

THE TRELLIS AND THE VINE

THE MINISTRY MIND-SHIFT THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING



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Christ, and keep praying for your people. The motivation to serve and to be trained will come from the gospel and from a deep work of the Spirit in people's hearts. It won't come from you going on and on about training, and harassing people until they finally sign up! It's grace, not guilt. Don't make 'training' the new test of true discipleship.

However, the possibilities for training and growth in most congregations are endless, and endlessly exciting. And you will need to think through for yourself the possibly radical changes that need to happen. To help you do so, and as a useful way to conclude, let's try a little mental experiment.

* **Imagine this ...** What if...?

As we write, the first worrying signs of a swine-flu pandemic are making headlines around the world. Imagine that the pandemic swept through your part of the world, and that all public assemblies of more than three people were banned by the government for reasons of public health and safety. And let's say that due to some catastrophic combination of local circumstances, this ban had to remain in place for 18 months.

How would your congregation of 120 members continue to function—with no regular church gatherings of any kind, and no home groups (except for groups of three)?

If you were the pastor, what would you do?

I guess you could send regular letters and emails to your people. You could make phone calls, and maybe even do a podcast. But how would the regular work of teaching and preaching and pastoring take place? How would the congregation be encouraged to persevere in love and good deeds, especially in such trying circumstances? And what

about evangelism? How would new people be reached, contacted and followed up? There could be no men's breakfasts, no coffee mornings, no evangelistic courses or outreach meetings. Nothing.

You could, of course, revert to the ancient practice of visiting your congregation house-to-house, and door-knocking in the local area to contact new people. But how as a pastor could you possibly meet with and teach all 120 adults in your congregation, let alone their children? Let alone door-knock the suburb? Let alone follow up the contacts that you made?

No, if it was to be done, you would need help. You would need to start with ten of your most mature Christian men, and meet intensively with them two at a time for the first two months (while keeping in touch with everyone else by phone and email). You would train these ten in how to read the Bible and pray with one or two other people, and with their children. Their job would then be twofold: to 'pastor' their wives and families through regular Bible reading and prayer; and to each meet with four other men to train and encourage them to do the same. Assuming that 80% of your congregation was married, then through these first ten men and those that they subsequently trained, most of the married adults would be involved in regular Bible-based encouragement.

While that was getting going (with you offering phone and email support along the way), you might choose another bunch to train personally—people who could meet with singles, or people who had potential in door-knocking and evangelism, or people who would be good at following up new contacts.

It would be a lot of personal contact, and a lot of one-to-one meetings to fit in. But remember, there would be no services to run, no committees, no parish council, no seminars, no home groups, no working bees—in fact, no group activities or events of any kind to organize, administer, drum up support for, or

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attend. Just personal teaching and discipling, and training your people in turn to be disciple-makers.

Here's the interesting question: after 18 months, when the ban was lifted and you were able to recommence Sunday gatherings and all the rest of the meetings and activities of church life, what would you do differently?