key Teams:** The GO Leader Team is the aggregate of all church leaders, giving input and support to the revitalization priority and standing united in living out that priority. The Vision Team is a selected group of approximately six people who lead the revitalization effort at the level of discerning vision and formulating strategic plans. Prayer Teams surround the Vision Team to uphold its members as they lead with the support and protection of the power of prayer.

**5. Key Markers – ROADMAP to Missional Vitality:** Marker 1: *Self-Discovery* enables leaders to see the state of the church as it truly is. Marker 2: *Motivation* mobilizes the church toward taking action. Marker 3: *Skill-Training* builds strength, knowledge and competence into the congregation in preparation for making revitalization happen. Marker 4: *Implementation* guides action on the field of ministry toward desired outcomes. Marker 5: *Evaluation* reveals progress and results, and informs GO Process next steps.

**6. Key Disciplines – Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church:** *Preemptive Prayer* provides power and protection for all actions to be taken in the GO Process. *Basic Bible* lays the biblical groundwork for a congregation to build its future on truth. *Cost Commitment* calls for high levels of sacrificial commitment to moving the church forward in realizing Great Commission impact within both congregation and community. *Missional Multiplication* solidifies the commitment and practice of going and making disciples.

**7. Key Paradigm Shift:** By default, church ministry tends to focus on the question, “How do we minister *TO* our congregation?” The GO Process shifts the question to, “How do we minister *THROUGH* our congregation to reach a lost community?” This paradigm shift sends the focus of ministry outward from the church with Great Commission ministry that strongly impacts the community. At the same time, by being mobilized for hands-on Great Commission ministry, congregational maturity is accelerated.

**8. Key Strategic Tool – the Great Commission Matrix:** The GO Process reaches its strategic peak with the Great Commission Matrix, a strategic tool that organizes ministry through the grid of the Great Commission. At the heart of the Matrix is the transforming of Outreach, Evangelism and Discipleship from simply being programs on a list with other programs to being MOVEMENTS. These three movements are threaded through all programs or ministry areas of the church so that all become outwardly engaged with the community rather than being just inwardly engaged with the congregation. For example, youth ministry is not focused simply on ministering TO the youth of the church but is focused on ministering THROUGH the youth of the church to reach teenagers in the community. Every ministry of the church becomes a proactive front door to Jesus Christ, to faith and to the church through the wholistic, all-hands-on-deck, approach to impacting both the lost and the found through the Missional Ministry Movements of Outreach, Evangelism and Discipleship.

## Chapter 2

### Key Platform: Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative

Effective church revitalization demands that leaders combine *Spiritual Renewal* with *Strategic Initiative*. Their approach must be *strategically spiritual* and *spiritually strategic* with a constant blending of both spiritual and strategic awareness and implementation. My observation is that church leaders tend to have a default setting that leans in one of these directions or the other, creating an imbalance that is unknown or unrecognized and that undermines sustainable revitalization. This default setting might originate with a key leader or cadre of leaders that holds strong authority or influence with the congregation, but over time, that default setting becomes a characteristic of the congregational culture, or group think, that drives the psyche or mindset of the entire congregation.

Leaders with a *spiritual* default setting tend to see giving strategic planning a favored position as compromising on having faith in God, or on placing trust in spiritual elements such as prayer and the power of God's Word. Let me be clear, I strongly support high commitments to faith and trust and prayer and to holding fast to Scripture. I never encourage leaders to lessen or abandon the spiritual side of revitalization. However, I have come to realize that the spiritual dynamic alone is incomplete and that the strategic dynamic of revitalization is equally important.

Let me give you an example. For a season I served with a particular denominational group that was centered in the southeastern United States. I worked with them through their national office, providing assessment, revitalization training and ongoing consultation through implementation of that training. They were a warm, loving and faithful people with a genuine humility and trust in the Lord. Their preaching was strong and their worship dynamic, yet, like most American churches, the majority of their churches were in plateau or decline.

They elected to work through our most comprehensive assessment material and, in that context, worked through a section of the assessment called "Getting the Story." Among the assignments that are contained within this section is the articulation of a timeline of a church's history. Leaders are asked to construct that timeline, from the birth of the church until the present, by highlighting whatever they chose to identify as significant milestones or seasons of the church's history. How

they chose to do so was quite revealing. Some cited pastor tenures as the primary metric, others listed building projects or location changes while others noted significant events that had occurred in their towns, cities, or states. It was fascinating to learn how many location changes were the result of fires that had claimed church buildings.

This group was quite unique in that each of the churches that completed this assignment organized their historical timeline by revivals that had been held within their churches over the span of years. I was intrigued by this because no previous church had cited revivals as a primary metric and yet each of these churches, 100% of them, independently of each other, segmented the history of their churches by periodic revivals that were held. It was clear that revivals reigned supreme in the ministry culture of that denomination and were, therefore, a dominant element. As I discussed this unusual finding with them, leaders warmly and enthusiastically reminisced about this or that revival and what had happened during particular revivals, who preached as leading evangelists, how many professions of faith were made and on and on and on. These rich memories clearly evoked wistful feelings of longing to recapture those moments and sentimentally breathe them in.

Sharing these memories with them was wonderful and a true joy, but, as I often do, there came a time for me to rain on the parade. I pulled out other segments of the assessment where statistics had been recorded across timelines and overlaid them against the milestone moments of periodic revivals. Here's what we discovered. During the times of revival and the few weeks that followed post-revival, there were surges of higher attendance, higher giving, higher visitor attendance, conversions and baptisms, but within a month or two, that surge would recede and slide back to patterns that had existed pre-revival. This happened again and again. Why? Because these revivals had only been approached as spiritual elements with no accompanying strategic plans. The result was what I now refer to as a *Spiritual Pep Rally* where there was much excitement and enthusiasm at the moment but the positive outcomes were not sustainable. These dynamic moments were not combined with strategic intentionality, so, the opportunities for sustainable health, growth and multiplication slipped away. Bottom Line: Spiritual Renewal without Strategic Initiative does not create sustainable outcomes.

What about the flip side? What happens when church leaders take the *strategic* initiative but bypass spiritual renewal? Just as Spiritual Renewal without Strategic Initiative fails, so does Strategic Initiative without Spiritual Renewal. Typically, it's not that evangelical leaders dismiss the spiritual dynamic as unimportant. Rather, they assume that the spiritual dynamic is already firmly in place and that spiritual elements are not where the problem of plateau or decline resides. They are, after all, a faithful and believing people who come together regularly for preaching, worship, prayer, fellowship, discipleship and all things church; right? They see the spiritual side of revitalization as a garden that doesn't need tending, so, they reason, the problem resides on the strategic side of revitalization. They're looking for the formula, the steps, the latest methodology-du-jour that will propel ministry forward into greater growth and stability.

Engaging Strategic Initiative without engaging Spiritual Renewal creates at least three challenges. First, a strategy-alone approach tends to be an extension of a church's self-focus. I've come to understand that the leading cause of long-term plateau and decline is a church's inward focus. Ministry is directed to the congregation with the assumption that ministry will naturally flow through the congregation into the community beyond, an assumption that is unfounded. Programs are offered as ministry to the congregation and, if there is ministry programming in place for outreach or evangelism, it typically involves a very small portion of the congregation while others in the congregation are content that outreach and evangelism are adequately covered.

Given this congregation-centric mindset or culture, Strategic Initiative, lacking the influence of Spiritual Renewal, gravitates toward methodologies that are more about laboring in the church than laboring in the harvest. Proper Spiritual Renewal that centers on scriptural mandates such as the Great Commandment and the Great Commission is what convicts, inspires and instructs leaders and congregations to join Jesus, the Son of Man, in His search and rescue mission to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Led by this harvest-centric conviction, strategy that turns a church's focus outward are sought, studied and implemented, and a church becomes equipped and empowered to revitalize biblically.

Second, a strategy-alone approach causes fragmentation among leaders and congregations. When discussion regarding strategy is entertained, without the spiritual dynamic, the discussion

is purely *horizontal* with no significant input from the *vertical*. In horizontal discussion, I'm referring to people-to-people dialogue that takes place horizontally, one person to another or to a group. It comes down to each person's offering his or her personal perspective, and the key influencer or the strongest voice tends to rule the day. Factions tend to form among leadership and within the congregation as people side with this or that point of view according to their personal perspectives or their allegiance to one or another of the key influencing voices. The strongest voice at the decision-making table needs to be the vertical voice, the voice of God. In my construct, God's voice is heard through Spiritual Renewal, through prayer, through Scripture, through godly discussion with vertically listening leaders in a concerted commitment to discerning God's voice.

Third, a strategy-alone approach generates false positives that are the product of manipulation. Typically, leaders that engage in revitalization are seeking to grow the church numerically and adopt methodologies that seem likely to boost such growth. Without the integrity of Spiritual Renewal, this pursuit of numerical growth through strategy alone opens the door to compromise and syncretism. Not surprisingly, these methodologies are often effective, creating the desired attendance spike. The increased rate of newcomers visiting the church, and perhaps plugging in short term, seems promising and convinces leaders that they're on the right track, but what exactly are these newcomers coming into? Without spiritual integrity or credibility, they might not be engaging with true faith but are simply attracted to the new horizontal methodology. They have been drawn into a spiritual void. Bottom Line: Strategic Initiative without Spiritual Renewal does not create sustainable outcomes.

*Simply Vital*, a process to jumpstart basic and complete revitalization, begins by laying the foundation for the Key Platform of Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative. The remaining chapters of this book build on this platform to position a church for revitalizing through biblical health, growth and multiplication that is a balance of the spiritual and the strategic.



## Chapter 3

### Key Scripture Planks: The Scripture Greats

The entire Bible is the Word of God, so, every verse, every passage, every chapter, every book and both testaments are of equal importance. As the Apostle Paul writes in his second letter to Timothy, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work," (2 Timothy 3;16-17). That said, I'm going to zero in on a handful of verses and passages that I believe speak to God's vision and strategy for His church. I trust you will find this profitable for teaching and training in righteousness and I'll leave it to you to determine if anything that is covered in this chapter might be applied for reproof or correction. Indeed, we want to be competent and we want, by God's grace, to be equipped for every good work.

The revitalization of God's visible church through laboring in the harvest is a good work in my thinking, and that is the context or mindset that I'm bringing to the unveiling of what I call the Scripture Greats, six Key Scripture Planks that reveal much of what God's plan, purpose and expectations are for His church.

#### **Scripture Plank 1: The Great Promise – Matthew 16:13-18**

*Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

On this day, as Jesus and his disciples came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus was at a midpoint along the path of his earthly ministry. Months before He had called His disciples and they had been with Him ever since, observing what He did, hearing what He said, and arguably being in the best position to know who this Jesus really was. This particular location, whose name honored both Caesar Augustus and its founder, Philip the tetrarch, was a cult center for pagan

religious practices that featured a sanctuary to the pagan god Pan. It's more than coincidence that Jesus selected this particular place to ask His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is." The disciples knew that Jesus was referring to Himself as the Son of Man and they offered a variety of answers to His question. Theirs was simply a report of what had been heard from people in general.

The list of possibilities was impressive, John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Clearly, in the minds of people Jesus was perceived as someone very special, someone of power, of knowledge, of renown. They hadn't yet hit on his true identity but, credit where credit is due, they were in the ballpark. It seems that this first question by Jesus was just a conversation starter, an icebreaker, if you will, because immediately He took a deeper dive into a much more profound and personal question. "Who do you say that I am," He queried, moving from a safe, objective question to the scrutiny of a fierce and even dangerous subjective question.

Oh, to be the proverbial fly on the wall, maybe the outside wall of the temple to Pan. As usual, Simon, soon to be Simon Peter, was the first to utter a response, speaking for himself and probably representing the group at large, but I wonder how much of a gap there was between the question and the answer. Was it immediate, as if Simon had this on the tip of his tongue before Jesus even asked the question, having come to this conclusion some time ago, or was there silence for an uncomfortable few moments, as if no one quite wanted to answer for fear of being wrong, or something in between? Regardless, Simon answered and he answered correctly, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

What a mouthful! In a few short words, Simon, I'm sure not known for his succinct skills in oratory, had captured the most significant truth of all eternity. There is a God and that God is alive, a living God. God has a Son and that Son is Jesus in the flesh, God the Son Incarnate. This Jesus is right here with us, Immanuel, and He is the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Redeemer who has been promised to come for centuries. Here He is, right here, right now, standing right here in front of me on this very day in Caesarea Philippi. Amazing!

Jesus responded to Simon's response with, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!" Question: Was Simon blessed because he got the right answer, or did he get the right answer because he was

blessed? Jesus explained, "For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." In this moment, and in this explanation, we see the mechanism or protocol through which people will come to faith in Jesus Christ. God the Father reveals through God the Spirit that God the Son is the Christ, the Son of the living God. That's how it works in this trinitarian revelation.

Now we come to the Great Promise as Jesus pronounced, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Simon was being given a new name, Peter, or Petros in Greek. It's a play on words because the Greek word for rock is *petra*, Petros as a proper noun. This was not the first time that Jesus had dubbed Simon the Rock. In the Gospel of John (John 1:42) we find that when Peter first met Jesus, Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas." Cephas is an Aramaic word that means, you guessed it, rock. So, it seems that Jesus saw Simon Peter as the rock from their first encounter. On this day, in Caesarea Philippi, it seems that Simon grew into his name and from this point on, he was known as Simon Peter or simply Peter. Note that the New Testament includes two letters written by Peter to the early church. They are known as First and Second Peter, not First and Second Simon.

Was Simon, Cephas, Simon Peter, truly the rock upon which the church of Jesus Christ would be built? It would seem so on the surface and, surely, Simon Peter played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Christian church, ultimately paying with his life by suffering crucifixion. But, as important as Simon Peter was, he did not have the power to regenerate the human soul. That came from the revelation by God the Father through God the Spirit that God the Son is the Christ. Every time someone comes to that conviction, the church of Jesus Christ grows. His church is being built and He is the One doing the building, guaranteed. That's the Great Promise. God has a vision of a church that positions itself well to be used as an agent of that revelation. A revitalized church is a church that is seeing men, women and children coming to Christ when He is revealed to them as the Christ, the Son of the living God. How does that positioning unfold in your church?

### **Scripture Plant 2: The Great Commandment – Matthew 22:34-40**

*But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, what is the great*

*commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."*

In criminal investigations, prosecutors labor to establish *motive* and *opportunity* for the alleged crime to have been perpetrated by the suspect. Let's consider motive and opportunity in this context. Why is this Pharisee, who happens to be a lawyer, asking Jesus this question? From what the reader is told, he was not seeking information or to be instructed by Jesus; this was not a learning moment. He asked Jesus this question to "test him." Side note: testing Jesus is probably a bad idea. To understand the dynamics of this encounter, we need to pull the lens back and consider the broader context.

There were at least three and as many as five parties to this scene. There were the Sadducees, the Pharisees and Jesus, for certain, plus, it's reasonable to assume that the disciples were present, and there was likely a number of onlookers still present from Jesus' prior interaction with the Sadducees (Matthew 22:33). We can consider any disciples or onlookers that were present as more spectators than participants, so the focus is on the threesome of Sadducees, Pharisees and Jesus Himself. Just prior to the approach and questioning of this lawyer, representing the Pharisees, Jesus had gone toe to toe with the Sadducees (Matthew 22:23-33), whom Jesus had silenced.

That the Sadducees had been silenced was a win for the Pharisees since the Sadducees and Pharisees were at odds with each other, much as Democrats and Republicans are in our day. So, in one sense, a loss for the Sadducees was a win for the Pharisees, except, in this case, for one thing. The Pharisees, as well as the Sadducees, were at odds with Jesus and saw him as a serious threat to their traditions and way of life. While it was wonderful for the Pharisees that the Sadducees had been defeated in their debate with Jesus, that win was essentially negated by the fact that Jesus had also won. A win-win for the Pharisees would be to see both the Sadducees and Jesus suffer a loss in the presence of this crowd of onlookers. So, a Pharisee who was a lawyer asked Jesus a question to test him, anticipating that Jesus would fail this test, I suppose, and be discredited just as Jesus had discredited the Sadducees. Win-Win!

What I find interesting is that the lawyer asked Jesus an obvious question that would solicit an obvious answer. If he was seeking to trip Jesus up, it seems that he could have come up with something much more complex or controversial, something that would have created more of a doctrinal mine field for Jesus to navigate. Perhaps he thought that by asking an obvious question with a simple and obvious answer, it would also be obvious to everyone if Jesus made a misstep. Perhaps, when he came into a very close encounter with Jesus, the power, authority, love, grace and mercy of Jesus caught him by surprise and caused him to change his plan of attack. We just don't know. What we do know is that Jesus took the moment to deliver a simple but profound teaching that captured the essence of the Gospel life in a couple of sentences.

First, Jesus appealed to the *Shema* found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Verses 5-6 read, *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* Every Hebrew was saturated with the *Shema* from the cradle to the grave. Quoting the *Shema*, in answer to the lawyer's question, was a response that was both correct and one that could provoke no argument. Second, Jesus adds a lift from the law of Moses found in Leviticus 19:18, *You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.* With these two quotes, Jesus mandates the vertical obligation that is owed to God and the horizontal obligation that is owed to each other.

How important are these two commandments? These two commandments reveal the organizing principle behind the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20. Commandments 1-4 explain the vertical obligation that is owed to God and Commandments 5-10 explain the horizontal obligations that we owe to each other, beginning with honoring our parents. In fact, Jesus goes on to say that these two commandments are the very foundation of all the Law and the Prophets, in other words, they are the foundation of all that is found in the Old Testament and the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets that is found in the New Testament. Note the connection to Paul's teaching concerning the foundation of the church recorded in Ephesians 2:19-22, *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

The lawyer asked a simple question to test Jesus and received a simple, yet profound, answer that tests all of us. God has a vision of a church that vertically fulfills its obligation to Him and horizontally fulfills its obligation to its neighbors. How does love for God and love for neighbor find expression in your church?

### **Scripture Plank 3: The Great Commission – Matthew 28:18-20**

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

There was a forty-day period of time that stretched from the resurrection of Jesus to the ascension of Jesus, His last forty days on earth. The penalty for our sins was paid by His death, His resurrection as the first fruits of the resurrection assured our eternal life, and, following His ascension, the Holy Spirit was poured out and the church age began, an age that will stretch throughout time until His return. These forty post-resurrection/pre-ascension days are extremely important because the appearances of Jesus during these days provided evidence of His resurrection and the teachings and actions of Jesus during these days provided vital and final earthly instruction for His disciples, then and now. Toward the end of those days, just prior to His ascension, Jesus delivered what we now know as the Great Commission, recorded in the three synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke and strongly inferenced in the Gospel of John and the opening chapter of the Book of Acts (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:14-20, Luke 24:44-49, John 20:19-22, Acts 1:8).

Our investigation centers on Matthew's account. Often people cite, "Go and make disciples," as the opening line of the Great Commission. As significant as that mandate is, it's not the opening. The opening line is, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Jesus Christ is in possession of all the authority that exists, expressed as all of the authority in heaven and on earth. There is no authority that is outside of the authority of Jesus Christ. This reminds me of the opening lines of John's Gospel. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him,

and without him was not any thing made that was made," (John 1:1-3). Nothing that was made was made without him, just as there is no authority outside of the authority of Jesus Christ.

How had Jesus come to possess all authority in heaven and on earth? It was given to Him. By whom? It was given to Him by God the Father. God the Father had given all authority in heaven and on earth to God the Son. Jesus, God the Son, had earned the Father's trust through His complete and perfect obedience and His complete and perfect fulfillment of His mission to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Now, before departing, Jesus was enlisting and mobilizing His disciples to become His co-missioners. He had been sent on mission by His Father and His mission had been fulfilled, but there was more. The word, the truth, the Gospel concerning Jesus had to spread across the world and across time. His mission would become the mission of His disciples as co-missioners, empowered to obey their callings and fulfill their missions by the Holy Spirit who was soon to come.

So, the Great Commission begins with the authority of God the Father being given to God the Son who, then, commissioned His disciples in and with that authority to be His witnesses by the power of God the Spirit (Acts 1:8). We must act in that authority if we are to be effective and successful in the fulfillment of our commission. We must fight against our tendency to act in our own strength, however well intentioned, in doing the works, even good works, in the flesh. That said, what is it, exactly, that we are to do?

The word, "therefore," can be a bit tricky. It suggests a consequence or outcome of what has gone before it. In this case, what has gone before is the announcement by Jesus that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to Him. As a consequence of His having received that authority, His disciples, *therefore*, are to go. Right? What makes this tricky is the grammar of the original language and the various ways that language has been interpreted and rendered in English. The Greek word is προεβηντες and translates as "going" or "having gone." Using those renderings gives us "going, therefore, make disciples" or "having gone, therefore, make disciples."

The issue, as I see it, is not so much the action of going, whether that be a new action or the continuation of a former action. The issue is the nature of the action, going or having gone to *make disciples* in the authority of Jesus Christ. It's the making of disciples in this newly found

authority that makes this moment the launch of something brand new. Never before had the disciples been authorized to go in the authority of Jesus to make disciples, but that's the mandate that Jesus prescribed for them. Going in authority, they were called to make disciples of all nations, beginning with conversion, demarcated by baptizing, and continuing with learning, prompted by teaching.

Wait a minute! Did Jesus ever baptize anyone? Jesus had been preceded by John the Baptizer, who came baptizing with water as a baptism of repentance. Matthew 3:3, in identifying this John, explains, "For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord: make his paths straight.'" John, distinguishing himself from Jesus, said, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire," (Matthew 3:11). We get a glimpse of that baptism in John 20:21-22, another post-resurrection/pre-ascension appearance of Jesus, "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.' And when he said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

Following Jesus' ascension, seen in Acts 1, the Holy Spirit came in force, captured in the opening verses of Acts 2, "When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance," (Acts 2:1-4).

The Trinity is in full view. God the Father has given all authority to God the Son, whom He had sent on mission to seek and save the lost. God the Son has completed that mission and has commissioned His disciples to go in His authority to make disciples of all nations. God the Father and God the Son have sent God the Spirit to indwell, instruct and empower these disciples to fulfill the co-mission of making disciples and administering the ministries of baptizing and teaching. This baptism continues the trinitarian work as baptism is to be performed in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The making of disciples begins with regeneration by



the Holy Spirit as sinners repent, followed by baptism, and, then, continues toward maturity through teaching.

What, according to the Great Commission, are the disciples of Jesus Christ, then and now, to teach? Often in training I ask this question and typically the first response is that we are to teach all that Jesus commanded. That's close and has the ring of being a right answer, but it's not the right answer. Jesus, in the Great Commission, instructs that we are to teach *obedience* to all that He commanded, or, in some translations, to teach *observance* to all that He commanded. It's not simply about knowledge of the commands of Christ, it's about being obedient to the commands of Christ, and we all know that knowledge and obedience are two different things. My wife and I have raised four children and, looking back to their childhoods, I remember using this phrase, "You know better!" In these cases, one of my children had done something that he or she knew was not what should be done. In other words, there was knowledge of what to do or not do, but that knowledge had not translated into obedience. It seems to me that the typical approach to teaching in the American church today is based in knowledge rather than obedience, falling far short of the intent and obligations put upon us by the Great Commission.

The Great Commission, as recorded in Matthew, closes with, "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age," (Matthew 28:20b). Jesus began with His authority and He closes with His presence, wrapping His co-mission in His power and protection. How is He with them; with us? He is present through His Holy Spirit, highlighting, once again, the trinitarian thread that weaves through the Great Commission.

One final comment: Notice the expansive scope of the Great Commission. Jesus has been given ALL authority. He commissions His disciples to make disciples of ALL nations, teaching them to obey ALL that He has commanded, and promising to be with them ALL ways. The Great Commission contains the massive enterprise of expanding the kingdom through time to its full completion; it's full consummation. God has a vision of a church that commits itself to the full implications and implementations of the Great Commission. How does this unfold in your church?

#### **Scripture Plank 4: The Great Witness – Acts 1:8**

*"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

The dialogue between Jesus and His disciples in Caesarea Philippi stands out as a pivot point in the earthly ministry of Jesus. Up to that point, Jesus had covered a lot of real estate as something of an itinerant teacher, healer, and miracle worker, giving evidence again and again of His incredibly unique identity. This journey led to the moment in Caesarea Philippi when Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter responded, as we have already noted, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Though the disciples were yet to understand fully what it meant that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, His identity was firmly established within His most intimate circle, His twelve disciples.

From that moment on, the itinerant drift of Jesus' earthly ministry seems to pivot and He began a direct journey to the cross. In preparation, Jesus climbed a mountain where He was transfigured and where He engaged in conversation with Moses and Elijah. What were they discussing during this spectacular supernatural moment? Luke informs, "Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem," (Luke 9:28-31).

Jesus was on the last leg of His earthly mission and throughout this last leg, He often spoke about the coming of the promised Holy Spirit. John 14 records these words of Jesus, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you," (John 14:15-17). The fulfillment of that promise is seen in Acts 1:8, as the Holy Spirit, the Helper, was poured out.

Acts 1:8 reveals a cause and effect, a consequential reality, in the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus states that the disciples will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, cause and

effect, and that, as a result, or consequence, they would be His witnesses, beginning in Jerusalem and ultimately taking that witness to the end of the earth. Obviously, Jesus was thinking well beyond what this handful of disciples would accomplish. He was speaking into the global reality that His life and message, the Gospel, would indeed, at some point in the future, engage all nations, all tribes, all peoples, and all languages. We see this ultimate fulfillment in John's vision recorded in Revelation 7, "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Revelation 7:9-10).

The Great Witness began on that day of Pentecost when the promised Holy Spirit, the Helper, was sent by God the Father and God the Son. It

That witness will continue until we join together in that celestial worship service pictured in Revelation 7. God has a vision of a church that bears a strong witness to the person and work of His Son, Jesus, in its Jerusalem and beyond. In what ways is that witness emanating from your church?

### **Scripture Plank 5: The Great Mission – Luke 19:10**

*"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

At the close of the scriptural account of the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus, Jesus delivered a declaration that clearly identified His mission. He, the Son of Man, came to earth as God Incarnate to seek the lost and to save the lost, a search and rescue mission that all disciples are called to engage. Jesus was closing in on Jerusalem and a date with the cross when He diverted to spend time at the home of Zacchaeus, a despised tax collector. Why? Because Zacchaeus was lost and Jesus came to seek and save the lost. In other words, the very reason that Jesus was going to the cross was to save Zacchaeus and everyone like him. It was and is as simple as that.

The challenge is that it seems the American church of today has lost its focus on the lost, electing, rather, to serve the found while harboring an unexpressed hope that the lost will somehow be

found without our making finding them a priority. This falls somewhere between wishful thinking and delusion and, if you buy my comments regarding the Great Commission, is nothing short of sinful.

When examining metrics in many churches such as staff and leader time spent, budget allocation and programming, it's clear that the focus is inward while the harvest, though plentiful, is largely ignored. With long-term plateau and decline rampant in the American church, the shift to outward ministry must be wholeheartedly engaged. Seek and save, search and rescue, was foremost for the King of kings and the Lord of lords. What about us? God has vision of a church that joins Jesus in His Search and Rescue Mission.

### **Scripture Plank 6: The Great Multiplication – Matthew 24:14**

*And this Gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

These words of Jesus that constitute Scripture Plank 6 of *Simply Vital* capture the essence of Scripture Planks 1-5 in one simple statement. The Great Promise is that Jesus is building His church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it; the Gospel will be proclaimed throughout the whole world and that Gospel proclamation, superintended by God's sovereignty, will prevail. The Great Commandment, love for God and love for neighbor, is reflected in serving His ultimate purpose of reconciling the world to Himself and the realization that to proclaim the Gospel effectually throughout the world is not centered on geography but on people, our neighbors, who live in that geography.

Parallels from Matthew 24 with the Great Commission are so obvious they don't need to be pointed out. In fact, I'm going to say that Matthew 24:14 could serve as a preview of the Great Commission as we know it in Matthew 28. The Great Witness described in Acts 1:8 as concentric circles that start in the center with Jerusalem and expand outward to the end of the earth are seen in Matthew 24:14 as the *whole world* and *all nations*. The Great Mission of Luke 19:10 connects with the global reach of the Gospel, finding and saving the lost, also pictured in Matthew 24:14. Finally, the coming of the end in the Great Multiplication resonates with the completion of

the building of the church in Matthew 16, the end of the age in Matthew 28, and the end of the earth in Acts 1:8.

God has a vision of a church that positions itself well to reveal that Jesus is the Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit – the Great Promise. God has a vision of a church that loves Him and loves neighbor and proves that love by what is done, not simply by what is said – the Great Commandment. God has a vision of a church that goes in the authority of Jesus Christ to make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit, and teaching obedience to the commands of Christ, fully abiding in the presence of Christ by His Spirit – the Great Commission. God has a vision of a church that is His strong witness to the community just outside the church to all points beyond – the Great Witness. God has a vision of a church that joins Jesus in His Search and Rescue Mission to seek and to save the lost – the Great Mission. God has a vision of a church that gives itself to the global proclamation of the Gospel in anticipation of God’s ultimate consummation – the Great Multiplication. Be the church that God envisions!



## Chapter 4

### Key Models: Nehemiah Meets the Great Commission

During the years of my pastorate in Phoenix, AZ, that were devoted to leading revitalization in a nine-decades old church that had declined to thirteen members, I was also pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree. The D. Min. is considered a professional doctorate that is designed for ministers that are fully engaged in practical, real-life ministry. In most seminaries, the D. Min. program is a combination of core courses and electives plus the researching, writing and defending of a doctoral dissertation. I determined early in the program that I wanted to connect my dissertation to my ministry in the most direct way possible, so I selected decline in the church as my focus. This enabled me to lace my pastorate and my doctorate together, with my pastorate providing a laboratory for my doctoral studies and my doctoral studies providing support and input for my pastorate.

I engaged this program at Reformed Theological Seminary where I had also completed my Master of Divinity studies. The D. Min. protocol at RTS was tightly and thoroughly spelled out, including the guidelines and specifications for the dissertation. Six chapters were prescribed and chapter two was devoted to Biblical and Theological Foundations, considered the most significant chapter in the overall document. Looking back, I'd say I poured about four years, off and on, into the development of that chapter.

In my research for chapter two, I studied Scripture, referred to commentaries, consulted theological books (the internet wasn't a thing yet!) and interviewed professors and pastors, seeking their perspectives on the scriptural and theological underpinnings of church revitalization. One resource that surfaced again and again in these conversations was the Book of Nehemiah. With person after person citing Nehemiah as a source, and multiple books referring to Nehemiah as a source, I dived in, reading the Book of Nehemiah over and over again, studying verse by verse, scene by scene, mining for the scriptural and theological treasures that this book had to offer. It was during this in-depth study of Nehemiah that I first began to recognize the tandem of Spiritual Renewal and Strategic Initiative, and, over time, I began to see Nehemiah's leadership as a model for revitalization, a model that has guided my ministry for well over twenty years. Let me introduce you to the Nehemiah Model for Revitalization.

## The Nehemiah Model

Exhibit A is chapter one, as follows:

*The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.*

*Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."*

*As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.' They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."*

*Now I was cupbearer to the king.*

Nehemiah 1 begins with an assessment, an evaluation, of the state of Jerusalem and the state of God's people following their return from exile. The report given to Nehemiah is bleak. Concerning the people, Nehemiah is told that the remnant who had survived the exile was in great trouble and shame. We aren't given much in the way of detail about these people, but we can presume that there were, at a minimum, two groups of God's people that comprised this remnant. They



are described as the remnant who had survived the exile, but these two groups would have survived in very different ways.

When the exile from Jerusalem had taken place, roughly seventy years earlier, not every Hebrew man, woman and child was carried off into exile. The typical practice was that the conquering country would carry off the best and brightest of the conquered population, paving the way for two outcomes that would be to the advantage of the conquerors. First, these best and brightest would be assimilated into the foreign culture, becoming assets to be channeled for use by the conquerors. Second, those left behind would not have the capacity to reorganize and rebuild, perhaps becoming a threat to the conqueror at some point in the future. With architecture literally broken down, with the economy stripped, with military capabilities destroyed, and with those most likely to lead carried into exile, those left behind would be left struggling for basic survival. Further, with the wall broken down and the gates destroyed by fire, Jerusalem was left unguarded and unprotected against any adversary that would choose to attack. Their only protection in that case was the fact that everyone and everything of value had already been taken, so there was little reason for yet another foe to invade. In a sense, their best defense was having nothing left to defend. As I pondered this description of post-exilic Jerusalem, I began to see parallels or analogies to modern decline in the church. The people of God and their holy city were in steep decline and in desperate need of restoration.

Nehemiah's response is both inspiring and instructive. We see that for days he wept and mourned while continuing to fast and pray before God. In this we find the seeds of Spiritual Renewal. First and foremost, this is a matter between God's people and their God, between Nehemiah and his God. In our day, the temptation would be to go online and search for solutions, or to order several books on Amazon, or go to a seminar or conference, or perhaps to link into a webinar. Nehemiah goes straight to the source, Almighty God, to make an appeal to the lone source that could provide a sustainable solution to this mammoth problem.

We don't have a transcript of all that Nehemiah prayed throughout however many days are being referenced. Perhaps what we have is a highlight reel that captures the essence of his prayers. He acknowledges the greatness of God and the fact that God is a covenant keeper. His prayers are persistent, being offered day and night, as he implores God to be attentive and to hear his

prayers. The hearing that he has in mind is not simply the audible reception of these prayers but a hearing that results in God's taking action on his prayers. In contrast to God, the covenant keeper, Nehemiah addresses the issue of covenant breaking on the part of the people, confessing their sins in intercessory prayer and including his own sins and the sins of his family in the confession.

Note that Nehemiah is not pointing a finger at God and leveling the accusation, "How could you let this happen?" Just as he knows where to secure a solution to the problem, he knows where to place the blame for the problem. The people of God have been unfaithful. That unfaithfulness led to their exile in the first place, decades ago, and unfaithfulness proves to be a continuing issue. But hope is not lost and Nehemiah cites God's promise that He will gather His scattered people and bring them back to the Promised Land if they return to God in a right relationship of obedience.

Clearly, Nehemiah is in pursuit of Spiritual Renewal in a restored relationship between a Holy God, a repentant people and a restored Jerusalem that rises from the rubble. The case for Spiritual Renewal is easy to make, but what about Strategic Initiative? Where do we see strategic development emerge in these early verses of Nehemiah 1?

To answer that question, we have to peel back the prayers of Nehemiah and read between the lines, prompted by what's inferred as Chapter 1 draws to a close. Nehemiah implores God to give him success and to grant him *mercy in the sight of this man*. He goes on to inform that he was cupbearer to the king. What man is in view here? Nehemiah is referring to the king, Artaxerxes, ruler over exiled Israel in the court of Persia. Nehemiah served King Artaxerxes in his court as cupbearer, an immense responsibility and one that possessed significant risk.

Nehemiah is one in a long line of Hebrews that served both God and their pagan captors in exile. He had risen to prominence and been entrusted with the king's very life. The power to rule in the cultures of that day were dependent on two essential ingredients, military strength and bloodline. Rights of succession flowed through royal bloodlines, so, when a king died, his oldest son assumed his kingship. If a son wasn't available, the kingship might pass to a brother or someone else in the bloodline. However, bloodlines were often cut off through the shedding of blood as when a

rival, through military strength, would overthrow the sitting king. In such cases, the likely protocol would then be to execute everyone connected to the deposed king's bloodline so that no adversary could claim the right of succession.

Power shifts and political intrigue were rampant with assassination being a constant threat to a sitting king, and poison being a frequent weapon of choice in assassination. So, kings would enlist cupbearers who would taste test any and everything that was prepared for the mouth of the king to assure that the food or drink about to be consumed by the king was free of poison. The cupbearer literally stood between a king's life and death.

Nehemiah was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes and, in the midst of days of weeping, mourning, fasting and praying over the condition of God's people and God's holy city, he prays for mercy in the sight of the king. Why? Reading between the lines, we see the beginning of Strategic Initiative taking place. Apparently, during those days of coming before God, a realization has developed in Nehemiah's heart and mind. Someone must go to Jerusalem and address the woeful situation there; some leader must take charge for the honor and glory of God Almighty and for the restoration of God's people. That someone, Nehemiah has come to understand, is he, himself.

However, there's a problem. Nehemiah is not the captain of his own ship; he is cupbearer to the king. He's not in a position simply to turn in his notice, leave his job and relocate to Jerusalem. He will need the permission of the king, a permission that will likely not be given since, no doubt, the king relied heavily on Nehemiah for his own protection. God will have to intervene and grant Nehemiah mercy, favor, success with Artaxerxes.

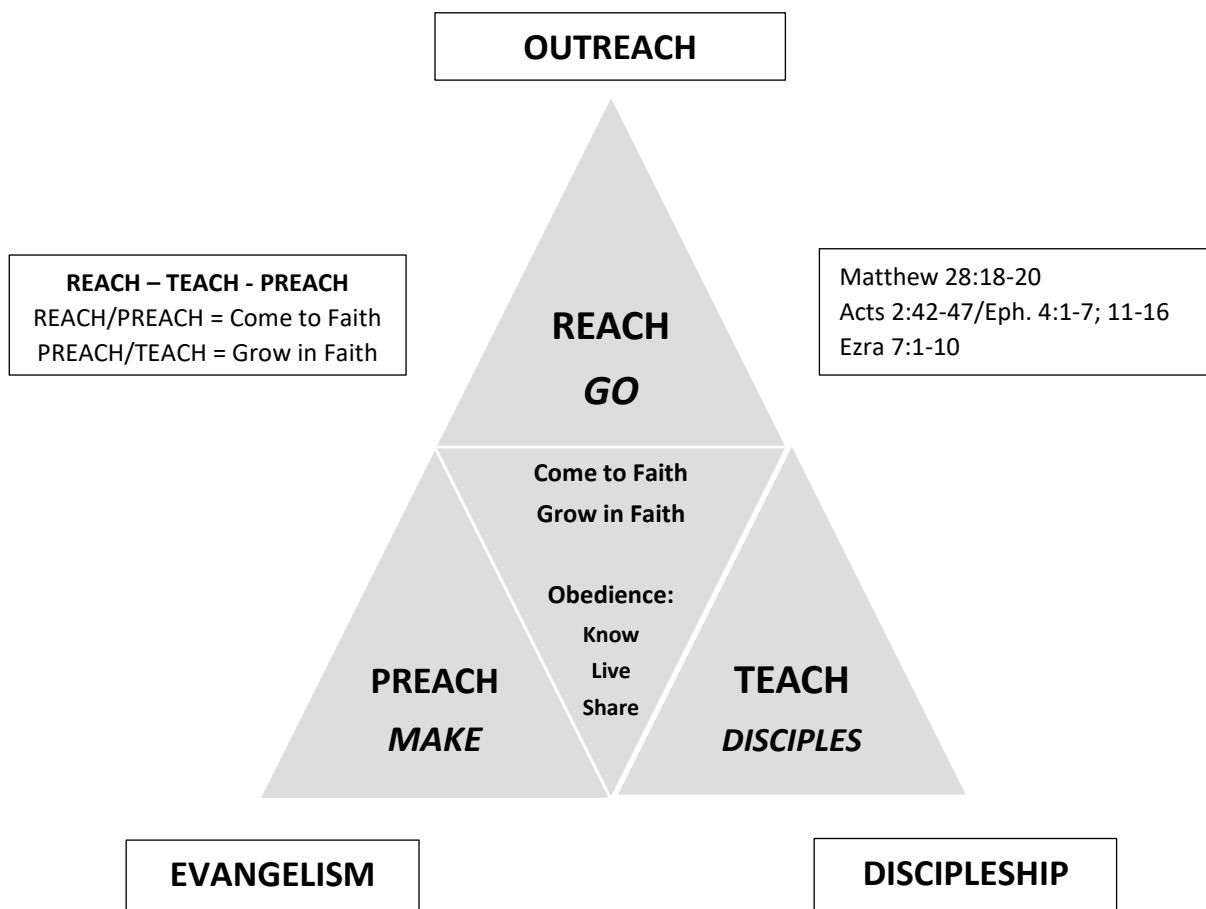
As we read on in Chapter 2 and beyond, we find that God did intervene and that Artaxerxes, a pagan king, not only granted him permission to return to Jerusalem, but assigned him the position of essentially being governor of the region. He outfitted Nehemiah with a military escort and with documentation that would smooth his way should any conflict arise on the journey. Spiritual Renewal was melding with Strategic Initiative to pave the way for restoration.

One clear example of the tandem work of the spiritual and the strategic is seen in a phrase that is recounted several times throughout the Book of Nehemiah, particularly in Chapter 2. The

reference is to, "the good hand of my God." Nehemiah makes it perfectly clear that the success he is having, that those working with him are having, is the result of God's hand of power and blessing being upon them (Nehemiah 2:8, 11-15, 17-18). Strategic process is bolstered by spiritual strength as Spiritual Renewal combines with Strategic Initiative. A major milestone is reached in Nehemiah 6:15-16, "So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul, in fifty-two days. And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God."

This is what happens when Spiritual Renewal and Strategic Initiative are in harmony, and Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative is the heart and soul of the Nehemiah Model for Revitalization.

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



The Great Commission has already been unpacked in depth as one of the six Scripture Greats and I won't repeat that here. Rather than repeating or expanding further on a theological discussion of the Great Commission, I want to present the Great Commission Triangle as a strategic tool, a model for how Great Commission ministry operates. As such, I have developed a particular nomenclature that drives the application of the Great Commission and have cited several closely related Scripture passages.

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

REACH	PREACH	TEACH
GO	MAKE	DISCIPLES
OUTREACH	EVANGELISM	DISCIPLESHIP

Again, REACH – PREACH – TEACH is our shorthand for the Great Commission, also represented by the short phrase, GO MAKE DISCIPLES. Outreach, Evangelism and Discipleship are typical headings for programs in the church, but in our usage of these terms, these three will not be positioned as programs but as *movements* within the church. A ministry area becomes a movement rather than a program when it's positioned as a thread that runs through every ministry area, or every program, of a church. In the Great Commission Model, Outreach, Evangelism and Discipleship are ministry elements that are present in every ministry or program of the church. So, we will treat them as movements and not as programs. This will be unpacked in greater detail in Chapter 8, but I wanted to include these three movements as part of the Great Commission Model to make that association now and provide context for what will follow in Chapter 8's presentation of the Great Commission Matrix. Stay tuned.

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

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

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

Several Scriptures come to mind. I’ll cite a couple. 1 Peter 2:9 says this, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” You are who you are in Christ in order that you might proclaim Christ, that you might share what He has done in your life with others. This is how you PREACH, how you offer proclamation through what you say and through how you live. When a congregation corporately grabs hold of this reality, our

collective witness, our collective proclamation, can be used mightily by God to build His family. Paul spells out the effect of this kind of proclamation with the stairsteps of Romans 10:13-15, "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'" First, we REACH, then we PREACH and God quickens the hearts and minds of whom He will. When we strategically operate in this manner as a congregation, the movements of OUTREACH and EVANGELISM are truly alive and become fruitful.

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

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

The Acts 2 – Ephesians 4 Church:

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47*

My intent is not to provide an exhaustive exposition here, but to point out a few key elements. The disciples of the early church were devoted, they were all in, there was a fervent passion for Jesus Christ and His fledgling church, probably not even known yet as the ecclesia but simply known as a small band of followers. This devotion was centered on four ministries: 1. the apostles' teaching, 2. the fellowship, 3. the breaking of bread and 4. the prayers. My focus in this treatment centers on the apostles' teaching and the question I want to put before you is this, "What did the apostles teach?"

There were two sources that informed the apostles' teaching. First, there were the writings that we now know as the Old Testament, the Law and the Prophets. Second, there was their first-hand experience of being with Jesus during His earthly ministry. They witnessed what He did, they heard what He said; they saw how He lived. They were eye-witnesses. Now, with the Holy Spirit having been poured out upon them, they moved in the authority of Christ, as seen in the Great Commission, and they were guided by the presence of the Holy Spirit, also seen in the Great Commission as Jesus promised that He would be with them always.

Much of what we see in the New Testament that shares the content of the teaching of the apostles is the apostles' appeal to the Prophets as they proved that Jesus was the one of whom the Prophets spoke. In a sense, their teaching was a post-Incarnation extension of what the Prophets had proclaimed pre-Incarnation. The message of the Prophets was to repent because an anointed Messiah was coming. The message of the apostles was to repent because the anointed Messiah had come. That is the essence of the Gospel, the kerygma (Greek for Gospel proclamation). Later,



the letters of Paul, Peter and others added more teaching that furthered the maturation of believers, the didache (Greek for teaching or instruction). Paul writes in Ephesians 2:19-22, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

As the early church maintained its devotion to a few simple elements of the faith, God added to their number, on a consistent and regular basis, those who were being saved. In these few verses of Acts 2 we clearly see the dynamics of Come to Faith and Grow in Faith.

Turning to Ephesians 4, verses 1-7 focus on the unity of the early church that held at its core the things they held in common: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of us all. Verses 11-16 identify five ministries of the church as Jesus gave the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. Why? So that they would equip the saints for the work of ministry and for building up the body of Christ. Ultimately, these would result in each person in the body of Christ being equipped for ministry and growing to full maturity in Christ.

Putting Acts 2 and Ephesians 4 together, we see a church that was devoted, that was unified, that was diversified, that was maturing and that was growing. This is surely an apt description of the early church and a prescription for the church of today. It was a church that provided REACH – PREACH – TEACH, an early expression of a Great Commission Church.

#### Ezra 7:1-10 – A Glimpse of Obedience

Finally, we come to Obedience, also cited in the center triangle followed by Know, Live and Share. Obedience, of course, connects strongly with the Great Commission mandate to teach obedience to all that Jesus commanded. The reference I want to bring to bear is Ezra 7:1-10, with a close look at verse 10. It reads, "For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel." I discovered this verse in 1988 and it has been my

life verse ever since. It's too long a story to tell you why on this occasion, but it's been with me almost daily for over thirty years.

So, what's the connection to the Great Commission Model? Ezra, like Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel, Jeremiah, etc., etc., was a biblical figure that rose in authority while in exile. Chapter 7 of the Book of Ezra reveals that he was a descendent of Aaron and that he was skilled in the law of Moses, an Exodus-ian (I made that word up) one-two punch. Aaron and Moses led the people of God out of captivity in a foreign land to the Promised Land. Ezra played a significant role in leading the people of God out of captivity in a foreign land *back* to the Promised Land, a second Exodus, if you will. Why Ezra? Was it his pedigree and his education, or was there more?

There was more and it's captured for us in Ezra 7:10. In the ESV version of that verse, quoted above, we see that Ezra had "set his heart." Other translations, such as the NIV, render the phrase, "For Ezra had devoted himself." We've seen devotion before in the early church community that devoted itself to the apostles' teaching and other disciplines. Ezra, in addition to his bloodline and resume, was a man of devotion. To what, exactly? He had devoted himself to three things, to studying the Law of the Lord, to doing the Law of the Lord and to teaching the Law of the Lord. He studied the Word of God, lived the Word of God and taught the Word of God in Israel.

Bear in mind that Ezra served over five hundred years before the coming of Christ and the focus of faith in his day was exclusively contained within ethnic Israel, God's original chosen people. Let's advance the context to the New Testament era that is post-life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus; post-Pentecost outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Adapting Ezra's Know the Law, Live the Law, Teach the Law O.T. world to N.T. times, my formulation emerges as Know Your Faith, Live Your Faith, Share Your Faith. In my approach to the Great Commission Model, this is what obedience looks like. The full schema, then, of REACH – PREACH – TEACH progresses from Come to Faith and Grow in Faith to Obedience to all that Jesus commanded, expressed as Know Your Faith, Live Your Faith, Share Your Faith, the core of obedience. Imagine a congregation that devotes itself to this model. Clearly, this would be a church that embraces a godly vision and a godly strategy that fully reflect the Great Commission Model.

When the REACH – PREACH – TEACH ministry framework of the Great Commission Model is built on the Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative platform of the Nehemiah Model, congregations grow and are mobilized to labor in the harvest. When the Nehemiah Model meets the Great Commission, the harvest is harvested and congregations expand their Great Commission ministry capacity. Disciples of Christ go and make disciple who, in turn, go and make disciples in a Great Commission upward spiral. God is glorified and the name of Jesus is lifted high. Hallelujah!



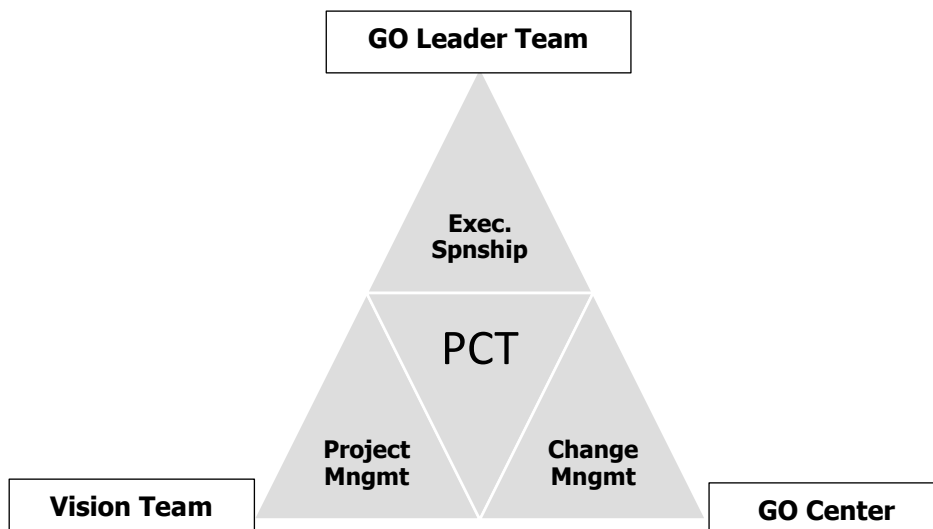
## Chapter 5

### Key Teams: GO Leader Team, Vision Team, Prayer Teams

People, with the hand of God upon them, make ministry happen, not programs, not ministries, not vision; not strategy. People make ministry happen. In the King James Version of the Bible, Proverbs 29:18a reads, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." I have discovered that the reverse is also true, "Where there are no people, the vision perishes." If a church is going to experience real Great Commission revitalization, people are going to make it happen. It's a team effort and the teams that are prescribed in the *Simply Vital* approach to revitalization are the GO Leader Team, the Vision Team and Prayer Teams. When these teams understand their roles and successfully fulfill those roles in a thorough and timely fashion, churches revitalize.

**The GO Leader Team (GLT)** is the aggregate of all key leaders and, perhaps, influencers in a church. That includes pastoral staff, ministry staff, elders, deacons and others that might be considered strong, positive voices in the church though they might not hold formal leadership positions. The people who comprise the GLT are the decision-making, direction-setting leaders of the church. Among their ranks are those who guide and govern the church and who lead the various ministries or programs of the church. They have responsibility for the spiritual development and care of the congregation and hold authority in the church.

From an organizational standpoint, the GLT provides *Executive Sponsorship* for the revitalization effort. Let me introduce the Prosci® Project Change Triangle™:



Prosci® is a global enterprise that specializes in a growing discipline called Change Management. A couple of years ago I had the opportunity to study Change Management with Prosci® and completed a certification course with Prosci® in Change Management. Though Prosci® is a secular, for-profit company, its philosophy, tools, constructs and inventory of other resources provide great insight into the inner workings of a congregation that is navigating change, which is at the core of revitalization.

The Prosci® Project Change Triangle™ (PCT) reveals a threesome of leadership entities that work together to move change forward, in this case, the change associated with church revitalization. The role of the GLT, in part, is to provide *Executive Sponsorship*, presenting a positive, supportive and united front for revitalization to the congregational at large. Negativity, lack of support and disunity among leaders undermines or sabotages revitalization, so it's extremely important that the GLT provide the healthy Leadership Sponsorship that the revitalization effort needs.

In order to engage key leaders in this important role, *Simply Vital* gathers leaders into the GO Leader Team and provides training and ongoing communication to ensure that strong *Executive Sponsorship* is present from the beginning to the end of the process. As part of engaging the GLT to fulfill its roles and responsibilities, specific training is provided for the GLT early in the process titled, *Four Leadership Dynamics for Greater Church Vitality (4LDV)*. These four dynamics are as follows:

1. The Ministry of the Word
2. The Ministry of Prayer
3. Leading with High Support
4. Leading with High Challenge

I'll not unpack all of that training here. It's available on video accompanied by a workbook. Typically, this training is delivered on-site as a half-day to full-day workshop, but is available digitally. For now, I'll provide a very brief overview.

The four dynamics can be divided into two sets of pairs: The Ministry of the Word and Prayer, and Leading with High Support and High Challenge. As a biblical touchpoint, the Ministry of the Word and Prayer finds an anchor in Acts 6:1-7:

*Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.*

*And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.*

The emphasis, in terms of 4LDV Training, is that effective Great Commission revitalization calls for key leaders, in this case the GLT, to make sure that the *main thing* is and remains the *main thing*. What is the main thing for key leaders? According to Acts 6, the main thing is the Ministry of the Word and the Ministry of Prayer. The scene is the very early church, and we've already viewed a snapshot of that early church in Acts 2:42-47 where we're told, "And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need," (Acts 2:44-45). However, in Acts 6 we find that Greek widows were being overlooked in the distribution of food, the most basic of needs.

This oversight is brought to the attention of the twelve disciples and logic, plus scriptural obedience, would suggest that the twelve would or should drop everything and tend to this grievous infraction. Not so. The twelve state, instead, that they cannot tend to the widows' neglect by neglecting prayer and the ministry of the word, their *main thing*. Recall that there is scriptural teaching through the Bible regarding the care of widows. For example:

*For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Deuteronomy 10:17-18*

*Sing to God, sing praises to his name, lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts; his name is the Lord; exult before him! Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. Psalm 68:4-5*

*Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees, and the writers who keep writing oppression, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people their right, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey! Isaiah 10:1-2*

*But I have stripped Esau bare; I have uncovered his hiding places, and he is not able to conceal himself. His children are destroyed, and his brothers, and his neighbors; and he is no more. Leave your fatherless children; I will keep them alive; and let your widows trust in me. Jeremiah 49:10-11.*

These Old Testament texts and many more like them would have been known by the disciples when the neglect of these Grecian widows was brought to their attention, so, one would think that they would immediately set all else aside to right the wrong done to these widows. That is not the case, however, and they refuse to be diverted from their primary responsibility of the ministry of the word and prayer, the spiritual leadership of God's people. In fact, they characterize the feeding of the widows as serving tables. My observation is that much of the "leadership" that key leaders in the church provide in our day is more like serving tables than it is spiritual leadership. It's focused more on the operational management and financial concerns of the church as an organization than on the spiritual development, mobilization and deployment of the congregation.

Rest assured, the need of the widows pictured in Acts 6 was met by raising up a ministry team to see to that need, but the twelve maintained their focus on the main thing. For the record, the New Testament, that was out of reach of these first disciples, continued to express God's love and concern for widows. For example, James 1:27 states, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." The *Simply Vital M.V.P. Process* encourages the GO Leader Team to measure their manner of leadership against this biblical model of leadership, to identify any gaps,



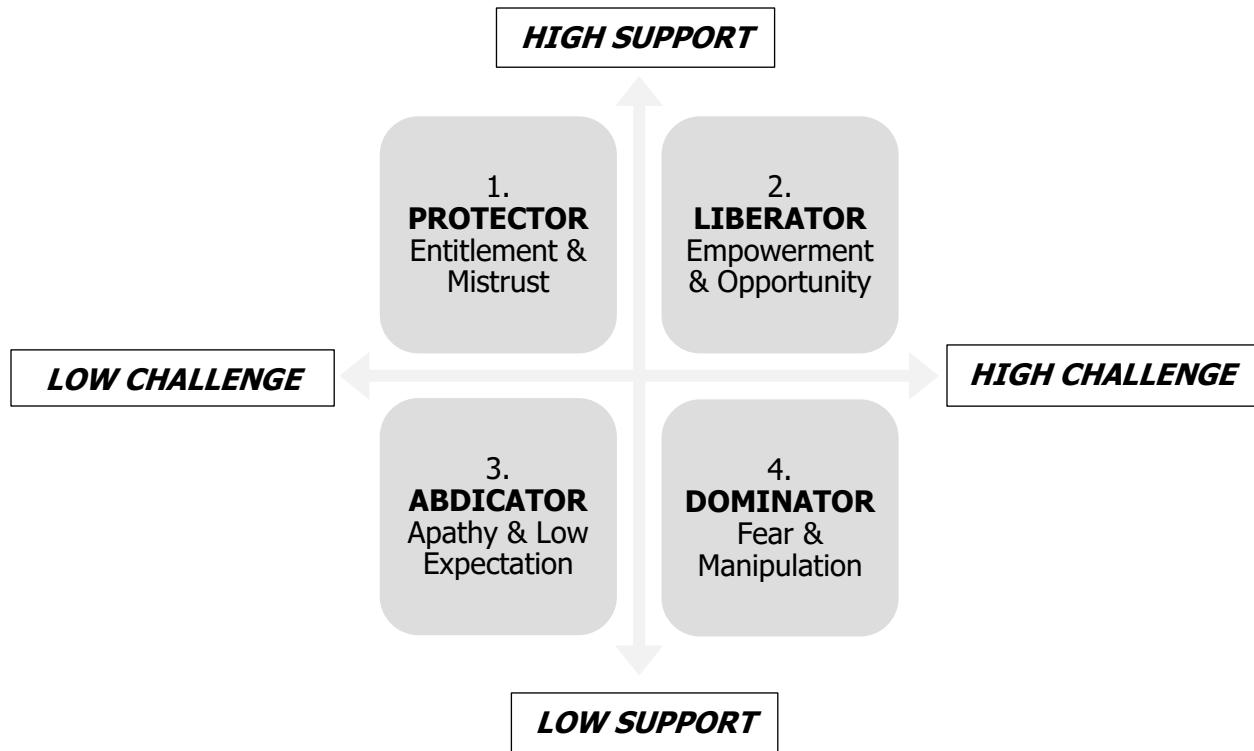
and to take the necessary steps to close those gaps. The first pairing of responsibilities for the GLT, then, is the Ministry of the Word and the Ministry of Prayer.

The second pairing of responsibilities for the GO Leader Team is Leading with High Support and Leading with High Challenge. This language came across my radar screen some years ago when I witnessed a presentation that included the Support-Challenge Matrix. This presentation was made by Tom Nebel, whom I had met in the late 90s when I completed a two-year certification with the Church Planting Institute. Tom was part of a three-man training team that included Bob Logan of *Beyond Church Growth* and CoachNet fame, and Steve Ogne, with whom I would later co-author *The Leadership Ladder: Developing Missional Leaders in the Church*, first as a book and then, later, with an accompanying workbook.

When I first saw the Support-Challenge Matrix, lights went on for me and I realized observations and thoughts that I had been nursing for some time had already been formulated into a construct that strongly resonated with me and that I would be immediately adding to my toolbox. This construct was one of many developed by **GIANT** WORLDWIDE, an organization based in the UK that specializes in leadership development. Some months later I enrolled in a one-year training program with **GIANT** that schooled me in its philosophy, principles, tools and techniques for developing leaders (Sidebar: An effective leader is a life-long learner).

The following diagrams the elements of the Support-Challenge Matrix:

## SUPPORT CHALLENGE MATRIX



As mentioned, I'll not go into exhaustive GLT training here, but I'll give you a couple of highlights and a bottom line. First, I'll sift the chaff. Quadrant 3 depicts a church leadership that provides Low Support and Low Challenge to its congregation, tabbed Abdicator. This church is of no consequence and I haven't come across too many of them. Quadrant 4 depicts a church leadership that provides Low Support but High Challenge to its congregation, tabbed Dominator. Often this type of church leadership is really the leadership of one dominating leaders, usually the pastor. He's a, "*my way or the highway*" type of leader that places high expectations on people but provides little in the way of support. Another slant on this type of leader is that very high responsibility is assigned by that leader, but that responsibility is not accompanied by authority that remains in the hands of the Dominator. Unfortunately, I do see this dynamic with some regularity and find such a culture unteachable unless there is a spiritual breakthrough with the Dominator, or unless the Dominator is removed.

That leaves us with the Protector and the Liberator. Perhaps you've reasoned that the ideal quadrant is Quadrant 2 where leadership provides both High Support and High Challenge and is tabbed Liberator. If so, you are correct and we'll get there soon. First, though, consider Quadrant

1 where leadership provides High Support but Low Challenge, tabbed Protector. This is the quadrant where many, I could be persuaded to say most, American evangelical churches reside. In our zeal to make church engagement palpable for twenty-first century Americans, we give and give and give to them whatever seems to be appealing if not compelling. We want them under roof, sometimes with a whatever-it-takes mindset. Challenge is kept low so as not to cause discomfort or guilt or annoyance because we don't want to give people a reason to fall away from us. This opens the door for compromise and the development of an unhealthy culture.

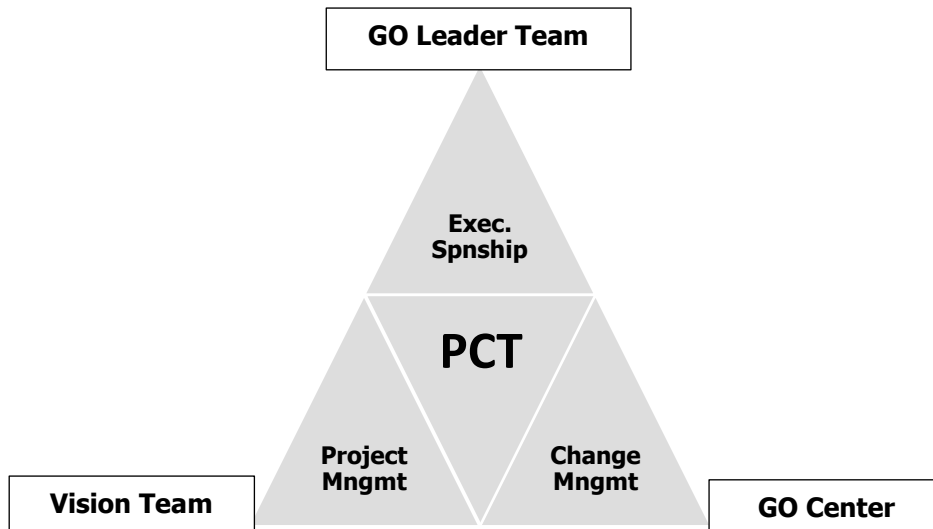
Though this is understandable, it creates a congregational culture of entitlement, giving people a sense that they can have very high expectations of what they are to receive coupled with a very low expectation for their own responsibility. As the congregation grows, it becomes more and more difficult for the few who are carrying the load to do so, resulting in leadership's beginning to shift from low challenge to higher and higher challenge. This proves to be a disruptive cultural intervention that creates the very discomfort that leaders were hoping to avoid. The shift causes mistrust to surface within the congregation and the exodus begins.

The Promised-Land of the Support-Challenge Matrix is Quadrant 2 that features both High Support and High Challenge. Leaders that provide this dynamic are Liberators who provide a congregation with the satisfaction of being challenged to engage in ministry with great meaning, bearing responsibility and acting in authority, while being very highly supported, equipped and cared for. **GIANT** captures the essence in its tag line, "Become a leader worth following, a liberating leader."

I get this. I've lived it. I've seen it. This is the type of leadership that is promoted in the *Four Leadership Dynamics for Greater Church Vitality* training that prepares the GO Leader Team for fulfilling its role of Executive Sponsorship in the *Simply Vital Revitalization Process*. The GO Leader Team leads and supports in unity through the Ministry of the Word and the Ministry of Prayer, and by developing a participation culture for the congregation as Liberators that Lead with High Support and Lead with High Challenge.

**The Vision Team (VT)** is a small group of leaders that is selected to take the technical, nuts and bolts responsibility of moving the revitalization process forward. It's this team that takes the lion's share of the workload in the early months, working closely with the GO Center's Missional

Ministry Partner. The Vision Team provides the Project Management specified in the Prosci® Project Change Triangle™:



It's recommended that the Vision Team consist of about a half-dozen people whom I describe as pastor-plus-five. It's important that the lead or senior pastor serve as a member of the Vision Team because, if not, the congregation gets the sense that revitalization is not that important. In most cases, the lead or senior pastor should serve as the point person for the Vision Team, having the most direct contact with the GO Center. There are no rigid rules as *Simply Vital* is here to serve the teams and the congregation, not the other way around, and there are occasions when the pastor doesn't serve as the point person, or even as a member, of the Vision Team, but that is rare and is not usually advised.

The two questions that loom large are 1. What does the Vision Team do? And 2. Who should be on the Vision Team? Though all leaders in a church should be actively engaged in the revitalization process, it is the Vision Team that bears the primary responsibilities. These responsibilities include four key considerations that guide the process from beginning to end. Specific responsibilities of the Vision Team include:

**1. Discerning God’s Vision for the Church:** Vision is a function of discernment, not creativity. The process centers that discernment on the Great Commission. Using GO Center tools, principles and concepts, the Vision Team seeks God’s leading in discerning His vision for that individual church. This involves prayer, Bible study, personal and team reflection and discussion, and investigative research into the demography of both congregation and community. Under the guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit, the members of the Vision Team seek to know God, to know the congregation and to know the community as they discern how God desires to express Himself through their church’s commitment to the Great Commission.

**2. Developing Vision & Strategy:** Having committed to the Great Commission, the Vision Team uses the training content of the process to develop that vision into a cogent strategy. Vision answers the frontline questions “What” and “Why.” What are we trying to accomplish and why is that our objective? Strategy answers the question “How?” How are we going to fulfill the vision? The Vision Team paints the broad strokes of strategy and then equips and empowers leaders of particular ministry areas to develop and deploy the tactical initiatives.

**3. Directing the Church through the Process:** The Vision Team directs all others through the process. This includes staff and leaders not serving on the team, church members, regular attendees and even newcomers that might come into the church during the revitalization effort. The Vision Team is more fully engaged in the process than all others, and therefore must determine the course and set the pace. The work of the team is a holistic undertaking, not a priming of the pump or simply a launch. The team stays the course until revitalization has firmly taken hold, usually a process that builds over 18-24 months of intentional and consistent effort.

**4. Determining Evaluation & Accountability:** One of the underlying causes of plateau and decline in the church is the failure of church leaders to hold themselves and the ministries of the church accountable to ministry effectiveness. So often, the hosting of events and activities is seen as the objective, and as long as these events and activities take place, leaders view themselves as having met the objective. But hosting is not the issue. The issue is ministry effectiveness, ministry results, ministry outcomes. The Vision Team holds every element of revitalization accountable for being effective in the production of intentional ministry results, and determines the means by which effectiveness and results are evaluated.

Selecting the roster of the Vision Team begins with a consideration of the characteristics that must be collectively reflected by the team. These characteristics need not be strongly evident in each Vision Team member, but must be strongly evident in the team as a group:

**1. The Vision Team Must Be Discerning:** It stands to reason that if vision is a function of discernment, the Vision Team must be discerning. The Vision Team must have the giftedness and patience to seek God and apply the Great Commission. Evidence of discernment in the lives of Vision Team members should be plainly visible prior to their selection to serve on the team. Potential is not enough, but there must be a history of trustworthy discernment that bears witness to this characteristic.

**2. The Vision Team Must Be Visionary:** Though the focal point of discovering God's vision is the Great Commission, the Vision Team needs to be visionary in the sense that the team is able to look into the future and clearly see the Great Commission as it is applied in the life of the church. The Vision Team must have a clear understanding of what the ministry future should look like and the capacity to cast that vision so that others can see the future that God desires as well.

**3. The Vision Team Must Be Spiritually Mature:** Discernment of God's vision and leading a congregation to pursue that vision are to be guided by a team that is spiritually mature. These are high stakes. God's vision for the church is at stake, the future of the congregation's ministry is at stake, and the reaching of men, women and children with the person, love and ministry of Jesus Christ is at stake. Therefore, the Vision Team must be spiritually mature. The temptation is to load the Vision Team with people who have proven to be entrepreneurial and/or highly successful in their professional lives, but the Vision Team is to be measured by spiritual and not secular standards.

**4. The Vision Team Must Be Well-Respected:** The Vision Team is very likely to bring issues to the congregation that are challenging and that require change. Congregations are typically negative in their attitudes towards change, so it is important that those bringing the Great Commission message be endowed with great credibility. This respect must already be in place at the start of the vitalization process. The process does not lend itself to the development of respect. Rather, respect is a prerequisite to Vision Team selection.

Following are several FAQs that surface in regard to Vision Team selection:

**1. How many should be on the Vision Team?** On average, six is a good number of members to have on the Vision Team – pastor plus five. The number might vary according to the size of the congregation. A small church with a limited number of qualified leaders might go with pastor plus two or three if necessary. Though a congregation might be large in number, it's recommended that the Vision Team not go far past six. There is certainly nothing magical about having six, but six provides enough people for varied input without the team's being so large that seeking input from everyone becomes overly time consuming, and having too many voices at the table breeds confusion rather than focus. Also, six provides for a critical mass of leaders on those occasions when a team member has to miss a meeting.

**2. Who should select the Vision Team?** There should be a cooperative effort between pastoral staff, elders and/or deacons, and other key leaders that are deemed to be significant in the selection process. This team will be responsible for leading the church through the Great Commission vitality process and will need to be both qualified and, in particular, trusted.

**3. Should the Elders serve as the Vision Team?** The recommendation is "no." Serving on the Vision Team is a serious commitment and if the leading governing and direction-setting group in the church is truly fulfilling its biblical responsibilities, adding service on the Vision Team will create overload. That said, the relationship between the Vision Team and the Elders must be very strong with great communication passing between them, so it would be a good idea to have the Elders represented on the Vision Team as a liaison.

**4. Should the Vision Team be a "representative" group?** The recommendation is "no." The goal is not to be democratic or to reach consensus or to have a leader from each ministry lobby for the interests of that ministry. The goal is to set direction and lead – to bring the Great Commission to the forefront of ministry both spiritually and strategically. Members should be selected according to the criteria regarding responsibilities and characteristics already covered in the previous pages.

**5. How often should the Vision Team meet?** It's recommended that the Vision Team meet twice a month. This is often enough to keep things fresh in the minds of team members so that progress can be made at each meeting rather than getting bogged down in review of past meetings. Shorter, more frequent meetings tend to produce better results than longer meetings that are spread out with a month or more in between.

**6. How long should the Vision Team serve?** The initial commitment should be approximately two years. That should give ample time for revitalization to take hold and begin bearing measurable fruit. Beyond that there are two considerations. First, if the main governing body has re-structured and de-structured away from administration and finance and moved to a leadership model that is focused on spiritual leadership with strategic resourcing (Acts 6:1-7), then it might make sense for these leaders to assume the ongoing role of the Vision Team. Second, if the Vision Team needs to continue to serve, members who have the need to step down and be replaced by others should do so.

**NOTE:** This process is not an exact science, so the answers to these often-asked questions need to be understood as recommendations and not as hard and fast rules. Again, the process must serve the ministry; ministry should never be asked to serve the process.

**Prayer Teams (PTs)**, though not specifically identified in our adaptation of the Prosci® PCT™ diagram, are extremely important and are the heart of the *Simply Vital Revitalization Process*, providing prayer support for both the spiritual and strategic elements of revitalization. Each member of the Vision Team forms a Prayer Team of four to eight people. Prayer Teams meet regularly and Prayer Team members are in contact with each other between meetings.

What do Prayers Team do? What are their responsibilities?

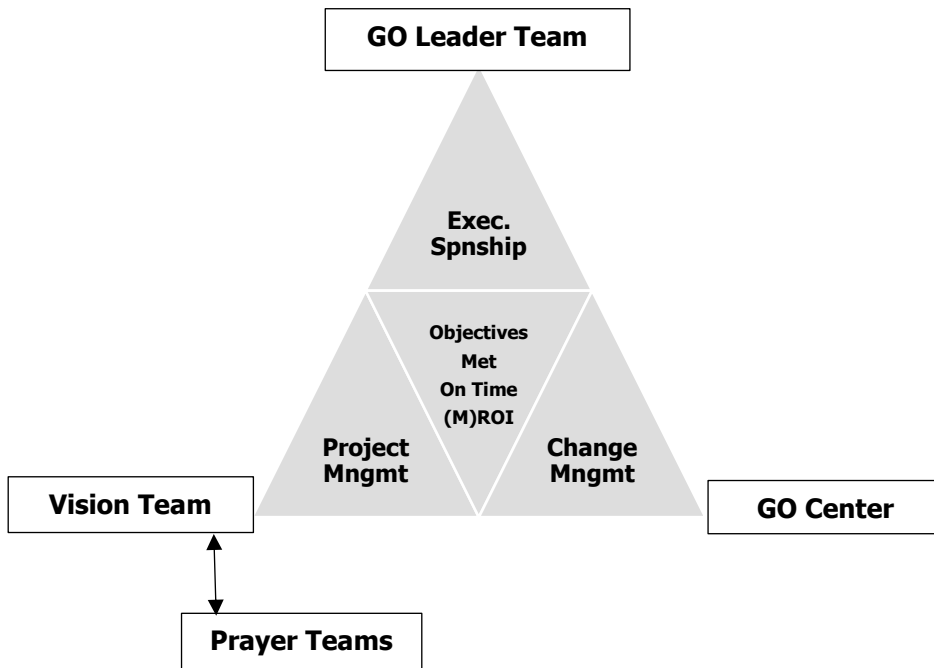
**1. Prayer Teams Pray:** The primary responsibility of the Prayer Team is to, well, pray! Pray for the work of the Vision Team. Pray for the Great Commission to be clearly and effectively applied. Pray for the well-being of Vision Team members and their families. Pray. Pray. Pray. The Prayer Teams provide a layer of prayer support that guides and protects the ministry of the Vision Team.



**2. Prayer Teams Communicate:** Prayer Teams also have a communications responsibility. When Vision Team members connect with their Prayer Teams, the primary activity is prayer, but the Prayer Team also serves as a vehicle for two-way communication. The Vision Team member is able to share what's going on inside Vision Team meetings with the Prayer Team; e.g. what issues are being discussed, what questions are being answered, what actions are being taken, what challenges are being faced. The Prayer Team becomes informed and prays. Also, Prayer Team members share insights and perspectives with the Vision Team member, and that input makes it back to the Vision Team for consideration. In this way, the Vision Team has the benefit of much prayer support, and the community of people in the church who are informed about Vision Team developments is widened. Also, the work of the Vision Team is witnessed by all those who serve on Prayer Teams, bringing the work of the Vision Team out from behind closed doors.

**3. Prayer Teams Meet Spiritual Resistance:** We know from Scripture that our battle is not against flesh and blood but is against "the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places," (Ephesians 6:12). We need not fear these forces because "he who is in [us] is greater than he who is in the world," (1 John 4:4). However, make no mistake; he is in the world. Whenever a church raises its head by committing to greater emphasis on reaching a lost community, our enemy takes notice and counters with resistance and attacks. Since the Vision Team is serving as the point of the revitalization spear, Vision Team members are likely to be in the center of that spiritual battle. Prayer Teams are there to support, protect and encourage the Vision Team as it undertakes its mission.

Before we leave this chapter on Key Teams, and to round out our adaptation of the Prosci® Project Change Triangle™, note that the GO Center provides Change Management, the people side of change. A Missional Ministry Partner (MMP) from the GO Center partners with the Vision Team, supported by Prayer Teams, and the GO Leader Team to provide navigation oversight of the revitalization process as primary trainer and consultant. So, the GO Leader Team provides Executive Sponsorship in unity, the Vision Team, upheld by Prayer Teams, provides Project Management and the GO Center Missional Ministry Partner provides Change Management. Working together, this will enable the church to meet revitalization objectives in a timely manner and produce the desired Ministry Return on Investment, the (M)ROI.



## Chapter 6

### Key Markers: Self-Discovery, Motivation Skill-Training, Implementation, Evaluation

The journey to revitalization through the eight M.V.P. Keys of the *Simply Vital* process travels through the reaching of five markers that segment the path. Though the component elements of GO Center revitalization are elements that I designed and began implementing many years ago, they have been modified and adapted over the years as contexts changed and as new insights were gained. One such adaptation, again from Prosci®, is the use of its ADKAR® Model. This model distributes the process of change management among five “building blocks,” Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability and Reinforcement. In studying this model, I recognized that I had intuitively been tracking along a similar path in my treatment of revitalization, so, with a nuance here and there and a recasting of nomenclature, the Five Key Markers of the GO Process emerged, Self-Discovery, Motivation, Skill-Training, Implementation and Evaluation. These five markers stretch from beginning to end along the GO Center ROADMAP to Missional Vitality. Note that the ROADMAP to Missional Vitality is included among the appendices at the end of the book. The Five Key Markers Chart breaks out the segments and their ultimate objectives:

MARKERS	OBJECTIVES
1: Self-Discovery (Pre-Training/Laying Foundation)	ESTABLISH A SENSE OF URGENCY
2: Motivation (Pre-Training/Preparing for Revitalization)	SECURE LEADERSHIP BUY-IN
3: Skill-Training (In-Training/Training for Revitalization)	EQUIP FOR REVITALIZATION MINISTRY
4: Implementation (Post-Training for Revitalization)	BUILD REVITALIZATION MINISTRY
5: Evaluation (Post-Training for Revitalization)	REINFORCE REVITALIZATION MINISTRY

The ROADMAP is segmented by five markers that stretch over three categories, pre-training, in-training and post-training. Markers 1 and 2 are pre-training segments, Marker 3 is the lone in-training segment, and Markers 4 and 5 are post-training segments. Obviously, Marker 3 is something of a hinge pin or pivot point and, as you’ll soon see, is by far the marker of shortest duration along the two-year timeline. Marker 3: Skill-Training features an on-site training intensive that works through the GO Training 2 Manual, the primary nuts and bolts training within the entire process. In fact, Markers 1 and 2 include a significant amount of training, but the training

in these preliminary markers looks through a wide-angle lens and exposes much in the way of theology and philosophy of ministry. Marker 3 gets up close into the real nitty gritty of strategic and tactical planning.

**Marker 1: Self-Discovery** marks the beginning of the journey, the first segment along the ROADMAP to Missional Vitality. It occurs as one of two pre-training markers, laying the foundation upon which revitalization will be built. The objective is to **establish a sense of urgency** for revitalization, an urgency for making the changes necessary to reach the harvest effectively. Congregations cannot and will not change unless they are first made aware of the need for change. Change management practitioners refer to feeling the impact of this need as *urgency*. Simply stated, without a sense of urgency there is no possibility of change. Urgency might be *negatively* motivated by losses in attendance, giving and overall ministry capacity, all hallmarks of plateau and decline. Urgency might be *positively* motivated by a renewed commitment to reaching a lost community. Often, both are in play. Self-Discovery seeks to establish that sense of urgency in the minds and hearts of a church's leaders and congregation through education and candid assessment.

Why self-discovery? In the 90s, while serving as lead pastor in Phoenix, I was not only living the ministry of leading revitalization but I was studying the ministry of leading revitalization. The church I served was proving to be a laboratory for learning and experimenting, and I was trudging my way through researching, writing and, eventually, defending my doctoral dissertation on the subject of understanding and overcoming decline in the church. On the side, in my *spare* time, I served with the Church Multiplication Training Center (CMTC), an organization that trained church planters and their teams through four-day BootCamps for Church Planting.

As our church in Phoenix began to gain traction and, then, to grow significantly, I was asked more and more frequently to work with other pastors and leaders to help them with revitalization. Speaking engagements began to dot my ministry landscape because what was happening at our church was not the norm and folks wanted to hear about it and perhaps learn how. After many such consultations and speaking engagements, I realized that I had accumulated a substantial stash of notes. More or less using the template of the church planter training materials we used in CMTC BootCamps, I crafted the first of many training manuals for revitalization. I called it

*ReStart* at the time, borrowing from the title of my dissertation, *ReStarting the Dying Church*. Armed with a draft of this manual, I went to the CMTC board and suggested that we could begin to offer ReStart Training to run parallel with our BootCamps for Church Planting. The board enthusiastically bought in and we were off and running.

ReStart Training took off through my work with the CMTC and led to opportunities to do more and more training as a spinoff to CMTC conference training. Then it happened, I was asked to go beyond training in general settings with the CMTC to consulting one-on-one with churches, often starting by conducting an assessment of those churches.

This was new territory for me and, to be candid, I didn't quite know what to do, so I asked for help, checking with others around the country that provided such ministry. The convention for assessment, it seemed, was for the consultant to go on-site for a period of days to gather information. This entailed interviews with many people from pastoral staff to departmental staff to support staff to officers to other leaders to congregants at large. It entailed pouring over statistical information of all sorts and sitting in on worship services, classes of all types, meetings; you name it. Following the on-site investigation, hours upon hours would be devoted to organizing and analyzing the data to craft a report that, first, cited findings and, second, presented recommendations.

I grabbed that conventional model and did my first consultation, then a second and a third. I discovered something along the way that was quite disturbing. In each case, when I presented my multi-page report along with my verbal report to leaders, I quickly found myself in an adversarial position with those leaders. They would argue with me over my findings, suggesting that I didn't really know them, that I had misread this or that. As I pointed out problems or deficiencies, they would become defensive, either justifying the status quo or accusing me of being off the mark. I discovered that denial was significantly in play among declining church leaders. Given this *them vs. me* dynamic, leaders would not follow through on my recommendations and it seemed to me that the entire enterprise was a waste of my time and their money.

Finally, I had a moment of clarity. I realized that if church leaders were going to buy into an assessment of their ministries, it would have to be a self-assessment. In that way, they would truly own the findings of the assessment because these would be their own findings. So, I shifted gears in assessment to what I now call *Self-Discovery*. The turnaround was immediate and remarkable. By outfitting leaders with carefully crated self-discovery materials, they could truly get to the heart of real issues and own their findings. The protocol shifted from my sharing my findings with them to their sharing their findings with me. As I addressed their findings with my recommendations, not only was there strong ownership of their findings, but there was a much greater buy-in to my recommendations since they were based on their findings. Hint: I largely knew what they would find and what my recommendations would be, but following this protocol got us to the place of working as allies instead of adversaries, and, if some element in their findings was off the rails, I would find an opportunity to course correct.

Typically, the Self-Discovery approach leads to both Ah-Ha moments and Oh-No moments. Ah-Ha is often the discovery of an opportunity to be seized while Oh-No is often the realization of a significant problem that needs to be addressed immediately. Both heighten the sense of urgency and urgency is a catalyst for moving ministry toward embracing change and innovation.

The central element within the scope of church assessment is the discovery of where a church is on the church lifecycle. A Lifecycle Assessment Tool is included in the Appendices of this book. In our schema, churches are initially determined to be in one of three Macro-Stages of the lifecycle, Incline, Recline or Decline. In broad strokes, Inclining churches are healthy, growing and expanding their ministry capacity, Reclining churches are stuck in plateau with a static ministry capacity, and Declining churches are falling down the back side of the lifecycle with a decreasing ministry capacity.

Once the Macro-Stage is identified, the assessment goes deeper into the six Micro-Stages, pinpointing a church in Emerging or Developed Incline, Emerging or Developed Recline, or Emerging or Developed Decline. On average, church leaders presume their churches to be at least one Micro-Stage healthier than they actually are, and self-discovering their churches to be deeper into the lifecycle than expected generates an Oh-No moment that can translate into

urgency. Once the lifecycle stage is discovered, whether Macro or Micro, it becomes the location for the launching of a new lifecycle, priming the pump for revitalization.

**Marker 2: Motivation** is also a pre-training marker and encourages church leaders to take action on what was learned in Marker 1 while working to **secure leadership buy-in** to the GO Process. For a congregation to move toward a Great Commission future, it must recognize where it is in the present and examine how it got there as it moved through its past, whether that past is short or long. GO Center assessment leverages the valuable dynamic of self-discovery that is central to the awareness gained in Marker 1 to create the desire to embrace needed changes and to foster the positive motivation for Great Commission actions to be taken. The willingness to change is aspirational and opens the door to needed changes, but the strong will, the strong motivation, to develop Great Commission effectiveness prompts truly incarnational action.

To complete Marker 2, there are two central emphases, the development of teams and the completion of the *GO Training 1 Manual*. Chapter 4 covered the establishment of the GO Leader Team, the Vision Team and Prayer Teams, and examined their relationship with a GO Center Missional Ministry Partner. During Marker 2, these teams are fully mobilized and move into action. The *GO Training 1 Manual* carries the sub-title, *Transforming Congregations through Great Commission Ministry*. I think the sub-title speaks for itself without further comment, especially in light of all that's been covered concerning the Great Commission thus far. At this point, we are clearly beginning to put our actions behind our words.

On the manual cover, *GO Training 1* is further described as a *Pre-Onsite Training Narrative & Workshop Guide*. This manual is designed for both individual and group study. Who should complete the manual? Everyone, especially leaders, and the more the merrier. The critical group, though, is the Vision Team. The suggested format is for individuals to read and study the manual individually, completing the workshops on their own. Having done that, leaders can come together and process through the workshops together for greater understanding. Again, it's vital that the Vision Team works through the manual thoroughly because their ministry will guide the revitalization process for the entire congregation. It's recommended that the GO Leader Team also become familiar with the contents in order to support, encourage and process the work of the Vision Team. Prayer Teams will be more effective if members are informed by *GO Training 1*,

and congregants at large could benefit as well by being informed and engaged. Active teams moving through *GO Training 1* builds motivation and makes preparation for the Onsite In-Training that will follow in Marker 3, featuring the *GO Training 2 Manual*.

**Marker 3: Skill-Training** is the on-site training intensive that is the pivot between preparation and implementation, and is designed to **equip for revitalization ministry**. Using the *GO Training 2 Manual*, supported by other tools, it equips congregations, including leaders and servers, with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate revitalization effectively. The typical format for this training is to break participants out into workgroups that are led by members of the Vision Team. A GO Center Missional Ministry Partner presents training that is then workshopped by the workgroups. As an intensive, this one on-site session goes a long way in launching into Marker 4: Implementation.

The workshopping role of leaders and servers who are not members of the Vision Team will become clear in our deeper dives into the Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church in Chapter 7 and the Great Commission Matrix in Chapter 9. In brief, the Vision Team works primarily on vision and overarching strategy while other leaders and servers work primarily at the tactical level. The workshops of Marker 3: Skill-Training covered in the *GO Training 2 Manual* are centered on identifying and developing those tactical action steps. Stay tuned for Chapters 7 and 9.

Development of cognitive knowledge and comprehensive skill-training, and development of tactical vision, strategy and tactics, are much broader than this single on-site event, so, additional training tools and experiences are delivered throughout Marker 4. These come in multiple formats such as on-site, live online, video and document downloads and more. Some are led by GO Center presenters while others are designed for self-study as individuals or groups. Once inspired and equipped, leaders and congregations are empowered for Great Commission effectiveness in reaching the harvest and growing the reached to maturity.

**Marker 4: Implementation** is led by the Vision Team working with input from the GO Center Missional Ministry Partner (MMP) and serves to **build revitalization ministry**. Of course, it's critical that the GO Leader Team remains active in providing Executive Sponsorship, that leaders and servers in ministry areas throughout the church diligently pursue the development and



deployment of tactical action, and that Prayer Teams continue to support and protect the Vision Team and the entire process, but primary guidance comes from the work of the Vision Team in close alignment with the GO Center MMP.

Implementation is charted by the post-training *GO Training 3 Manual*, a guide to the application of what is covered in pre-training – *GO Training 1*, and in-training – *GO Training 2*. Marker 4 typically spans the lion's share of the GO Process timeline. On average, a congregation working through the process should cover Markers 1-3 by the six-month mark, and should plan on twelve to eighteen months to work through Marker 4. This might vary church to church, but this timing breakdown provides a reasonable guideline or target. At the 18 to 24-month mark, the 8 M.V.P. Keys process should be completed and revitalization should be firmly taking hold throughout the congregation.

This might be a good time to mention that the process is tracked by a comprehensive chart called the **GO Process ROADMAP Tracker**. This tracker identifies checkpoints and checklists for each marker that are to be reached and completed. Further, for each marker, targeted outcomes for that marker are specified. So, by following GO Training 3 as a guide, and keeping tabs on progress with the ROADMAP Tracker, Vision Team, GO Leader Team, Missional Ministry Partner, and congregation are able, throughout, to note progress. This ensures that no important elements fall through the cracks, that a proper sequence of action steps is followed, and that course correction can be made as necessary, such as quickening the pace if the process starts to drag. Also, as mentioned before in our comments regarding Marker 3, additional training elements occur throughout Marker 4 to reinforce pre-training and in-training, or to introduce new training content that is directly tied to particular implementation elements.

**Marker 5: Evaluation** is similar to Marker 1: Assessment. Evaluation leverages the dynamics of self-discovery, but this is a GO Center MMP guided self-discovery that provides accountability and measurability in order to **reinforce revitalization ministry**. As this self-discovery unfolds, the Missional Ministry Partner reviews these findings with church leaders, again seeking buy-in as to what is really happening and why. There is a sense in which this reinforcement and evaluation serve as awareness and assessment that is similar to the markers of Self-Discovery and Motivation that were experienced at the beginning of the process. This can serve as the beginning of a

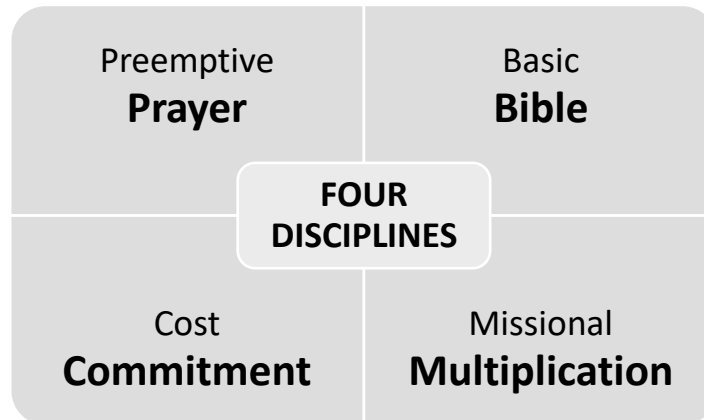
second wave of revitalization, informing continued training and coaching if so desired by church leaders. The ROADMAP, then, could serve as an upward spiral that mitigates the typical negative drift over time that is experienced on the church lifecycle.

The GO Process is designed to follow a more or less linear path, but upon completion, it's apparent that this linear process could, in fact, be leveraged as an upward spiral, where Marker 5 feeds into Marker 1 to launch a second season. Of course, ministry at this point should be much further along than when this process was first embraced, but revitalizing should become more than an episode in a church's life, it should become central to the ongoing culture. In that way, ground gained is never lost but ministry is always moving forward toward greater and greater impact in the harvest. This ongoing expansion of Great Commission ministry capacity, resulting in Great Commission fruit as a Ministry Return on Investment (MROI), is, indeed, the ultimate objective of the M.V.P. Process of *Simply Vital*. Now, with our philosophy of ministry, our biblical theology, and our markers segmented by the ROADMAP and generally explained, we're ready to move into three Keys that inform our taking Strategic Initiative. These three Keys include Chapter 7: Key Disciplines – Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church. Chapter 8: Key Paradigm Shift – From Ministry TO to Ministry THROUGH, and Chapter 9: Key Strategic Tool – the Great Commission Matrix. Let's get into the nuts and bolts!

## Chapter 7

### Key Disciplines

#### Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church



Imagine a church whose pastors, leaders and congregants are people of prayer, people of the Bible, people whose actions are driven by high-level, sacrificial commitment to the Lord, and people who have the will and the skill to multiply disciples through outreach, evangelism and discipleship. That is a church that is vital and that is practicing the Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church. In painting this picture, I'm suggesting that being vital as a congregation is not a complicated undertaking. I'm not saying that it's easy, just that it's not complicated. In fact, it's simple, hence, the title of this book, *Simply Vital: A Jumpstart to Basic-Yet-Complete Church Revitalization*.

With this chapter, we're beginning to examine three basic elements that position a church for revitalization and then carry that church through revitalization as pastors, leaders and congregants remain consistently faithful to those elements. As a reminder, the Key Platform identified among the M.V.P. Keys is the tandem of Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative. These three elements provide the operational theater upon which Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative germinate, grow and blossom into vital outcomes.

The three elements are the Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church, the Paradigm Shift from Ministry TO to Ministry THROUGH, and the Great Commission Matrix. We'll begin our

examination with the Four Disciplines. Note that each of these disciplines engages both the spiritual and the strategic. One turn of phrase that I often use is that the *Simply Vital Process* is *spiritually strategic* and *strategically spiritual*. The two are intertwined; inseparable. Keep this in mind as we unpack the Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church.

The early apostles described their ministry in Acts 6 as, "we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word," (Acts 6:4). In like manner, the first two of the four disciplines center on prayer and Bible, Preemptive Prayer and Basic Bible. The third is Cost Commitment followed by the fourth, Missional Multiplication. In each case, there is an adjective that precedes the noun, and that adjective is very important in shaping the nature of the categorical noun it modifies.

**Discipline 1: Preemptive Prayer** is prayer that is offered as a first resort. Prayer preempts or precedes every endeavor of the church, laying a spiritual foundation that anticipates God's working His will through all ministries that the church provides. I've never had anyone in evangelical circles deny the importance or power of prayer, and yet this behavior is far from prevalent in the church to the degree that it might qualify as a habitual discipline. Church leaders who desire to see gains in the vitality of their churches will practice and promote the discipline of Preemptive Prayer.

In 1993, I became pastor of a church in Phoenix, AZ, that, at that time, was an eighty-seven-year-old church that had declined to thirteen members, six married couples and one single young man. Three of the men were brothers and another two were father and son. Simply stated, vitality was gone except for the ministry that the members of this tiny congregation provided for each other. By the grace of God, we grew steadily, becoming a congregation of about three hundred fifty in the seven years I served with the church, with outcomes that went well beyond our expectations.

In early 1997, after having just moved onto new property and into a new multi-purpose building, we sensed the leading of God to begin planting churches in nearby northern Mexico. On our first trip to Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, we became acquainted with a small group of church plants throughout northern Sonora that had all been planted through one mother church in Magdalena.

God was leading us to connect with this small network of plants but they were suspicious of us, having received commitments from American churches before that had gone unfulfilled.

As we prayed about this, we came to realize that we would need to provide a grand gesture that would demonstrate the seriousness of our commitment. One of these churches, in Nogales, was the closest to our church geographically, and was the first church of the network with which we had made contact. So, we asked their leaders to reveal their greatest need, determined that we would help them meet it. They told us that their greatest need was to have their own building so they could stop bouncing around from location to location, leasing space under market value until owners found a "real" tenant. They had been in seven locations in the past couple of years. Frankly, this was a bit beyond what we were expecting, but we committed to do what we could to raise money, buy a building and get this church plant into its own home.

At that point, we were a church of about a hundred seventy people, and we had just bought property and put up a building, committing to a large mortgage payment. We established the Project Mexico Fund and began to pray for God to provide the funds needed to help our new friends in Mexico. Gradually the fund grew to \$22,000.00 while leaders in Mexico searched for a suitable building, finding a perfect property that included a warehouse, a courtyard and a small house. The price tag was \$40,000.00 USD.

One day a call came from Mexico that the owner of the building they were currently using had found a tenant and that the church had to move out in a matter of weeks. A new building was needed immediately and so we went to prayer. During the service the following Sunday, I explained the situation and asked for people who were strongly committed to Project Mexico to stay after church for a brief meeting. During that meeting I went into more detail and asked for ideas as to how we could generate that additional \$18,000.00 almost overnight. Though \$18,000.00 was not a huge sum of money, we were a small congregation that was already adjusting to a large mortgage payment.

I had to leave the meeting briefly to say goodbye to a staff person whose family was moving away. On returning, a man near the door grabbed my arm and asked to speak with me outside. We stepped out and he informed me that he had recently received a large bonus through his

employment and that he had come to church that Sunday with two checks, one for \$4000.00 for the church and one for \$5000.00 for Project Mexico. Upon my announcement regarding Mexico, he had withheld those checks and was now thinking he should give the entire \$9,000.00 to Project Mexico. I affirmed that decision, even though our administrator had told me on Friday that if we didn't have a "good" Sunday offering we wouldn't make payroll the next week.

Now only \$9000.00 short, we could see that God was moving so we developed a plan. First, we prayed, and then I sent a detailed letter to all members early in the week explaining the situation. I called for prayer and fasting throughout the week in preparation for a special offering that would be taken up on Sunday for Project Mexico. On Sunday morning, I led a small prayer meeting before the service, and then opened the service confident that God would bless our efforts by bringing the money forth.

We altered the Order of Worship that Sunday, starting with one song followed by the special offering for Project Mexico. A short explanation was given and the offering bags were passed. Our administrator was to take the offering back to the office for counting so that we could announce the total at the end of the service. We knew we were taking a high risk regarding this announcement, but we thought the best thing that could possibly happen for the kingdom would be for the additional \$9000.00 to be raised, and that God would honor Himself by doing so.

At the close of the service I walked to the lectern on which our administrator had placed an envelope. Inside this envelope was a sheet of paper with the amount of money raised printed in very large type. To be completely transparent, I was very confident all throughout the service that the amount needed would be there, but as I approached the lectern my heart started to pound and my knees felt a little weak. As I held the envelope, I said to the congregation, "There is no amount of money in this envelope that could be too large. The first \$9000.00 buys the building, the next two or three thousand covers the closing cost, and anything beyond that buys chairs." I opened the envelope, took out the sheet of paper and read the number \$12,624.25.

Our reserved, dignified, middle to upper middleclass congregation went crazy; people on their feet, shouting, crying; hugging. You would have thought we had just won the Super Bowl. Soon after we drove to Nogales and connected with the pastor and a few church leaders. I had four

cashier's checks with me for \$10,000.00 each. We met with the owner and his attorney, transacted the purchase, and I walked out with the keys in my hand. After a short drive to the building, we stood outside and I handed the keys to the pastor. He asked me where on the side of the building we would like the name of our church printed. I simply said, "Nowhere," and explained that this had nothing to do with us and everything to do with God's plan for him and his congregation.

That day was by far one of the highlights of my ministry life, and the entire experience was undergirded by the power of prayer. Prayer is the oxygen of the personal spiritual life as well as the body life of the church. Note the following Scriptures concerning prayer:

Psalm 62:8

Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

Nehemiah 1:4

As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Matthew 7:7-11

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

1 John 5:14-15

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

#### Philippians 4:6

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

#### Ephesians 6:16-18

In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

#### 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2

Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.

#### Daniel 9:17-19

Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name."

#### Matthew 26:41

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

#### Luke 18:7-8

And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"



Acts 12:5

So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

**Discipline 2: Basic Bible** emerges from the acknowledgement that Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God and Scripture is the Written Word of God. Scripture is the authority that illumines and governs the life of the committed Christian and the life of the committed Christian church. This authority is captured in the phrase *Sola Scriptura, Scripture Alone*, that was formulated with several other "*Solas*" during the Reformation in the sixteenth century. In its context, it emphasized the unique authority of the Word of God over and above the authority of the Catholic Church or the Pope himself. Scripture, and Scripture alone, was identified as the sole authority over faith and life for the follower of Christ. As 21<sup>st</sup> century believers, we must get back to Basic Bible.

Today there is a startling lack of biblical literacy in the church. Evangelicals claim that the Bible is the true Word of God and that it teaches the way to salvation and the way to live a Christian life, and yet evangelicals as a group are largely unfamiliar with what the whole counsel of Scripture holds. Perhaps because we are products of a *sound bite* culture, many in the church have a *sound bite* knowledge of Scripture, aware of certain highlighted Scriptures, such as John 3:16, but largely unaware of the depth and breadth of the comprehensive Word of God.

For example, as a church planter and revitalization pastor, I've served in a pastoral role with a number of churches. Over the years, I disciplined one-on-one with many men, particularly young men ranging more or less from their late twenties to early forties. On several occasions, one of these men has made a statement to the effect that he was no longer in love with his wife, that he was unsatisfied in his marriage and that he was considering making a change. More than once a man has expressed that he was unhappy and added a comment along these lines, "God wouldn't want me to be unhappy, right?"

To be candid, I'm not a marriage counselor and have no formal training, but I do know the Word of God. In such cases, I would first make it clear that there is nothing biblical about being "happy." I would speak of a joy that surpasses simple happiness and point to Scripture to support that premise. I would go to the Creation Ordinances in Genesis regarding God's making man (mankind), male and female, in His image, and that His wife was, indeed, made in the image of

God and was to be loved and honored as such. I would point out the Bible's teaching about a man's and a woman's becoming one flesh and that ripping that union apart would not be a smooth separation but would leave jagged edges that would have lifelong repercussions.

I would particularly dwell on the teaching of Paul in Ephesians 5 regarding mutual submission of husband and wife, and how husbands are called upon to love their wives as Christ loved the church, as follows:

*Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Ephesians 5:15-33*

This is an illustration of bringing Scripture to bear on a real life issue. The combination of Scripture, prayer and conversation was helpful in many cases as these men experienced the power of Basic Bible and both the conviction and instruction that God's Word brings.

Biblical literacy is a must if a church is to gain vitality, and church leaders must move their congregations through the very basics of God's Word. Just as holy Scripture had authority beyond

that of the Pope and of the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century, so does Scripture have authority beyond today's popular writers, intellectuals, pop psychologists, influencers such as Oprah Winfrey, and even leading evangelical preachers and writers such as Tim Keller, John Piper, Ravi Zacharias, and R.C. Sproul. They would be among the first to say so.

The bottom line is that the discipline of being in the Bible, Basic Bible, must be nurtured in a church if that church is to gain vitality. Note the following Scriptures concerning the Word of God:

Psalm 119:9-18

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes!

With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth.

In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.

I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.

I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

Deal bountifully with your servant, that I may live and keep your word.

Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

Ezra 7:10

For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

Luke 24:44

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

1 Corinthians 2:13

And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

Deuteronomy 4:2

You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.

John 20:30-31

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Acts 17:11

Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

Psalms 19:7-11

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

2 Timothy 3:14-17

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

John 5:39

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.

Romans 10:17

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Deuteronomy 10:12-13

"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?

Joshua 1:8

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Psalms 119:105

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

**Discipline 3: Cost Commitment** raises the challenge that to follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is to embark on a "suicide" mission. That is the **Cost Commitment**. Scripture repeatedly calls the believer to die to self in order to live for Christ. Many churches today are failing to make the cost of discipleship clear, allowing their congregations to compartmentalize faith rather than having their faith in Christ permeate all layers of life. Following Christ is not something one adds to an already busy life. Rather, it is a commitment that takes over all of life as He become preeminent in the thoughts and actions of the believer.

It's common in our day for churches to emphasize God's love, grace and mercy over His holiness, righteousness and judgment, as if God is more of a pal or buddy than the sovereign Creator of the universe. A short step into the 10 Commandments reveals that God's expectation is to be the *First and Only God* in our lives. Note Commandments 1 and 2:

*You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or*

*that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. Exodus 20: 3-6.*

Church vitality calls for a high Cost Commitment. The following Scriptures provide teaching and foundation for understanding the all-encompassing, high-commitment nature of being a disciple of Jesus Christ:

Matthew 22:36-38

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.

Matthew 10:37-39

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Luke 9:23-25

And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

Matthew 13:44-46

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

### Philippians 3:8-11

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order 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 comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

### Acts 4:15-20

But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

### Acts 5:40-42

And when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

### Acts 9:13-16

But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

Acts 15:24-27

Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth.

Acts 21:10-14

While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

**Discipline 4: Missional Multiplication** notes that, in the book of Genesis, God instructs Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, launching His covenant with His people into being. The multiplication continues throughout providential time until it reaches completion, envisioned in Revelation as a multitude that is too numerous to count. Jesus restates this covenant of multiplication with the Great Commission of Matthew 28, charging His followers to go and make disciples of all nations. The faithful and orthodox church is centered on this Great Commission, pouring itself out that the lost might be gathered into the family of God. This is the thrust of Missional Multiplication, broken out in this presentation in Parts 1, 2 and 3.

Missional Multiplication – Part 1: General References

The following Scriptures speak to the general mandate of missional multiplication:

Genesis 1:22

And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."



Jeremiah 23:3

Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.

Jeremiah 30:18-19

“Thus says the LORD: Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob and have compassion on his dwellings; the city shall be rebuilt on its mound, and the palace shall stand where it used to be. Out of them shall come songs of thanksgiving, and the voices of those who celebrate. I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will make them honored, and they shall not be small.

Isaiah 61:1-3

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor;  
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;  
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;  
to grant to those who mourn in Zion—  
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;  
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,  
the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.

Luke 4:16-21

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of

the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Luke 7:20-23

And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

Hebrews 6:13-14

For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you."

Revelation 7:9-10

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 9:35-38

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Matthew 16:15-18

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Mark 4:20

But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

Luke 19:10

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

Missional Multiplication – Part 2: The Acts of the Apostles

The Book of Acts chronicles the movement of the Holy Spirit in establishing the Christian church through the actions of the apostles. These are actions of Missional Multiplication as God grows His church through the ministry of the apostles. The word "church" occurs but three times in the Gospels, but is used twenty-three times in Acts, a book that is largely about the early multiplication of the church. This is *descriptive* as a history and is *prescriptive* in terms of how the church today must understand the Great Commission mandate as an element of ecclesiology.

The following Scriptures walk through the Book of Acts revealing a consistent and persistent numerical multiplication of the church:

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Acts 8:1

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Acts 2:37-41

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Acts 2:46-47

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 4:4

But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

Acts 5:12-16

Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but

the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Acts 6:7

And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Acts 9:31

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Acts 9:40-42

But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

Acts 10:44-48

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Acts 11:19-24

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists

also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

Acts 12:21-24

On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

But the word of God increased and multiplied.

Acts 13:46-49

And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.

Acts 16:4-5

As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

Acts 16:28-34

But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed

their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

Acts 17:2-4

And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.

Acts 17:10-12

The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.

Acts 17:32-34

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Acts 18:7-11

And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

#### Acts 19:8-10

And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

#### Acts 19:13-20

Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

#### Acts 28:28-31

"Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."

He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

#### Missional Multiplication – Part 3: Fish Stories

Jesus used a simple analogy with the fishermen He was calling to be His disciples, explaining that they would become *fishers of men*. At the time of their first calling, Jesus used a miraculous catch of fish to exhibit His power and to lay the foundation for His calling them to grow His kingdom through the miraculous catching of men, women and children. It's interesting to note that He



repeated this miraculous catch of fish during one of His post-resurrection appearances, bookending His earthly ministry with this powerful, numeric display. His point, then and now, is that His disciples are to engage in **Missional Multiplication**, gathering a harvest that He provides.

The following Scriptures demonstrate the calling of Christ to be catching people with the Gospel:

Mark 1:16-18

Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Matthew 4:18-19

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Luke 5:1-11

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

John 21:1-14

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

The church that encourages and develops the Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church through every ministry of the church, and within every pastor, leader and congregant in the church, is a church that will experience significant growth in vitality. Preemptive Prayer, Basic Bible, Cost Commitment and Missional Multiplication, when practiced consistently, foster spiritual growth and produce numerical growth as the harvest is gathered, growing the church and, more importantly, growing the kingdom. The disciplined church is *Simply Vital*.

Chapter 8  
Key Paradigm Shift  
From Ministry TO to Ministry THROUGH

You know what a 180 is, right? A 180 is when you are heading in a particular direction only to realize that you are heading in exactly the wrong direction. So, you execute a 180, a one hundred eighty degree turn such that you are now headed in the exact opposite direction. If I was headed due north, for example, a 180 would be to turn completely around and head due south.

I believe that many churches are headed in wrong directions that need to be course corrected by 180s. I call them Vital 180s because they are vitally necessary if a church is to grow in vitality. I've identified a number of these over the years and I want to share one of them with you now.

***Vital 180***

*NOT how do we minister TO our congregation  
BUT how do we minister THROUGH our congregation?*

The fundamental ministry question for the church is NOT, "How do we minister TO our congregation?" The Great Commission fundamental question is, "How do we minister THROUGH our congregation in order to reach a lost community; to reach the harvest?" Looking through this lens changes the trajectory of ministry from congregational ministry that is a cul-du-sac, or dead end, to congregational ministry that is an intersection, albeit a round-about, that carries ministry through multiple avenues into and throughout a community, creating a Christ-in-culture reality that is typically absent.

For example, let's consider Youth Ministry. The starting question is, "How can we reach out to, or connect with, the youth of the community THROUGH Youth Ministry?" Note that this is a very different question than more churches ask. Typically, the default question is, "How do we minister TO the youth of our congregation?" The Vital 180 question is, "How do we minister THROUGH the youth of our congregation to reach the youth of the community?" This perspective positions

the Youth Ministry of a church for effective outreach, followed by evangelism and leading to discipleship.

How does a church make this turn; how does a church navigate from ministry TO to ministry THROUGH? As an example, let's consider the ministry of Small Groups. Many churches offer the ministry of Small Groups and, typically, this ministry of Small Groups is an in-reach ministry, a ministry for church insiders. Small Groups are thought of as gatherings for discipleship and fellowship. Someone hosts a Small Group in a home and people gather together for prayer, for worship, for Bible study, for fellowship, and they think of this ministry as a means of growing deeper in their faith, of maturing as disciples of Christ.

I agree to a point, but often these groups calcify in terms of participants, deciding to close to adding new people because they have come to know each other so well, and have been transparent and vulnerable with each other, so it seems that allowing someone new in would disrupt what they've built together. This is the opposite of Great Commission thinking, the opposite of going and making disciples, the opposite of being salt and light; the opposite of sharing the faith.

Often this ministry rests on an unspoken, or perhaps even unrealized, assumption, that if we meet together enough, pray together enough, worship together enough, study the Bible together enough, fellowship together enough, the Gospel message of Jesus will somehow spill out of our lives into the community and people will be drawn to Christ. All I can say is, "Prove it!" Show me where this is happening. Surely, there is nothing inherently wrong with the activities engaged by the conventional Small Group. However, as a rule, something is woefully missing. That something is the witness of the Gospel, the laboring in the harvest, the sharing of the faith; the impact of the people of God in the community.

So, how might we take a 180 and turn a Small Group outward, such that the fundamental question is not, "How to we minister TO our Small Group, but how do we minister THROUGH our Small Group to reach a lost community?" To pull this off, there is no need to jettison the current activities of the group. We can still pray, worship, study and fellowship, but there's a need for addition that might lead to multiplication. We need to add outreach and evangelism to the mix. What if each

Small Group adopted a mission in the community and began to serve and interact in the community as a group, with the same people again and again over time? Relationships would develop and the community would be face to face with followers of Jesus Christ.

My observation over the years has shown me that most Small Groups are organized according to which day of the week they meet plus the geographical location of the hosts. Groups are identified, for example, as the group that meets at the Taylors' home on Tuesday evenings at 7:00 pm. Would-be attendees are encouraged to find the location and day of the week that works for them. What if the identity of each Small Group was its mission and the invitation was to join the group that is serving in a way that you feel called to serve? So, instead of joining with the Taylors on Tuesday evenings, perhaps you join the group that is tutoring third graders after school, or working with the Women's Crisis Center, or leading an ESL program; the list goes on and on.

One final comment, over the years I have been criticized for taking this point of view. The accusation is that I'm using the congregation to satisfy some evangelism itch that I have that needs scratching. Here's what I've learned, though. When people in the congregation are being ministered THROUGH, they actually experience accelerated personal spiritual growth that is greater than if they were only being ministered TO. Being mobilized for ministry, being trained for ministry and being on the front lines of proactive ministry beats sitting on a couch in someone's den anytime if what you're looking for is to be vitally engaged in the work of the Lord. So, I understand the criticism that's being leveled, but, when you really look deeply into what ministry in the field accomplishes, for both the receiver and the giver, I find that criticism unfounded.

I am convinced that every ministry in a church has the capacity to face outward, so that, for newcomers, every ministry of the church is a connector to that church, a connector to the Gospel, a connector to Jesus; a connector to the kingdom of God. How do we get there? We change the fundamental question. It's not, "How do we minister TO our congregation, but how do we minister THROUGH our congregation to reach a lost community?"



## Chapter 9

### Key Strategic Tool

### The Great Commission Matrix

God's big picture vision stretches from Genesis to Revelation, the timeline of redemptive history that provides the stage for God's unfolding plan of redemption. A multitude of men, women and children from all peoples of all times will be gathered into the harvest that is God's eternal family. The question is, "Will our church commit to playing its part in the unfolding of that redemptive history?"

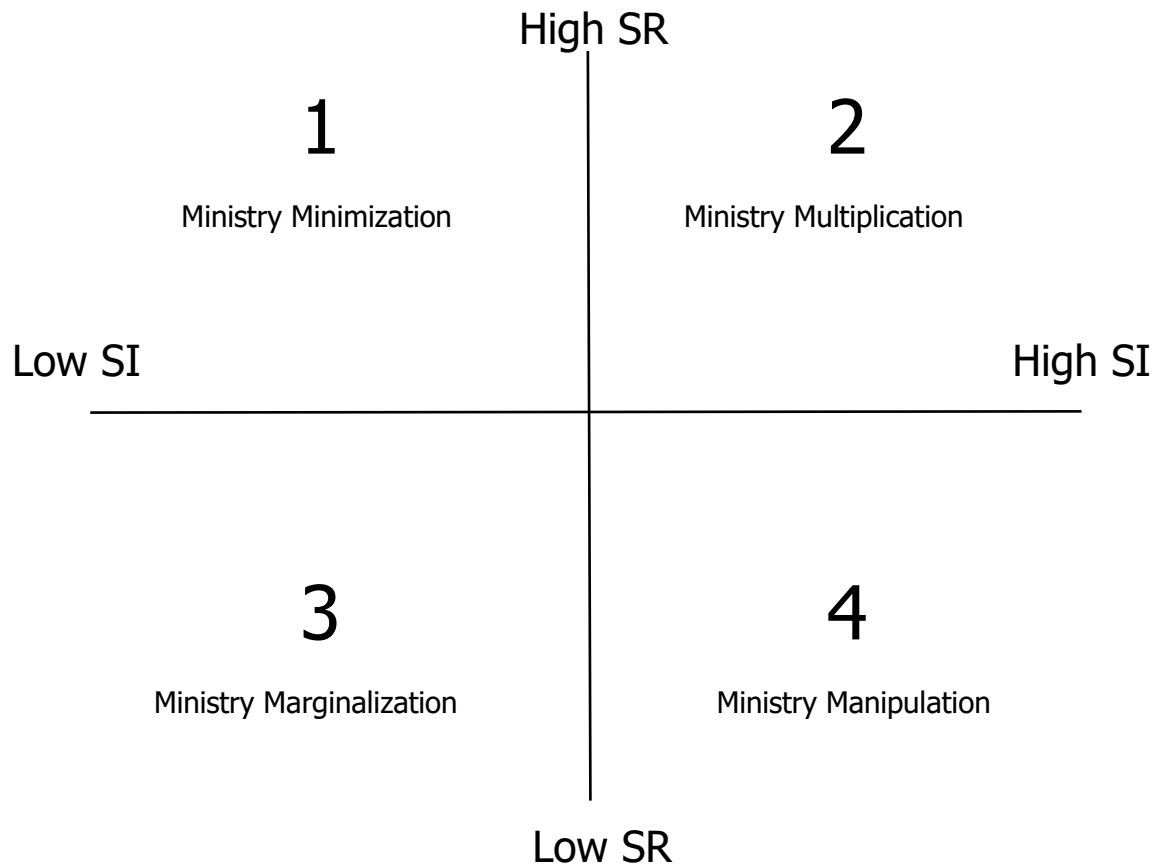
If the answer to this question for any given church is, "Yes," then a second question takes center stage. That question is, "How?" The *How* will be driven by that church's commitment to the Great Commission, and by its development of Great Commission vision and strategy. With the commitment to Great Commission ministry made, the stage is set for moving into the nuts and bolts of strategic design, development and implementation. This can be accomplished through the application of a dynamic strategic tool, the **Great Commission Matrix**.

The Great Commission Matrix creates multiple front doors through which lost people can find their way to Christ and into the ministry of the church. Typically, churches position Sunday morning as the primary, or only, front door to the ministry, expecting newcomers to visit on Sunday and then trickle down to other ministries of the church. The Great Commission Matrix model, however, positions every ministry area of the church as a front door, greatly multiplying access to the Gospel and to subsequent discipleship and worship opportunities. The Great Commission Matrix strategically defines and shapes the Great Commission commitment of a church and positions that church for dynamic missional multiplication.

# The Great Commission Matrix

Spiritual Renewal (SR) – Strategic Initiative (SI)

High/Low Strength of Commitment



Recall our look at the Nehemiah Model of revitalization as a combination of Spiritual Renewal (SR) with Strategic Initiative (SI). This tandem platform creates the frame for the Great Commission Matrix. High to Low Commitment to Spiritual Renewal (SR) forms the vertical axis and High to Low Commitment to Strategic Initiative (SI) creates the horizontal axis. Together, they form the four quadrants of the Matrix.

**Quadrant 1** blends a High Commitment to Spiritual Renewal with a Low Commitment to Strategic Initiative, resulting in **Ministry Minimization**. While High Spiritual Renewal is healthy, leaving it unsupported by Low Strategic Initiative minimizes the impact and sustainability of any



revitalization effort. Spiritual Renewal might generate momentary inspiration and commitment, but without strategic legs, the impact of the church in the community goes nowhere. In short, the church experiences a spiritual “pep rally” or mountain top experience, but quickly returns to status quo back in the valley.

**Quadrant 3** blends a Low Commitment to Spiritual Renewal with a Low Commitment to Strategic initiative, resulting in **Ministry Marginalization**. This is the church that is invisible in a community, having no impact or influence. From the perspective of the community, this church might as well not be there. It’s pushed to the margins of consequence and, should that church close, the community wouldn’t miss it.

**Quadrant 4** blends a Low Commitment to Spiritual Renewal with a High Commitment to Strategic Initiative, resulting in **Ministry Manipulation**. Spiritual Renewal is assumed to be present and goes unattended while leaders focus on aggressive methodologies that are perceived to be the pathway to drawing people into the church. Often, this approach does indeed draw a crowd, but draws that crowd to what, exactly, and at what cost? Without the compass of Spiritual Renewal, the danger of falling into compromise and syncretism is high, and often this kind of church goes high on grace and low on truth, such that the growing crowd is not challenged by the whole counsel of Scripture. This might result in short-term statistical spiking but will not lead to healthy, sustainable growth.

**Quadrant 2** blends a High Commitment to Spiritual Renewal with a High Commitment to Strategic Initiative, resulting in **Ministry Multiplication**. This, of course, is the quadrant where credible and sustainable health, growth and multiplication reside. The high commitment to both, and the healthy balance of both, establish a truly healthy ministry culture that, over time, continues to mature spiritually and strategically. Quadrant 2 is the landscape for maximizing a church’s influence and impact in a community and positions the church to be used by God in building His kingdom family. As we move forward in examining the Great Commission Matrix, Quadrant 2 will be our focus.

Groundwork has been laid for establishing the central strategy for revitalization. We have noted God's big picture vision of a timeline that stretches from Genesis to Revelation, the timeline of redemptive history that provides the stage for God's unfolding plan of redemption. A multitude of men, women and children from all peoples of all times will be gathered into the harvest that is God's eternal family. The question, again, is, "Will our church commit to playing its part in the unfolding of redemptive history?"

We have recognized the importance of establishing a Vision Team and its accompanying Prayer Teams. This Vision Team of pastor (typically) plus four or five other leaders is charged with the responsibility of discerning how God desires to express Himself through their church's commitment to the Great Commission, developing a Great Commission vision and strategy, directing the church through the vitalization process, and determining how progress and productivity will be evaluated and held accountable. This team should be able to be characterized as discerning, visionary, spiritually mature and well respected throughout the congregation.

Each Vision Team member is to be supported by a Prayer Team. This team will pray for the effectiveness and protection of the Vision Team and its work, as well as provide a communications network through which ideas and information can move among these valuable teams. Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church have been presented and discussed, Preemptive Prayer, Basic Bible, Cost Commitment and Missional Multiplication. We have identified the Four Quadrants of the Great Commission Matrix.

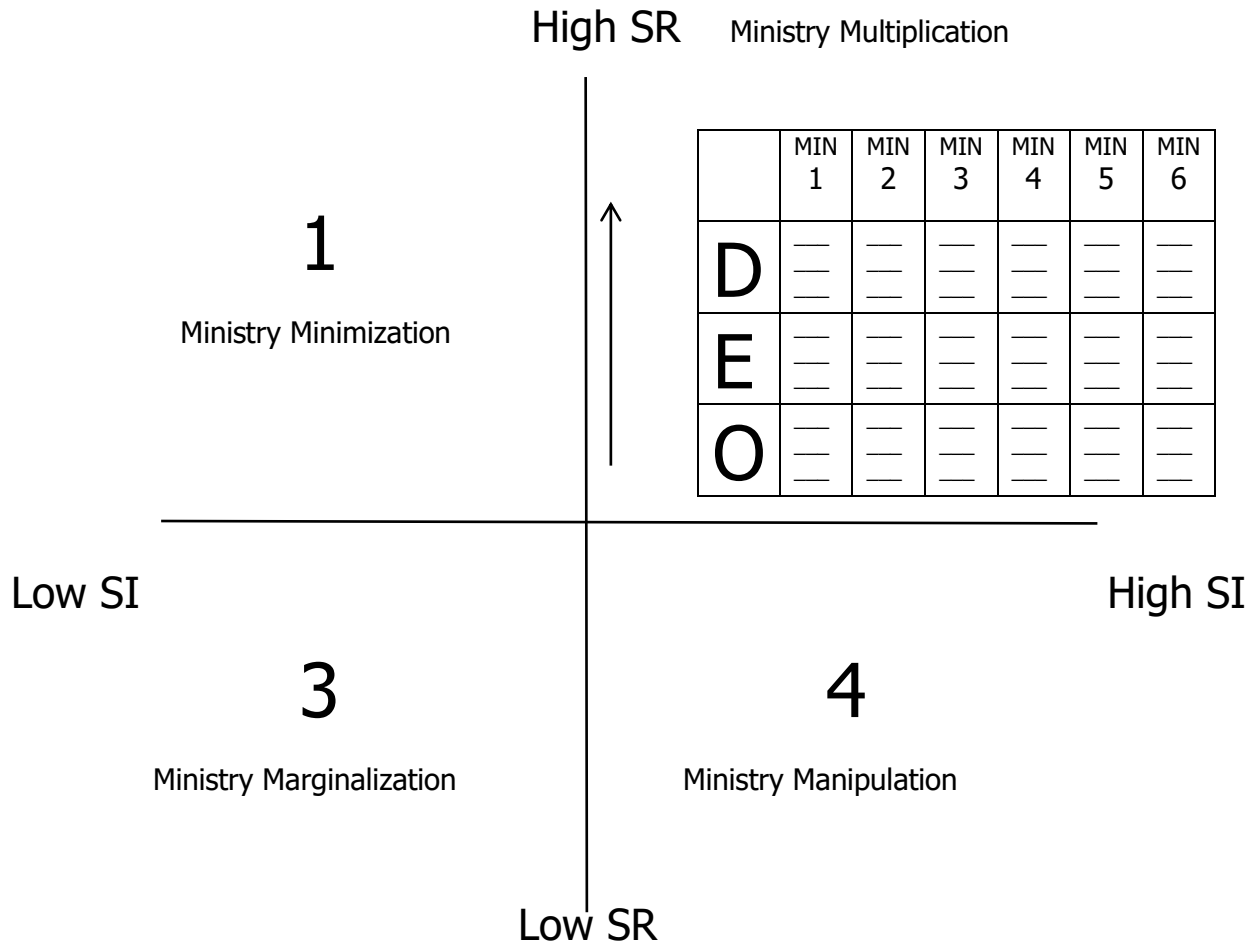
The stage is now set for moving into the nuts and bolts of strategic design, development and implementation. This will be accomplished through the application of the Great Commission Matrix.

# The Great Commission Matrix

Spiritual Renewal (SR) – Strategic Initiative (SI)

High/Low Strength of Commitment

2



As we prepare to zoom in to Quadrant 2, a grid is placed in Quadrant 2 with another vertical axis and another horizontal axis – a grid within a quadrant, within the Matrix. The vertical axis, from the bottom up, indicates an O = Outreach, an E = Evangelism and a D – Discipleship. The horizontal axis indicates various ministry areas as MIN 1, MIN 2, MIN 3, etc.

Structurally and strategically, Outreach, Evangelism and Discipleship are separated from other ministry, removed from a typical list of ministries or programs of a church, and are being set aside for special treatment.

That treatment will be called a **Movement**. The church will not have an Outreach Program or an Evangelism Program or a Discipleship Program. These three will be **Missional Ministry Movements**. What qualifies them as movements is that they will be threads that weave through every ministry or program of the church. All ministries or programs will develop the capacity to provide Outreach, all will develop the capacity to provide Evangelism, and all will develop the capacity to provide Discipleship.

*Years ago, I attended a church of roughly 1200 members. There were 15 of us on the Evangelism Team. That's a program approach.*

*A church of 1200 should have 1200 on the Evangelism Team. That's a movement!*

	MIN 1	MIN 2	MIN 3	MIN 4	MIN 5	MIN 6
<b>D</b>	—	—	—	—	—	—
<b>E</b>	—	—	—	—	—	—
<b>O</b>	—	—	—	—	—	—

↑

D = DISCIPLESHIP – *DISCIPLES*

E = EVANGELISM – *MAKE*

O = OUTREACH – *GO*

Missional  
Ministry  
Movements

Let's begin our discussion of the Great Commission Matrix by looking at the left-hand column, starting at the bottom. By way of reminder, bring the Great Commission Triangle to mind. We begin with **Outreach**, the "Go!" element of the Great Commission. Effective missional multiplication begins here. The goal is conversion growth as the church fulfills its redemptive calling and the commandment is to Go! Outreach occurs when people of faith in the congregation connect with people outside of the faith in the community, usually through outsider needs and interests. The objective of outreach is to build sustainable relationships with lost people, relationships that will provide opportunities for sharing the Gospel.

From Outreach we move upward to **Evangelism**, the "Make!" element of the Great Commission. Evangelism occurs when people outside of the Christian faith are connected to the crystal clear Gospel of Jesus Christ. If the Gospel message has not been made crystal clear, evangelism has not taken place. I emphasize this point because I have observed that in many churches outreach has increased significantly, but there has been no such corresponding increase in professions of faith. It seems that many church people are viewing outreach as evangelism, believing that through outreach, and outreach alone, they have evangelized. This is a grievous error. Outreach and evangelism are not synonymous and regardless of how much worthwhile outreach is taking place, until the Gospel is clearly put on the table, evangelism has not happened.

With strategies for Outreach and Evangelism deployed, we move further upward to **Discipleship**, the "Disciples!" element of the Great Commission. It's at this strategic level that those who have come into the faith through outreach and evangelism learn what to believe and how to live through Christian education directed toward Christian living. Sadly, many churches practice discipleship as if intellectual understanding is all that's required. Though knowledge in the faith is of high importance, knowledge is a means and not an end. Sacrificially living for Christ (see Cost Commitment) through obedience is the objective, not simply Bible knowledge.

## **GLOSSARY OF G.C. MATRIX TERMS**

**Outreach:** The strategic connecting of people in the congregation with people outside of the congregation for the purpose of building sustainable relationships. It is these sustainable relationships that give opportunity to evangelism.

**Evangelism:** The strategic connecting of people outside of the Christian faith with a crystal-clear presentation of the Gospel, including an opportunity to respond to the call of the Gospel. Note – if the Gospel has not been made crystal clear, evangelism has not happened.

Good News: Many congregations have greatly increased outreach in recent years.

Bad News: But many of these congregations are mistaking outreach for evangelism. Consequently, the Gospel is not being presented clearly.

**Discipleship:** Developing someone in his or her Christian faith with an emphasis on obedience to all that Jesus commanded. The objective of discipleship is not increased knowledge or moral improvement. The objective is true life transformation that is seen in behaviors and not simply in theological or doctrinal understanding, in orthopraxis and not simply in orthodoxy.

**Ministry Area:** Any program, department, sub-department, team or group that is employing strategies that impact people through Outreach, Evangelism, and Discipleship; the delivery systems a congregation develops to minister THROUGH the congregation to reach a community.

**Strategy:** The particular methods, followed by tactics, employed within a given ministry area to promote Outreach, Evangelism, and Discipleship.

**The Lost:** More than simply those who are without Christ, the Lost are those whose names are recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life but who have not yet come to faith. They are our missing brothers and sisters in Christ and we must reach them, leaving the ninety-nine for the one.

**Worshippers:** Formerly the lost, worshipers give themselves sacrificially to their Lord, driven by obedience to the Word of God. They do, indeed, worship in spirit and truth.

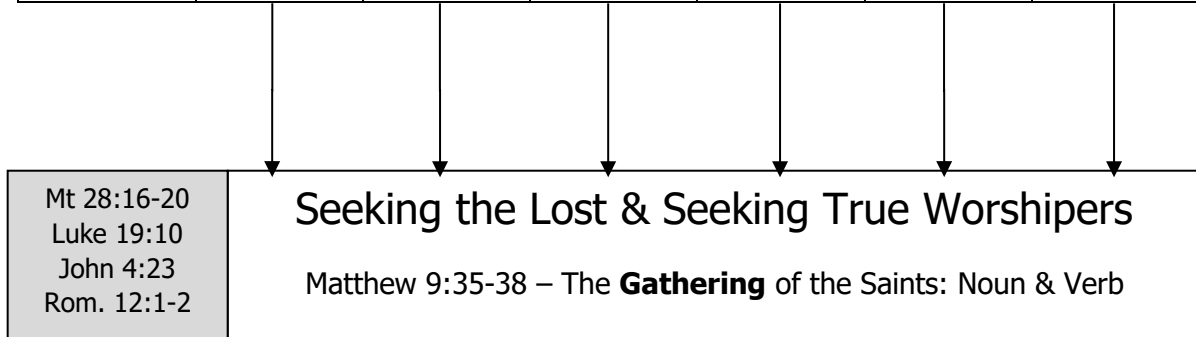
**Gathering** (noun): The gathering of the saints as a noun is the body of Christ having come together, a.k.a. the congregation.

**Gathering** (verb): The gathering of the saints as a verb is the drawing of the lost into the family of God through outreach and evangelism while serving in the harvest.

# The Great Commission Matrix

## Zoom-In to Quadrant 2

	MIN 1	MIN 2	MIN 3	MIN 4	MIN 5	MIN 6
<b>DISC</b> Disciples!	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3
<b>EVAN</b> Make!	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3
<b>OUTR</b> GO!	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3	Strategy 1 Strategy 2 Strategy 3



The key to leveraging the Great Commission Matrix effectively is the principle of ministry THROUGH the congregation rather than TO the congregation. This might give the appearance of shortchanging the congregation, but the truth is that people in the congregation will grow much further in their faith when they are *giving* ministry rather than when they are *receiving* ministry, an active rather than passive posture. Consider the first time you moved from being the student to being the teacher, whether in a Sunday School class, a Bible study, a small group, or some other setting. Most of us learned far more as teachers or leaders or servants than as students because the added responsibility pushed us toward more thorough study and preparation.

## **Reminder: Multiple Front Doors**

The Great Commission Matrix creates multiple front doors through which lost people can find their way to Christ and into the ministry of the church. Typically, churches position Sunday morning as the primary, or only, front door. The Great Commission Matrix, however, positions every ministry area of the church as a front door. Every ministry develops the capacity to provide Outreach, every ministry develops the capacity to provide Evangelism, and every ministry develops the capacity to provide Discipleship. In this way, there is a constant flow of newcomers into the church, or into the sphere of the church's ministry, where they can find faith and develop as true worshipers. At the same time, mobilized followers of Christ find their spiritual growth accelerating as a result of their proactive engagement in meaningful ministry. The Great Commission Matrix strategically defines and shapes the Great Commission commitment of a church and positions that church for dynamic missional multiplication, all to the glory of God!



## Chapter 10

### The M.V.P. Keys in Review

One of the essential ingredients in effective adult learning is *reiteration*, so, at the risk of apparent redundancy, let's move through the **M.V.P. Keys** one more time. Think of this as reinforcement of our church revitalization basics. We began at the foundation with the **Key Platform**: Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative. How important is this foundation?

By way of analogy, I went to Google and typed in, "How important is the foundation of a building?" Of the 1,300,000 or so responses, this one was at the top from a blog by SA Homes: *The strength of a building lies in its foundation. The main purpose of the foundation is to hold the structure above it and keep it upright. On the contrary, a poorly constructed foundation can be dangerous to the occupants and the neighborhood. With high-rise buildings touching the sky these days, it has become all the more important to have powerful foundations.*

For my purposes, this quote is too good to be true. Do we want a strong foundation that firmly holds our revitalization efforts above it, keeping it upright? Yes! Do we want our revitalization effort to impact the occupants of our congregation and the residents of our neighborhood positively, not being a "danger" to them? Yes! Is it important that we establish a spiritually and strategically powerful foundation? Yes!

In the word of Jesus, Scripture says it this way: *Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it, (Matthew 7:24-27).*

*Simply Vital* builds that firm foundation on the rock of Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative, a foundation that is strategically spiritual and spiritually strategic. This foundation ensures that revitalization will be effective, credible, viable and sustainable whatever the future holds.

**Key Scripture Planks** demonstrated the strength of the spiritual working with the strategic as we considered the local church implementation of these six Scripture passages, tagged the Scripture Greats, that inform us of God's vision for His church. These passages in combination are vital to a Great Commission vision, and, also, to a Great Commission ecclesiology.

In the Great Promise of Matthew 16:13-18, Jesus goes to the bottom line of bottom lines with the question, "Who do you say that I am?" By this time, after months of being with Jesus, the disciples, through the revelation of the Holy Spirit, are beginning to understand who Jesus really is. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus provides an eternal guarantee that He will build His church and that nothing will stop it. God has a vision of a church that serves as an agency through which the Holy Spirit can reveal that Jesus is the Christ to the lost among the harvest whom God seeks to find.

The Great Commandment of Matthew 22:34-40 imports the primacy of the Shema of Deuteronomy 6, coupled with the love of neighbor seen in Leviticus 18, to lay out ethical guidelines that interface with theological beliefs. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis capture the importance of this interface in their book, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community*, with their observation, "The theology that matters is not the theology we profess but the theology we practice," (p. 18). God has a vision of a church that truly loves Him and truly loves people, and that consistently demonstrates that vertical and horizontal love in thought, word and action.

The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 provides crystal clear insight into God's purpose for the church. Going and making disciples must be at the core of how we execute ministry. I'm intrigued by what I'll call the double-Trinitarian nature of the Great Commission. Obviously, we are called to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, noting that baptism is in the name of all three Persons of the Trinity. Somewhat less obvious is the interplay between God the Father, Son and Spirit as God the Father gives all authority in heaven and earth to God the Son, who then commissions His disciples in that authority, and God the Son's promising that He will be with them to the end of the age. How so? He will be with them through God the Holy Spirit. God has a vision of church that goes in the authority of Christ to make disciples,

baptizing them in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, and then teaching them how to live lives of obedience to the commands of Christ.

The Great Witness of Acts 1:8 reveals a godly purpose with a godly condition. In one of His final post-resurrection/pre-ascension statements, Jesus informed His disciples that their purpose was to be His witnesses, bearing the good news of the Gospel in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and the end of the earth. In other words, this message was to go everywhere and it was to go through them. However, there was a condition. This witness was going to happen as a result of the Holy Spirit's coming upon them.

They had already "received" the Holy Spirit in a moment captured in John 20:22. The setting was the evening of Resurrection Day. Jesus appeared to the disciples and, at one point, we're told He, "breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" But, the Spirit's coming upon them as told in Acts 1:8 was of a different nature and, according to the text, their being His witnesses was contingent upon that act of the Holy Spirit. So empowered, so armed, so equipped by the Spirit, then, they would become His witnesses here, there and everywhere. God has a vision of a church that is filled with the Holy Spirit and heartily engages in bearing witness to the love, grace, mercy and salvation of God the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Great Mission of Jesus recorded in Luke 19:10 leaves no doubt as to what the Incarnation of Jesus Christ was and is all about. Jesus, the Son of Man, came to seek and to save the lost. Luke 19 presents Zacchaeus as Exhibit A. Zacchaeus was lost. Jesus found him and saved him, simple as that, and then announces for all time that His very mission on the planet was to do just that, to seek and to save the lost, just as He did with Zacchaeus. God has a vision of a church that dedicates itself to seeking and saving the lost. Of course, we don't have the power to regenerate, but we do have the power, and the responsibility, to go into the harvest as the hands, feet, hearts and voices of God as He seeks and saves through His Spirit.

The Great Multiplication of Matthew 24:14 fast forwards to the last of the Last Days, noting a conditional contingency that must be met before the end will come. Another way of perceiving this contingency is that, when this contingency is met, the end will come. There are times when I greatly identify with the Apostle John in Revelation when he cries, "Maranatha! Come, Lord

Jesus!" If we truly want to hasten that day, we must be inspired and propelled by the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:14, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." God has a vision of a church that actively engages in the global proclamation of the Gospel of the kingdom.

**Key Models** from Scripture were examined, featuring the Book of Nehemiah and, again, the Great Commission. Much has been said in this chapter's look at the Key Platform and in our quick review of the Great Commission, so I'm not going to reiterate my reiteration. Note, however, that Key Models moves a bit from biblical, theological underpinnings to the nuts and bolts of how churches can revitalize. The model of Nehemiah, which showcases the interplay of Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative, and the model of the Great Commission's being leveraged as both vision and strategy, begin to drive the specific action steps that a church will take in intentionally moving forward with transformative revitalization.

**Key Markers** discussed how the journey of revitalization is segmented along the ROADMAP to Missional Vitality. Marker 1: Self-Discovery establishes the needed sense of urgency to commit to revitalization and to commit NOW! Marker 2: Motivation secures leadership buy-in, making sure that key leaders are united in their role of providing revitalization sponsorship. Marker 3: Skill-Training equips leaders, and all who will serve, for completing the nuts and bolts of revitalization ministry, and ultimately reaching spiritual and strategic objectives. Marker 4: Implementation is the longest season in the process and it's during this season that revitalization ministry is holistically built by completing those nuts and bolts tasks and reaching those objectives. Finally, Marker 5: Evaluation provides an opportunity to evaluate, analyze and assess ministry progress in order to reinforce and sustain revitalization ministry over time.

**Key Disciplines** were identified as the Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church. At the core, these disciplines are Prayer, Bible, Commitment and Multiplication. To add clarity and distinction, each of these is accompanied by a descriptor. Preemptive Prayer is concerned with making sure that prayer is treated as the First Resort, covering every action to be taken in the course of revitalization with prayer that is engaged in advance. This discipline is reflected in the general call to prayer as well as the spiritual and strategic ministry of the Prayer Teams that labor in support of the ministry and personnel of the Vision Team.

Basic Bible calls the church to the fundamental importance of Bible literacy, acknowledging the authority of Scripture over every aspect of both belief and behavior. Nothing in life falls outside the scope of Scripture, so, in any and every instance, we must ask several questions: "What does God say about this in His Word? What does God mean by what He says about this in His Word? What must I do in light of what God says and means about this in His Word?" To navigate through life without God's Word is to fly blind. In the church we must not only acknowledge the authority of Scripture in our lives theologically, but we must acknowledge the authority of Scripture in our lives practically in the decisions we make and the actions we take. The church must get back to Basic Bible.

Cost Commitment reminds us that, though the Gospel and the salvation it proclaims is a gift that comes to use by the grace of God, this gift of life costs us our lives. We are called to die to ourselves to live for Christ, to take up our crosses and follow Him. Salvation and life eternal are free but they come at great cost. They come at the cost of Jesus Christ on the cross and at the cost of our taking up our crosses. Let's be ALL-IN in our commitment to the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Missional Multiplication takes a whole lot of syllables to say that we must be committed to sharing our faith in the harvest of souls that God seeks to save. Yes, the Gospel is about us in the sense that God values each and every one of us enough to send His Son to die our death so that we might live His life. But, it's not ALL about us. It's about every man, woman and child that God will call into His eternal family. We must multiply souls, disciples, leaders and churches as the Gospel is proclaimed throughout the nations until all who will come to faith have come to faith.

Imagine the impact of a church whose congregation is well-grounded in the disciplines of Preemptive Prayer, Basic Bible, Cost Commitment and Missional Multiplication. Now, that's a Great Commission Church, a church that is *Simply Vital*.

**Key Paradigm Shift** moved the flow of ministry from ministry TO a congregation to ministry THROUGH a congregation in order to reach a lost community. This shift places the reaching of a community at the core of a church's ministry rather than on the fringe, if at all. In this way, a community is reached, and, perhaps surprisingly, congregational maturity accelerates.

**Key Strategic Tool** leveraged the Great Commission Matrix as the spiritual and strategic funnel through which ministry flows, all the way down to the boots-on-the-ground tactics that are utilized by all ministry areas of the church. Outreach, Evangelism and Discipleship were identified as Ministry Movements, threading through all ministry areas such that each ministry area was enabled to engage its own Outreach, Evangelism and Discipleship strategies. In this way, every ministry area serves as a front door to the faith, to the kingdom and to the church.

These eight **M.V.P. Keys** combine to outline an effective process in basic, yet complete, church revitalization. A church that commits to this process and faithfully follows through, is a church that will become ***Simply Vital***.

# APPENDICES





Appendix 1  
**M.V.P. Keys**  
 GO Center **Missional Vitality Process\*** Architecture Framework

<b>8. Key Strategic Tool</b> The Great Commission Matrix featuring Outreach, Evangelism & Discipleship Movements**
<b>7. Key Paradigm Shift</b> From Ministry TO the Congregation to Ministry THROUGH the Congregation
<b>6. Key Disciplines</b> <i>Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church</i> Preemptive Prayer Basic Bible Cost Commitment Missional Multiplication
<b>5. Key Markers</b> <i>ROADMAP to Missional Vitality</i> Marker 1: Self-Discovery Marker 2: Motivation Marker 3: Skill-Training Marker 4: Implementation Marker 5: Evaluation
<b>4. Key Teams</b> GO Leader Team Vision Team Prayer Teams
<b>3. Key Models</b> Nehemiah Model Great Commission Model
<b>2. Key Scripture Planks</b> The Great Promise: Matthew 16:13-18 The Great Commandment: Matthew 22:34-40 The Great Commission: Matthew 28:18-20 The Great Witness: Acts 1:8 The Great Mission: Luke 19:10 The Great Multiplication: Matthew 24:14
<b>1. Key Platform</b> Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative

*\*The M.V.P. Architecture Framework builds from the Bottom Up – Featured in the GO PROJECT.*

*\*\* Movements Thread Through Every Ministry Area of the Congregation.*

*– One Key Process with Variations Customized for Varied Congregations –*

**1. Key Platform:** The GO Process promotes healthy, holistic revitalization that embraces both the Great Commandment and the Great Commission by building two platforms: Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative. Church leaders tend to lean toward one or the other, but when combined, Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative, centered on Great Commission Ministry, sparks sustainable multiplication that builds congregations from within and reaches communities from without.

**2. Key Scripture Planks:** The Promise is that Jesus is building His church. The focus of our affection is to love God and love people. That love is expressed in obedience to His command to go and make disciples. Our witness begins in the center of where we are and then extends further and further outward. Jesus is on a search and rescue mission to seek and save and we are to join Him on that mission. When His message is fully multiplied throughout His world, He will come again.

**3. Key Models:** The Nehemiah Model reveals what happens when Spiritual Renewal meets Strategic Initiative. Concerned over the state of Jerusalem, Nehemiah wept and mourned, fasted and prayed. Then, with the hand of God upon him, he took action. The Great Commission Model reveals that we move in the authority of Jesus Christ when we follow His command to go and make disciples. More than evangelism, we are called to teach obedience to the commands of Christ and to rely on His presence through the Holy Spirit always.

**4. Key Teams:** The GO Leader Team is the aggregate of all church leaders, giving input to the revitalization priority and standing united. The Vision Team is a selected group of approximately six people who lead the revitalization effort. Prayer Teams surround the Vision Team to support its members as they lead with the power of prayer.

**5. Key Markers – ROADMAP to Missional Vitality:** *Self-Discovery* enables leaders to see the state of the church as it truly is. *Motivation* drives the church to take action. *Skill-Training* builds strength, knowledge and competence into the congregation in preparation for making revitalization happen. *Implementation* guides action on the field of ministry toward desired outcomes. *Evaluation* reveals results and informs GO Process next steps.

**6. Key Disciplines – Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church:** *Pre-emptive Prayer* provides power and protection for all actions to be taken in the GO Process. *Basic Bible* lays the biblical groundwork for a congregation to build its future on truth. *Cost Commitment* calls for high levels of sacrificial commitment to moving the church forward in realizing Great Commission impact within both congregation and community. *Missional Multiplication* solidifies the commitment and practice of going and making disciples.

**7. Key Paradigm Shift:** By default, church ministry tends to focus on the question, “How do we minister *TO* our congregation?” The GO Process shifts the question to, “How do we minister *THROUGH* our congregation to reach a lost community?” This paradigm shift sends the focus of ministry outward from the church with Great Commission ministry that strongly impacts the community. At the same time, by being mobilized for hands-on Great Commission ministry, congregational maturity is accelerated.

**8. Key Strategic Tool – the Great Commission Matrix:** The GO Process reaches its peak with the Great Commission Matrix, a strategic tool that organizes ministry through the grid of the Great Commission. At the heart of the Matrix is the transforming of Outreach, Evangelism and Discipleship from simply being programs on a list with other programs to being MOVEMENTS. These three movements are threaded through all programs or ministry areas of the church so that all become outwardly engaged with the community rather than being just inwardly engaged with the congregation. For example, youth ministry is not focused simply on ministering *TO* the youth of the church but is focused on ministering *THROUGH* the youth of the church to reach teenagers in the community.

**Combined and properly sequenced, these 8 Keys outline the Missional Vitality Process.**

## Appendix 2

# GO PROJECT ROADMAP *Tracker Overview*

### (Letter to GO PROJECT Pastors & Leaders)

This document is not the complete ROADMAP Tracker but Indicates Marker 1-5 Outcomes.

Pastors & Leaders:

Welcome to the GO PROJECT! The ROADMAP Tracker Overview is designed to give you a look into the GO PROJECT in terms of the OUTCOMES that can be expected when the journey to revitalization is completed. That journey will be a challenging, but thrilling, ride toward greater effectiveness as a Great Commission Church. In traveling across this 18-24 Month adventure, you will lay a Great Commission FOUNDATION followed by reaching 5 MARKERS:

MARKER 1 – Self-Discovery (Pre-Training)	ESTABLISH A SENSE OF URGENCY
MARKER 2 – Motivation (Pre-Training/ GO TNG 1)	SECURE LEADERSHIP BUY-IN
MARKER 3 – Skill Training (In-Training/GO TNG 2)	EQUIP FOR REVITALIZATION MINISTRY
MARKER 4 – Implementation (Post-Training/GO TNG 3)	BUILD REVITALIZATION MINISTRY
MARKER 5 – Evaluation (Post-Training)	REINFORCE REVITALIZATION MINISTRY

Though some of the following information might not be perfectly clear at this point in the GO PROJECT, know that all will become clear as the project unfolds. It’s important that you know where this journey will take you and what you will encounter along the way. So, the following aggregate of OUTCOMES has been assembled to give you a high altitude look at where you are headed:

**FOUNDATION & MARKER 1 OUTCOMES:**

- Launch or Introduction/Presentation Weekend Conducted
- Partnership Agreement Signed
- Markers 1-3 Digital Materials Distributed to Project Director
- Questing After God’s Heart: 21-Days of Prayer & Fasting for Revitalization* Completed
- Funding Secured
- WITH* and/or *Simple Church* Read by Key Leaders
- Congregational Prayer Plan Developed & Implemented
- 10 Needs in a Vitalizing Church Examined by Key Leaders (GO Leader Team if formed by then)
- Church Lifecycle Assessment Completed (Lifecycle Point Identified)
- Additional Assessment Tools Leveraged (if option exercised)
- Assessment Conference with GO Center Missional Ministry Partner Conducted
- Strong Affirmation of Commitment to GO PROJECT Demonstrated by GO Leader Team

**Note Date Completed for Each Outcome**

**MARKER 2 OUTCOMES:**

GO Leader Team Identified & Mobilized  
Training for GLT in Four Leadership Dynamics for Vitalization Conducted  
Vision Team Selected & Mobilized  
Prayer Teams to Support Vision Team Recruited & Mobilized  
Strong Affirmation of Commitment to GO PROJECT Celebrated with High Visibility  
(Congregational Communications Plan Developed & Implemented)

**Note Date Completed for Each Outcome**

**MARKER 3 OUTCOMES:**

FRI: Leader Conference Completed: Progress, Updates, Q&A, Planning  
SAT: GO Training 2 Seminar Completed:  
    Segment 1: GO Training 1 Review  
    Segment 2: Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church Workshop  
    Segment 3: The Great Commission Matrix Workshop  
SUN: Preaching/Teaching by MMP Conducted

**Preliminary Strategic Plan: Four Disciplines of a Great Commission Church** Completed  
and Ready for Phase 1 Implementation

**Preliminary Strategic Plan: The Great Commission Matrix** Completed  
and Ready for Phase 1 Implementation

**Note Date Completed for Each Outcome**

**MARKER 4 OUTCOMES: Implementation Mid-Point**

**Strategic Plan for Four Disciplines Finalized, Implemented, Evaluated and Adjusted**  
Now Ready for Phase 2 Implementation

**Strategic Plan for Great Commission Matrix Ministry Finalized, Implemented, Evaluated and Adjusted**  
Now Ready for Phase 2 Implementation

**Note Date Completed for Each Outcome**

**MARKER 4 OUTCOMES: Implementation Final Point**

Implementation of Phases 1 and 2 of the Strategic Plan for Four Disciplines Completed

Implementation of Phases 1 and 2 of the Strategic Plan for GC Matrix Ministries Completed

**Note Date Completed for Each Outcome**

**MARKER 5 OUTCOMES:**

**THE CHURCH LIFECYCLE: Assessed at FINAL POINT**

Upon reaching the FINAL POINT of the GO PROJECT, the church will have launched a new lifecycle and a final lifecycle assessment will indicate that the church is firmly on the **INCLINE**. A proven Strategic Plan will be in place.

**Note Date Completed for This Outcome**

**What is a Great Commission Church?** A Great Commission Church is a church that is fully committed to being obedient to the Great Commission and to organizing its ministry through the strategic grid of the Great Commission. This is accomplished in the GO PROJECT through the use of the Great Commission Matrix. With this tool, church leaders implement ministry in each ministry area through the “movements” of Outreach (GO), Evangelism (MAKE) and Discipleship (Disciples). Simply stated, the ministries of the church are turned outward toward the community and the ministry paradigm shifts from ministry TO the congregation to ministry THROUGH the congregation in reaching the harvest of souls that populates the community. Here’s the surprise – the congregation that is ministered THROUGH grows deeper in faith and maturity than the congregation that is ministered TO as ministry spectators become ministers and *passive* shifts to *passionate*.

Contact me at any time.

For the Harvest,

*Ken Priddy*

Ken Priddy, PhD

GO Center Executive Director

kenpriddy.com@gmail.com or kenpriddyepc@gmail.com (EPC only)

804-306-7942 – www.gocenterinfo.com



## Appendix 3 Church Lifecycle Assessment (excerpt from GO Training 1 manual)

### Three Macro-Stages

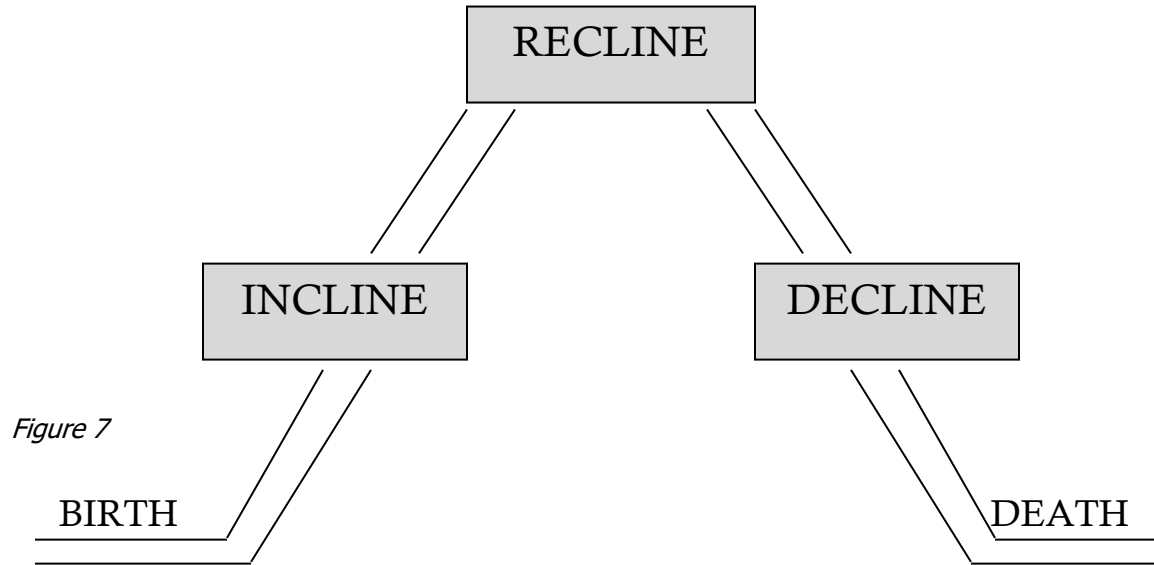


Figure 7

The Church Lifecycle can be considered in three primary macro-stages.

**Incline** is the stage of church lifecycle when the ministry capacity of the church is increasing. Over time, the church is doing more and more ministry and the quality of that ministry is better and better. Incline is a strong stage featuring health, growth and multiplication.

**Recline** is the stage of church lifecycle when the ministry capacity of the church levels off into plateau. Over time, the church is doing the same ministry over and over at more or less the same levels of quality. Recline is a tepid, tread water stage featuring ministry management by routine, filling in the blanks.

**Decline** is the stage of church lifecycle when the ministry capacity of the church is decreasing. Over time, the church is doing less and less ministry and the quality of that ministry is more and more compromised. Decline is a weak stage featuring decreases in membership, attendance, giving and overall impact in the community.

The Lifecycle Story:  
Vitality LOST Over Time  
Arnold C. Cook  
*Historical Drift: Must My Church Die?*

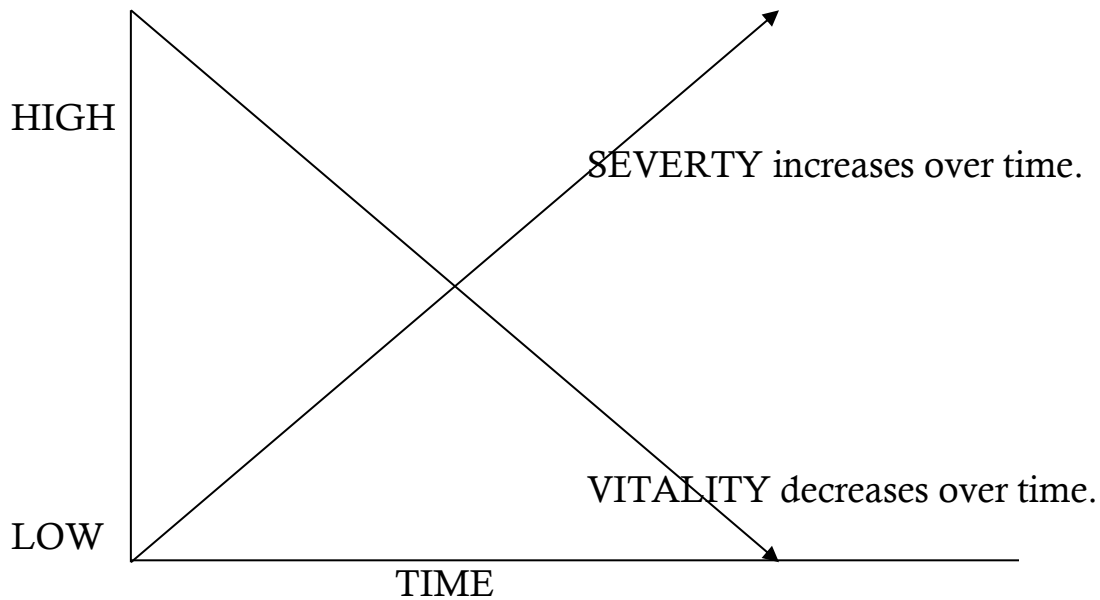
Figure 8

Vitalization Principle:  
Change ranges from  
MODERATE to SEVERE  
depending on the lifecycle stage.

Figure 9

The typical lifecycle story is one of vitality lost over time. The objective of vitalization is to intervene into the lifecycle and reverse the trend such that vitality is gained over time. A key vitalization principle is that church vitalization ranges from moderate to severe depending on the lifecycle stage. Churches on the upside of the lifecycle, Incline and early Recline, are facing moderate vitalization, while churches on the downside of the lifecycle, fully developed Recline and Decline, are facing a much more severe vitalization treatment.

The Catch-22, then, is that churches that are facing the most severe treatment concerning vitalization are at their weakest in terms of vitality, as illustrated by *Figure 10*. Therefore, it is much better for churches to embrace vitalization early in the lifecycle rather than late, as vitalization is much more accessible from a position of strength than from a position of weakness, especially when a moderate vitalization treatment is appropriate. So why don't churches turn to vitalization sooner rather than later? It's because church leaders are reluctant to tamper with ministry that's working, choosing to rest on their laurels rather than fix what's not broken. However, preemptive vitalization makes the most sense and creates the greatest ministry impact.



*Figure 10*

*If the prime organization does not refuel its momentum, if they lose entrepreneurship, if they keep capitalizing on the momentum rather than nourishing it, they will lose the rate of growth and eventually the organizational vitality will level off.*

Arnold L. Cook – *Historical Drift: Must My Church Die* p. 72.



## 10 Distinctive Characteristics of Incline, Recline & Decline

In considering Incline, Recline and Decline, it's helpful to note certain distinctive characteristics that separate them.

### 1. Orientation

Inclining churches are **Future-Oriented**. Inclining leaders are always looking ahead, making decisions today based on their implications for tomorrow. Leaders of Inclining churches would never trade what is best for the future for what seems best for the present. There is a sense of destination and all energy, resources and focus are fixed on reaching that destination.

Reclining churches are **Present-Oriented**. Reclining leaders are quite satisfied with how things are and if they could they would freeze time, preferring an eternal present where all Sundays would be just like *this* Sunday, characterized by a solid congregation with solid finances, good staff, good programs, and nice facilities.

Declining churches are **Past-Oriented**. Declining leaders desire to go back to some former time in the church, perhaps when Rev. So-and-So was here. Decline has a point of reference, a point from which things declined. So, the natural tendency is to want to return to the way it used to be, a time that is perceived as better and a time that is sugar coated with nostalgia.

Question: Is your church more: Future-Oriented        [   ]  
   Present-Oriented        [   ]  
   Past-Oriented         [   ]

### 2. Drive

Inclining churches are **Vision-Driven**. Inclining leaders have discerned God's vision for their churches and are fully committed to that vision. All decisions are made in light of and for the benefit of that vision. The rightly discerned godly vision is the point of reference from which all else flows.

Reclining churches are **Program-Driven**. Reclining leaders are convinced that the success of their churches lies in the strength of the programming. All decisions are made in light of and for the benefit of the programming. The programming is the point of reference from which all else flows.

Declining churches are **Structure-Driven**. Declining churches are living in a church world that is devoid of vision and devoid of effective programming. In light of this void, these leaders cling to the structure of the church as evidence that the church is still alive. They are preoccupied with elements such as organizational charts, boards and committees, finances, payroll, building maintenance, etc.

Question: Is your church more: Vision-Driven        [   ]  
   Program-Driven        [   ]  
   Structure-Driven       [   ]

### 3. Focus

Inclining churches are **Community-Focused**. Inclining leaders give priority to the group of people that is living in the community, as yet unreached by the church. These community residents are the objects to key Scripture passages such as the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Who are the neighbors in the Great Commandment to love your neighbor as yourself? They are the people of the community.

When the Great Commission commands us to go and make disciples, to whom are we to take the gospel? We are to take the gospel to the people of the community.

Reclining churches are **Congregation-Focused**. Reclining leaders give priority to the group of people that is inside the church, those already reached. Surely, a healthy church will focus on both community and congregation, but the natural inclination for leaders is to focus on the congregation at the expense of the community. Inreach has its own voice, but outreach needs an advocate. Otherwise the focus will be so heavily weighted toward the congregation that the community will be ignored. The church that fails to reach its community ultimately finds itself on the backside of the lifecycle.

Declining churches are **Core-Focused**. Declining leaders focus on a remnant of the declining church whose influence becomes stronger as the church grows smaller. Key influencers in this core often prove to be barriers to growth as they remain entrenched in their authority and hold the congregation hostage by means of that authority and influence. One key element that is leveraged in this way is money. Often the influencers in the core give significant percentages of the church's budget. Others in the core believe that the church couldn't sustain without that income, so they acquiesce to the influencer's demands.

Question: Is your church more: Community-Focused [ ]  
Congregation-Focused [ ]  
Core-Focused [ ]

#### 4. Attitude

Inclining churches are **Innovative** in their approach to ministry. They keep abreast of new ideas and developments and thrive on making good ministry better through creativity and experimentation. Inclining leaders will adjust, modify and even replace ministries, programs or systems that are working well if they determine that something new would bring greater benefit. Constantly being in research and development mode and putting new prototypes on the field is labor intensive, but Inclining leaders are willing to pay that price.

Reclining churches are **Routine** in their approach to ministry. If the machinery of ministry is working, don't mess with it. This approach might best be described as fill-in-the-blanks ministry. Make sure people, curriculum, programming and the like are in place and let the system run. Templates are developed as much as possible for standardization, such as a Sunday morning bulletin template that gets filled in by ministry leaders with song titles, sermon title and text, announcements, etc. Often in this environment, leaders of different ministries or departments rarely communicate but simply make sure the blanks for which they are responsible are filled.

Declining churches are **Complacent** in their approach to ministry. It's not that Declining leaders don't care, it's that they are resigned to the belief that they cannot make the future happen, but can only wait and let it happen. In a sense, they see themselves as victims of circumstances and consequently hope that these external circumstances will change so that they will be less victimized. This is a passive posture that incubates in the wishful thinking that somehow God will do something to better their plight. They believe that God does great things through His church, but struggle to believe that He would do something great in theirs.

Question: Is your church more: Innovative [ ]  
Routine [ ]  
Complacent [ ]

## 5. Faith

Inclining churches exercise **High-Risk Faith**. Inclining leaders are committed to following God wherever He leads without contingency. As such, no risk is too high when God's leading is ascertained. Given this proclivity, much time and energy are invested in pursuit of God's leading with an expectation that God will in fact guide these leaders on their journey of faithfulness, a faith journey that is willing to risk all but that faith.

Reclining churches exercise **Low-Risk Faith**. Reclining leaders are surely committed to following God, but are also committed to guarding resources and all that has been accomplished carefully. These leaders are willing to try new ideas, but in a controlled environment where not much is at stake if the new endeavor fails.

Declining churches exercise **No-Risk Faith**. Declining leaders are committed to protecting whatever limited resources remain and therefore will not put those resources at risk. They see this as prudent, as stretching resources out as long as possible in the hope that God will make some unanticipated move at some point and make ministry better, as if the state of their ministry is God's fault.

Question: Does your church exercise:    High-Risk Faith [   ]  
  Low-Risk Faith [   ]  
  No-Risk Faith [   ]

## 6. Decisions

Given its High-Risk Faith, Inclining churches make **Faith Decisions**. Inclining leaders will move forward in faith despite the fact that things might not add up on paper, despite the fact that not all of the needed resources might currently be available, and despite the fact that the outcome is uncertain and there might be much at risk. This is predicated, of course, on the belief that a godly vision has been rightly discerned and that God's leading is clear, compelling leaders to act decisively though there might be holes in the initiative.

Given its Low-Risk Faith, Reclining churches make **Resource Decisions**. Reclining leaders will move forward only when all of the necessary resources are on hand or anticipated, and when those resources need not be diverted from current programming. They see this as wise and prudent and in keeping with counting the cost before undertaking a new initiative.

Given its No-Risk Faith, Declining churches are paralyzed by **Indecision**. Declining leaders are fearful of making mistakes and falling further into Decline, so they hesitate in making decisions or fail to make decisions altogether. Ironically the decision not to make a decision *is* a decision, usually a wrong decision.

Question: Does your church make:        Faith-Decisions            [   ]  
  Resource Decisions        [   ]  
  or is it stuck in:        Indecision                    [   ]

## 7. Servanthood

Inclining churches place people in serving positions by identifying their **Gifts**. Inclining leaders understand that people are most productive and most fulfilled when they are serving in their areas of giftedness, talent, passion, experience and calling. Care is taken to deploy people in ministry accordingly in order that they are utilized to their full potential in a manner that is sustainable over long periods of time. When people are integrated into service through this approach, they understand that they are serving as a privilege, not as an obligation or as a means of simply helping out.

Reclining churches place people in serving positions through **Slot-Filling**. An inventory is taken to determine how many slots need to be filled to man each program. The congregation is then grabbed by the collar and dragged through the grid of these slots in the hope that a live body will land in each slot. Once this is done, the nominating committee reasons that its work is done since each program has proper coverage. Though all slots might be filled, this approach is not fulfilling for those involved and leads to burnout and ineffective ministry as people are not matched properly to service.

Declining churches place people in serving positions by **Default**. There are typically more slots to be filled than there are people, so those remaining in the church are likely to fill a slot because "somebody has to do it." Usually those willing to serve commit to serving in multiple slots, wearing so many hats that they are spread too thin to be effective.

Question: Does your church place people in ministry more by:

Gifts	[ ]
Slot-Filling	[ ]
Default	[ ]

## 8. Finances

Inclining churches approach money like an **Investor**. Inclining leaders regard the funding that God has provided as money intended to produce the fruit of ministry, so they invest that money in ministry with the expectation that ministry fruit will result, thirty-fold, sixty-fold, a hundred-fold.

Reclining churches approach money as a **Provider**. Reclining leaders are driven by the church's programming and see money as the financial provision to keep those programs running. The focus is on hosting program activities rather than on the fruit of ministry that might be produced.

Declining churches approach money as a **Preserver**. Declining leaders see the church's money as the financial means of the church's survival. The focus is on stretching the church's ability to stay alive as long as possible in the hope that God might unexpectedly move at some point to create more viable ministry that recaptures the past.

Question: Does your church approach money and resources more as an:

Investor	[ ]
Provider	[ ]
Preserver	[ ]

## 9. Leadership

Inclining churches are always seeking the development of **New Leadership**. Inclining leaders understand that for the church to continue to grow there is always the need for new leaders to move into existing and newly created ministries. This commitment to new leadership is reflected in aggressive discipling toward leadership and the sending out of existing leaders to create new ministry and open doors for new leadership. New Leadership is foundational to expanding ministry capacity.

Reclining churches are led by **Established Leadership**. With programming reaching capacity and leveling off, the leadership positions have been identified and filled, leaving little room for the emergence of new leadership. Those who come into such a ministry with leadership giftedness and potential are unable to realize that giftedness and potential, so their growth is stunted or they migrate elsewhere to apply their leadership calling.

Declining churches are led by **Incumbent Leadership**. Declining leaders have often been in place for long stretches of time, perhaps even serving for decades in the same leadership position. Routine prevails

as the same kinds of decisions are made the same way based on the same criteria with little change or progress being seen. The prevailing attitude is to do things the way we always have in the hope of a better result. At best, this is wishful thinking.

Question: Is your church's leadership creating: New Leadership [ ]  
or is it more vested in: Established Leadership [ ]  
Incumbent Leadership [ ]

### 10. Growth

Inclining churches grow by **Conversion**. A significant percentage of growth can be attributed to people coming to Christ and making professions of faith. Inclining leaders commit to the regular presentation of the good news of the Gospel and strategically provide opportunities for people to voice those professions.

Reclining churches grow by **Transfer**. The programming emphasis of the Reclining church draws already-Christian people, providing programming for all in the family that is appealing to the Christian who might attend a church with less attractive programming. Since transfer growth is adding to the church's growth statistics, Reclining leaders sense that they are fostering church growth and miss the fact that significant conversion is not taking place. The church grows by transfer, but the kingdom of God does not grow when already-Christian people church hop.

Declining churches by definition experience **No Growth**, or perhaps negative growth would be more accurate. With programming failing through lack of resources, the church offers less and less, losing more and more people in the process.

Question: Is your church characterized more by: Conversion-Growth [ ]  
Transfer-Growth [ ]  
No Growth [ ]

Transfer your check marks to the following chart:

INCLINE	RECLINE	DECLINE
Future-Oriented	Present-Oriented	Past-Oriented
Vision-Driven	Program-Driven	Structure-Driven
Community-Focused	Congregation-Focused	Core-Focused
Innovative	Routine	Complacent
High-Risk Faith	Low-Risk Faith	No Risk Faith
Faith Decisions	Resource Decisions	Indecision
Serve by Gifts	Serve by Slot	Serve by Default
\$ = Investor	\$ = Provider	\$ = Preserver
New Leadership	Established Leadership	Incumbent Leadership
Conversion Growth	Transfer Growth	No Growth

Figure 11

How many checks were placed on Inclining characteristics? \_\_\_\_\_

How many checks were placed on Reclining characteristics? \_\_\_\_\_

How many checks were placed on Declining characteristics? \_\_\_\_\_

Based on this simple analysis, where is your church on the lifecycle?

My church is on the Incline. \_\_\_\_\_

My church is on the Recline. \_\_\_\_\_

My church is on the Decline. \_\_\_\_\_

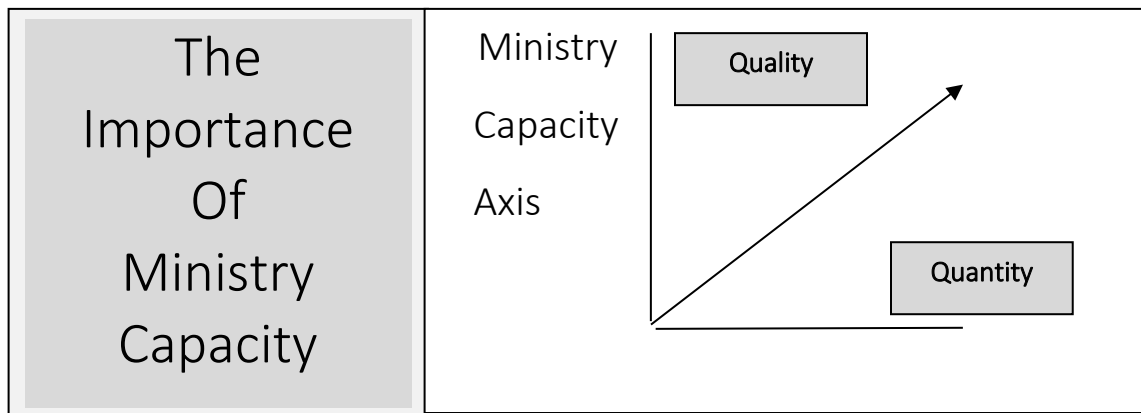
NOTE: Use these findings to complete the FREE Church Lifecycle Assessment online at [assessment.church](http://assessment.church).



at its highest quality levels requires tremendous time and effort. Those who are serving and leading tend to tire of giving the time and energy necessary for full quality capacity and begin to compromise as an inreach mentality reaches full bloom.

This full blooming of inreach causes church insiders to think only of themselves and not newcomers. Rather than prepare for the possibility of "company" coming to the church, they prepare only for the church "family," reasoning that all the time and trouble to be the best that they can be is really not needed for family. If this mentality is allowed to prevail over time, their prediction will manifest and no company will be coming. Once that happens, the natural attrition of insiders moving away, passing away or simply going away goes unchecked as no newcomers are coming into the church to replace those who are leaving, not to mention the failure to reach the lost through outreach and evangelism.

By the time the church moves into Decline, drop in quality and quantity is at full steam and continues until only the core and its limited resources remain. Occasionally a core is actually well off financially due to endowments and the like, but those resources are held for self-preservation and therefore provide no impetus for increased ministry capacity.



*Historical drift is the inherent tendency of human organizations to depart over time from their original beliefs, purposes and practices, which in the Christian context results in the loss of spiritual vitality (p. 10) ... Time is a great healer and a great eroder. It dilutes commitment, blurs vision, undermines values and destroys virtues. The darker side of generational theory would remind us that in questionable ethical issues what one generation rejects the second one tolerates and the third one embraces ... At every level of Christian living and ministry, time takes its toll. Complacency gradually replaces commitment. The desire to be served subtly displaces the desire to serve. Monetary motivation slowly takes priority over ministry. Wants evolve into needs. And, through it all, historical drift becomes the winner (p. 57). Arnold L. Cook, Historical Drift – Must My Church Die: How to Detect, Diagnose and Reverse the Trends*



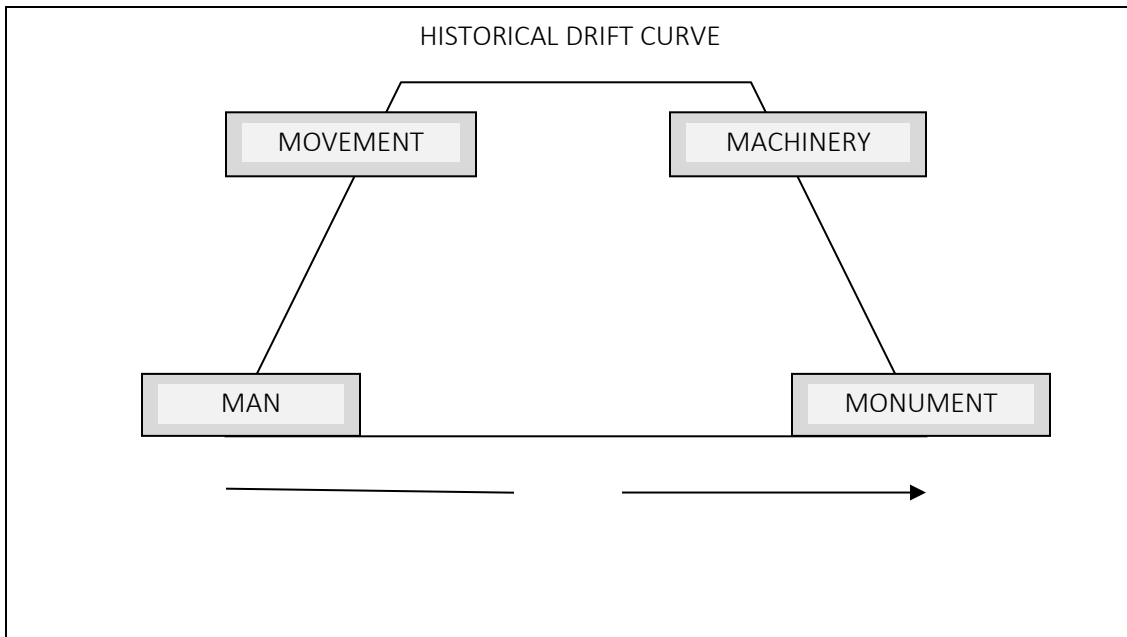


Figure 13

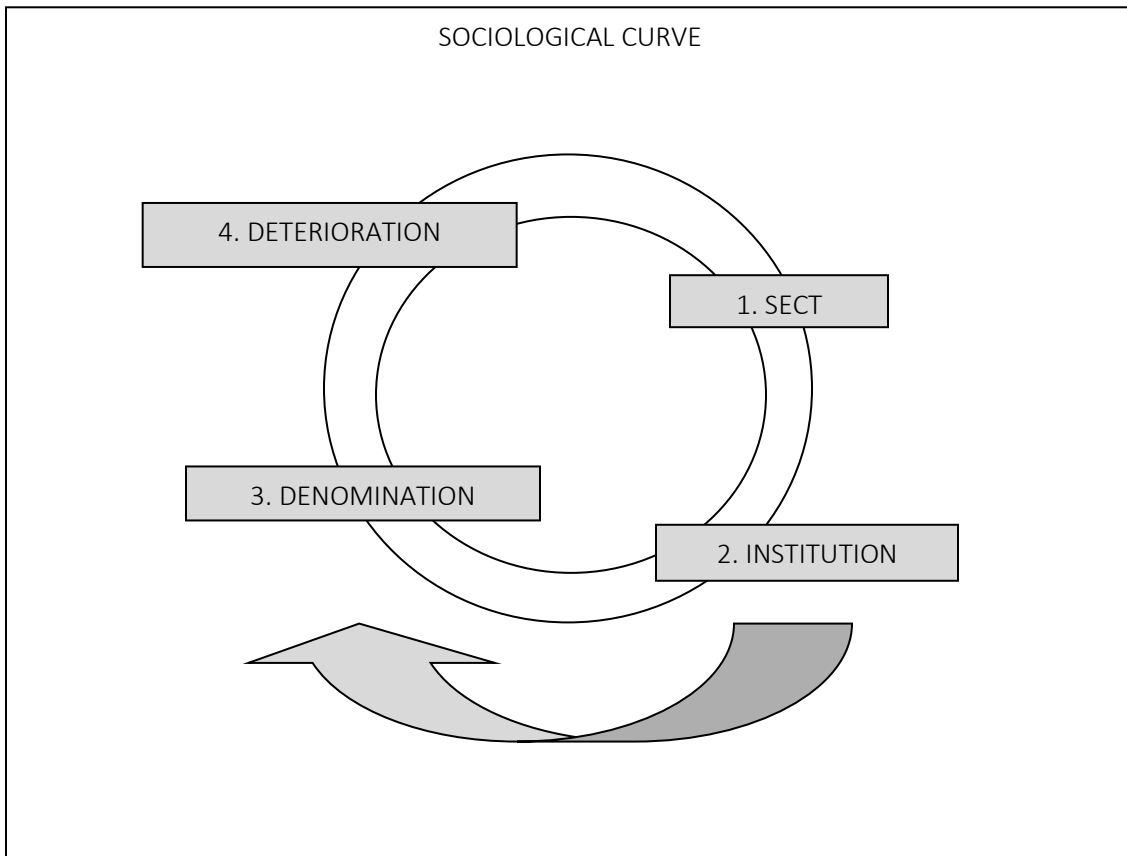


Figure 14

## **A Closer Look at the Church Lifecycle: Six Micro-Stages**

When church leaders first encounter the Distinctive Characteristics of Incline, Recline and Decline, they tend to see their churches as clearly in one or the other of these three stages. However, on second thought, many begin to wonder if their church is perhaps somewhere in between Incline and Recline or Recline and Decline. It very well may be that their instincts are correct and that their church's ministry is a blend of two lifecycle stages.

Incline, Recline and Decline can each be divided into two sub-stages that delineate a stage that is *emerging* from a stage that is *developed*. This delineation sub-divides the lifecycle into six sub-stages: Emerging Incline and Developed Incline, Emerging Recline and Developed Recline, Emerging Decline and Developed Decline (see *Figure 15*).

As the church moves left to right along the lifecycle, Emerging Incline will become Developed Incline as Reclining characteristics begin to manifest. Emerging Recline is entered when Reclining characteristics begin to hold more force than fading Inclining characteristics. Developed Recline, the first sub-stage on the downside of the lifecycle, takes over as Inclining characteristics disappear altogether and the first hint of Declining characteristics begins to surface behind dominant Reclining characteristics. Emerging Decline is seen when these Declining characteristics gain dominance over Reclining characteristics, and Developed Decline, near the end of the lifecycle, holds sway as all traces of Reclining characteristics fade, leaving a pure form of Decline in place.

Though all Distinctive Characteristics could be utilized in describing the movement of a church through the six sub-stages of the lifecycle, I am choosing to concentrate on four of the ten characteristics presented earlier for the sake of clarity and emphasis: 1. Orientation, 2. Drive, 3. Focus, and 4. Growth.

***Emerging Incline:*** As a church plant or church vitalization effort launches, the appropriate launch point is Emerging Incline. This is Incline in its purest form and positions the church as Future-Oriented, Vision-Driven, and Community-Focused resulting in Conversion Growth.

***Developed Incline:*** Emerging Incline gives way to Developed Incline as Reclining characteristics begin to appear. Though the ministry remains primarily Future-Oriented, it becomes secondarily Present-Oriented. Though the ministry remains primarily Vision-Driven, it becomes secondarily Program-Driven. Though the ministry remains Community-Focused, it becomes secondarily Congregation-Focused. During this stage there is still significant Conversion Growth, but Transfer Growth is beginning to increase. This is the healthiest and most productive season of the lifecycle.

***Emerging Recline:*** Developed Incline gives way to Emerging Recline as the primary and secondary characteristics of Developed Incline switch positions. The ministry becomes primarily Present-Oriented and secondarily Future-Oriented, it becomes primarily Program-Driven and secondarily Vision-Driven, and it becomes primarily Congregation-Focused and secondarily Community-Focused. The church continues to grow, but there is an increase in Transfer-Growth and a decrease in Conversion-Growth. A serious line is crossed when entering Emerging Recline that places congregation over community, setting the church on an inevitable course for Decline unless there is intentional intervention.

***Developed Recline:*** Emerging Recline gives way to Developed Recline as two distinct shifts take place. First, the characteristics of Incline disappear, and second, the characteristics of Decline begin to surface. The ministry remains primarily Present-Oriented but is secondarily Past-Oriented, it remains primarily Program-Driven but is secondarily Structure-Driven, and it remains primarily Congregation-Focused but is

secondarily Core-Focused. As stated earlier, churches in Recline, whether Emerging or Developed, are quite attractive to already Christian people, so the church continues to experience growth through Transfer-Growth, but Conversion-Growth disappears.

**Emerging Decline:** Developed Recline gives way to Emerging Decline as the primary and secondary characteristics of Developed Recline switch positions. The ministry becomes primarily Past-Oriented and secondarily Present-Oriented, it becomes primarily Structure-Driven and secondarily Program-Driven, and it becomes primarily Core-Focused and secondarily Congregation-Focused. Transfer-Growth might still be present, but it is decreasing and is not keeping pace with the number of people leaving the church. Conversion-Growth remains a distant memory.

**Developed Decline:** As the church slides further down the backside of the lifecycle, Emerging Decline gives way to Developed Decline as all traces of Recline disappear. This is Decline in its purest form and positions the church as Past-Oriented, Structure-Driven and Core-Focused. There is No Growth as Conversion-Growth and Transfer-Growth have both disappeared. Without severe intervention, this church is going to die.

**Vitalization Principle: The church lifecycle is a one-way street.**

The church in Decline looks back to a previous time in the history of the church and longs to return to that time. By its very nature, Decline has a point of reference, a point from which it declined. That point in the past is always more appealing than the declined point in the present. Church leaders instinctively want to move right to left on the lifecycle, returning to that perceived prime time. However, if the objective of new vision is conversion growth brought about by outreach and evangelism, this backing up on the lifecycle will prove faulty and will not bear the desired conversion fruit.

The problem with this right to left movement begins with the perception that Recline, whether emerging or developed, was the prime time. Recline has its appeal with its present orientation, its emphasis on programs, its focus on the congregation and its transfer growth. Churches in the heart of Recline typically feature solid staff, stable finances, consistent congregation, a broad range of programs and nice facilities. What's not to like? What's wrong with this picture is that it describes features of a church that draw the reached, not the unreached, and it tends to draw those among the reached who have little concern for the unreached.

Still, the perception among leaders is that it was the programming of Recline that drew a crowd. So, attempts are made to recreate the programming, believing that the programming will serve as a magnet to draw people in. The only people that would be drawn in this manner would be already Christian people, not the objective of outreach and evangelism, but even they would be reluctant to come to a church caught in the characteristics and environment of decline. This is the classic cart before the horse scenario.

So, if programming is the cart, what is the horse? The horse is the outreach and evangelism that result from the Community-Focus of Incline. A people flow must be created before programming has any relevance, and programming will not create the desired flow of unreached people.

The principle, then, is: *The lifecycle is a one-way street.* A church can only move from left to right. The idea is not to back up on the lifecycle, but **to use the present lifecycle point of the church as the point of departure to launch a new lifecycle.** Repeating this process every few years allows the church to stack one season of Incline after another, never lapsing again into Recline and Decline.

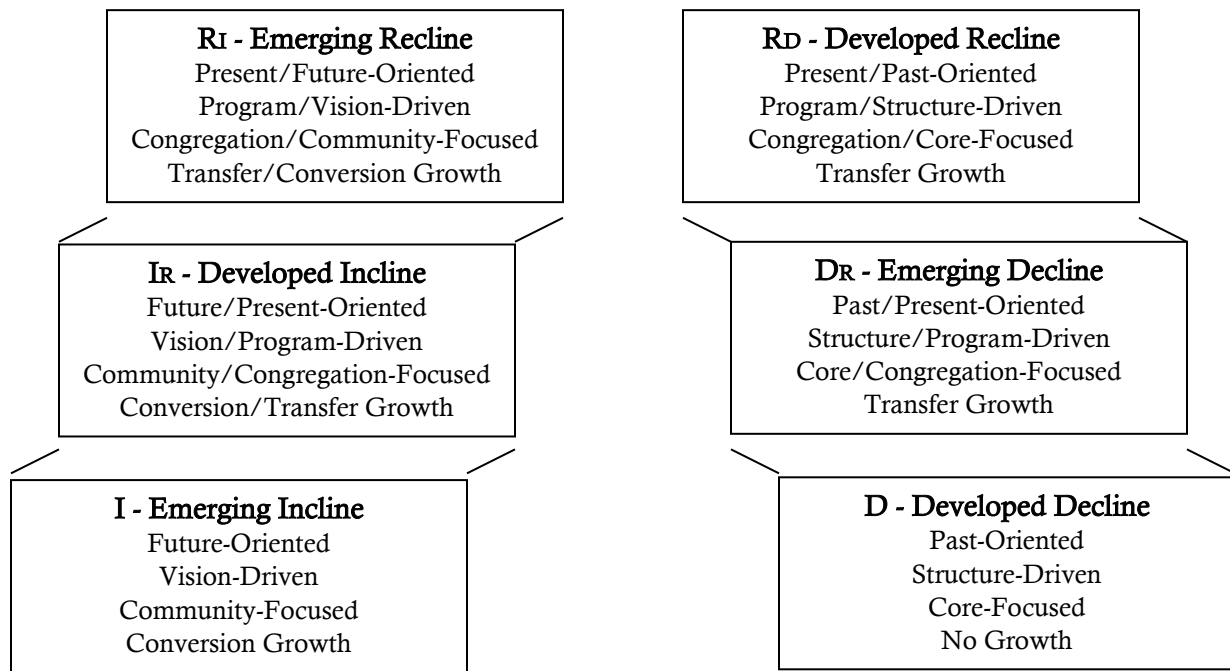
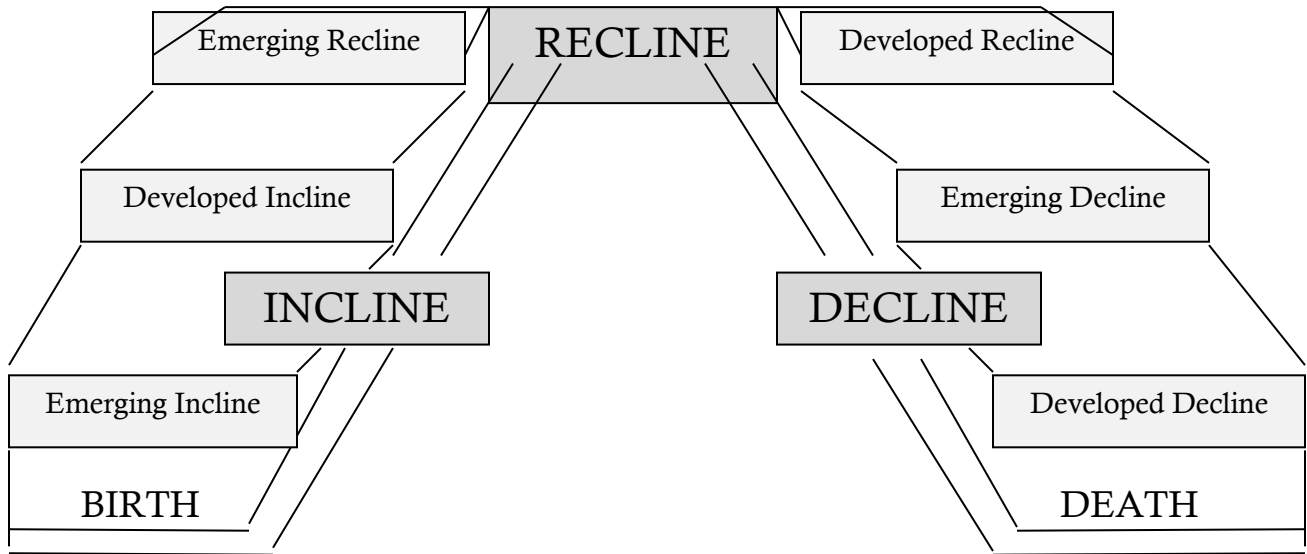


Figure 15

**Vitalization Principle**  
The lifecycle is a one-way street.

Figure 16





## Appendix 4

### About the GO Center

The GO Center inspires hope, instills vision, informs strategy and invigorates action in pastors, leaders and congregations as they serve God by finding who's missing and bringing them home. The GO Center is a Virginia not-for-profit corporation serving cross-denominationally that trains, coaches and consults with ministry leaders in gaining, sustaining or regaining Great Commission effectiveness. Led by its Founder and Executive Director, Dr. Ken Priddy, the GO Center works throughout the U.S. and occasionally beyond through on-site and online interaction.

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

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

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

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

**Finding Who's Missing & Bringing Them Home:** Simply stated, the mission objective of the GO Center is to equip and empower pastors, leaders and congregations in finding who's missing and bringing them home. The lost are the missing and Jesus came to seek and save the lost. As the Father has sent Him, so He is sending us. We are to go and make disciples of the lost, the missing, and the harvest is plentiful with fields ripe for harvest. We are to be His witnesses. The GO Center promotes finding the missing and bringing them home through outreach and evangelism, and, once home, they are to be disciplined in their faith en route to becoming true worshipers who worship the Father in spirit and truth. The Father is seeking such people to worship Him. Hallelujah! Amen!

Luke 19:10, John 20:19-22, Matthew 28:18-20, Matthew 9:35-38, John 4:34-38, Acts 1:8, John 4:23, Romans 12:1-2

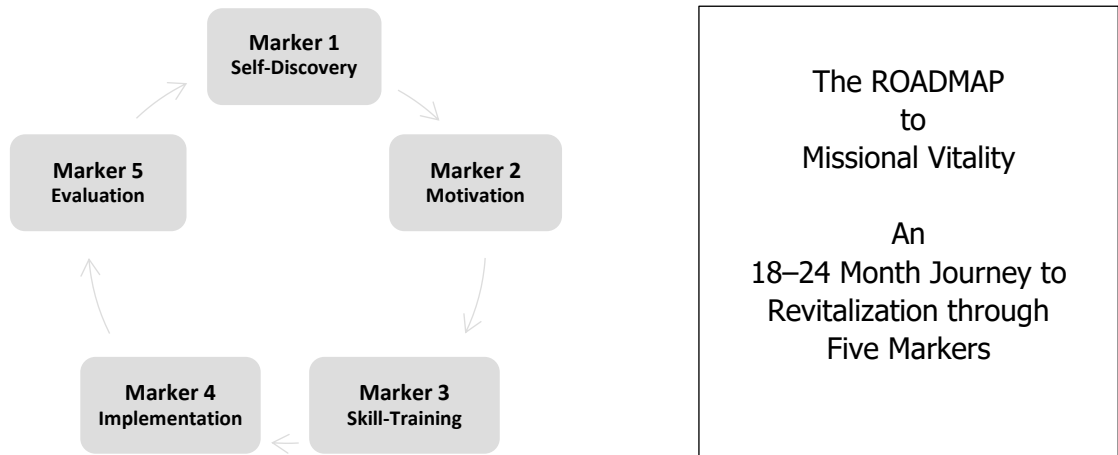


**Finding Who's Missing & Bringing Them Home!**  
 A Ministry of Vitalization & Revitalization in the  
 Greater American Evangelical Church through  
 Training, Coaching, Consulting & Assessment

GO Center Objectives: Reaching the Lost and Developing the Found through **3** GO Initiatives:

- GO Initiative 1:      Equipping missional pastors and missional leaders to lead missional congregations
  
- GO Initiative 2:      Equipping Christian business owners, business executives and managers, and working people to see their workplaces as mission fields, thinking and acting like workplace missionaries
  
- GO Initiative 3:      Equipping faith-based non-profit leaders to complete their missions and expand their service capacity

The GO PROJECT:



**FIND OUT MORE!**  
 Ken Priddy, PhD  
[www.gocenterinfo.com](http://www.gocenterinfo.com)  
[kenpriddy.com@gmail.com](mailto:kenpriddy.com@gmail.com)  
[kenpriddyepc@gmail.com](mailto:kenpriddyepc@gmail.com) (EPC only)  
 804-306-7942



## Appendix 5 About the Author

**Dr. Ken Priddy** is a seasoned ministry development practitioner, trainer and consultant who serves as Executive Director of the GO Center. Additionally, Ken recently founded Leadertown, a training and consulting enterprise that serves multiple for-profit and non-profit organizations and businesses. He has ministered as a revitalization trainer with Global Church Advancement and works collaboratively with Fresh Start Churches as its Director of Training. Periodically, Ken serves as an adjunct/guest professor with several evangelical colleges and seminaries. Ken and his wife, Sharon, have three daughters and a son, four grandchildren and reside in Richmond, VA.

Ken's ministry history is heavily weighted in church planting and revitalization. A former church planter and revitalization pastor, Ken, since 2000, has devoted himself to working with pastors and church leaders to establish health, growth and multiplication in their churches through a vitality process built on two platforms, Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative.

Dr. Priddy holds the Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees from Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, FL. His D.Min. dissertation is titled, *ReStarting the Dying Church*. He also holds the Doctor of Philosophy in Biblical Studies from Newburgh Theological Seminary in Newburgh, IN. His Ph.D. dissertation, titled, *A Theology of Multiplication*, has been developed into an e-book titled *VACANCY: Finding Who's Missing & Bringing Them Home*. This timely book considers the biblical and theological underpinnings of both qualitative and quantitative growth in the church.

As an author, Ken's main concentration is on developing training curricula for church vitalization and revitalization, a strong passion of his since the mid-90s. In addition to a robust inventory of training and assessment materials, Ken has authored numerous books including:

*The Silent Church: 39 Reasons We Keep the Good News to Ourselves*  
*Jubal's Worship Primer: Leading Worship & Leading Worship Leaders*  
*The Leadership Ladder: Developing Missional Leaders in the Church* (with Dr. Steve Ogne)  
*The Leadership Ladder: Developing Missional Leaders in the Church Workbook* (with Dr. Steve Ogne)  
*VACANCY: Finding Whose Missing & Bringing Them Home*  
*Simply Vital: A Jumpstart to Basic-Yet-Complete Church Revitalization*

### Contact Information:

kenpriddy.com@gmail.com  
kenpriddyepc@gmail.com (EPC only)  
804-306-7942  
P.O. Box 4911  
Richmond, VA 23220  
www.gocenterinfo.com  
www.kenpriddy.com