

THE ART OF 
CHURCH GROWTH

COURSE
APPLICATION
GUIDE

8 Key Strategies to Move Your Church Well Beyond
the 200 Attendance Barrier

The Art of Church Growth

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Session 1

Structure Bigger to Grow Bigger

Eighty-five percent of all churches in North America never break the 200 attendance barrier. If you're taking this course, you're probably a senior pastor or a leadership team member at one of those churches and you want to know what to do with that statistic.

And even if your church has passed the 200 barrier, the issues that small churches face often linger to 300, 400, or even 500 attendees.

So the question is, why? Why do 85 percent of churches never break the 200 barrier?

The reasons aren't what you might think.

My story didn't start as the pastor of Connexus Church, a church north of Toronto which twenty-five hundred people now call home and which twelve hundred people attend weekly. It started much smaller than that.

Two decades ago, I was a thirty-year old new dad, a seminary student, and the new pastor of three small congregations. When I say small, I mean small. The smallest of the three congregations had an average attendance of six. The second had an average attendance of fourteen, and the third (the megachurch) had twenty-three people on a Sunday. Our three churches barely saw forty people each Sunday.

Regardless of that number, God did so much in our midst. He did so much in me, a young leader trying to figure things out, because of one desire we had—to reach people. I imagine you share that same desire.

We wanted to reach our community. Like you, we wanted to make a difference in the lives of young families and introduce people to Jesus. I also realized that these churches were right on the brink of life and death—the denomination had been trying to close them for decades. They didn't want to call it a day, and neither did I. We believe that, against all odds, God had a future for those churches because he wasn't done with them, and he certainly wasn't done with our community.

As we started to grow, we ran into barriers and obstacles that no one—including me—was expecting. While reaching families and introducing people to Jesus is such exciting work, it's inevitable that you'll face barriers along that journey. It's those barriers that keep 85 percent of congregations from growing past the 200 attendance mark.

You might be tempted to think that the reasons for the barrier are spiritual. Maybe the leaders need to pray more. Perhaps the congregation doesn't have enough faith. Maybe you need to love people better. Or perhaps there are problems with the facility.

Believe it or not, these are almost never the reasons. There are many leaders of small churches who pray intensely, who love people and love God, who have immense faith, and their buildings are actually fine for the stage they're in. And yet, they still can't push past the 200 barrier.

So, again, the question is, why?

The real reasons churches don't move past the 200 barrier aren't spiritual - They're structural.

Think about a local “mom-and-pop” shop. You know the kind—the tiny corner convenience store where Mom does the books, Pop stocks the shelves, Mom runs the register, and Pop opens the doors and locks up. Nothing happens without Mom and Pop there. They rarely get a vacation. They're never off (except for one week a year, when they may have to close the store if they can't find someone to cover), and most of the time they're dead tired. Maybe they serve a few dozen customers each day.

Contrast that with a supermarket. Supermarkets are set up with a regional manager, a store manager, and shift managers. Someone specializes in ordering, shipping, and receiving, while someone else manages the bakery. There are workers deployed on each team. The supermarket serves hundreds or thousands of customers daily.

The mission is the same, but the supermarket's impact far exceeds that of the mom-and-pop shop. So what's the difference between the two? They both sell food and goods, after all.

The difference is structure. A bigger vision requires a bigger structure. A bigger church requires a bigger structure. Simply put, you need to structure bigger to grow bigger.

The truth is, a lot of churches run much more like the mom-and-pop than the supermarket. Their reach is stunted and they're exhausted. But those in a well-run organization find that they have a little more margin in their life, a little more joy, and they're able to reach a lot more people.

There are no solo acts past 200 in attendance. The mom-and-pop model has to give way to something different, something better.

What this course won't do is show you how to grow your church.

Rather, this course is about what to do as your church grows. So I'm not going to tell you what to preach or what to program. Instead, we're going to tackle the barriers you need to scale. The good news is that the structural barriers you face are scalable.

That's not to say it's going to be easy—hence this course. It requires hard work and willingness to change. Over the years, I've had to learn a lot about exactly how to scale those barriers. I've had to release leadership. I've had to change my patterns, and our church had to be willing to think differently too. But this willingness, this openhearted look at how God might be leading us to confront these barriers, has allowed us to reach our goal of reaching as many people as possible—of creating a church that unchurched people love to attend and leading people into a growing relationship with Jesus.

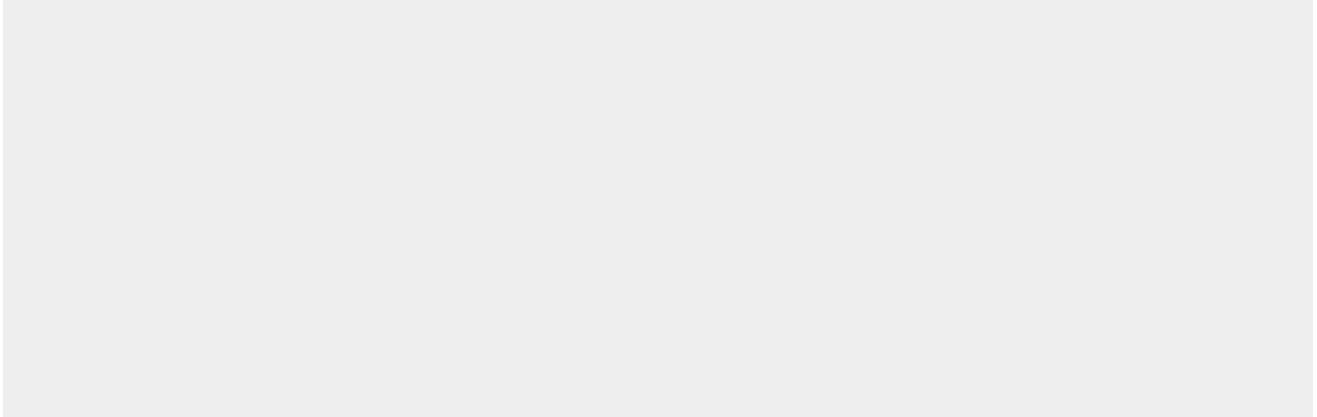
It all comes down to this: Do you want to reach more people? Can you break 200 without breaking you? Can you develop the systems and the personal rhythms that you need—as the senior leader, the board, and the leadership team—that will allow you to realize the vision God has for your church?

The resounding answer is yes. Yes, you can. You can break 200 without breaking you.

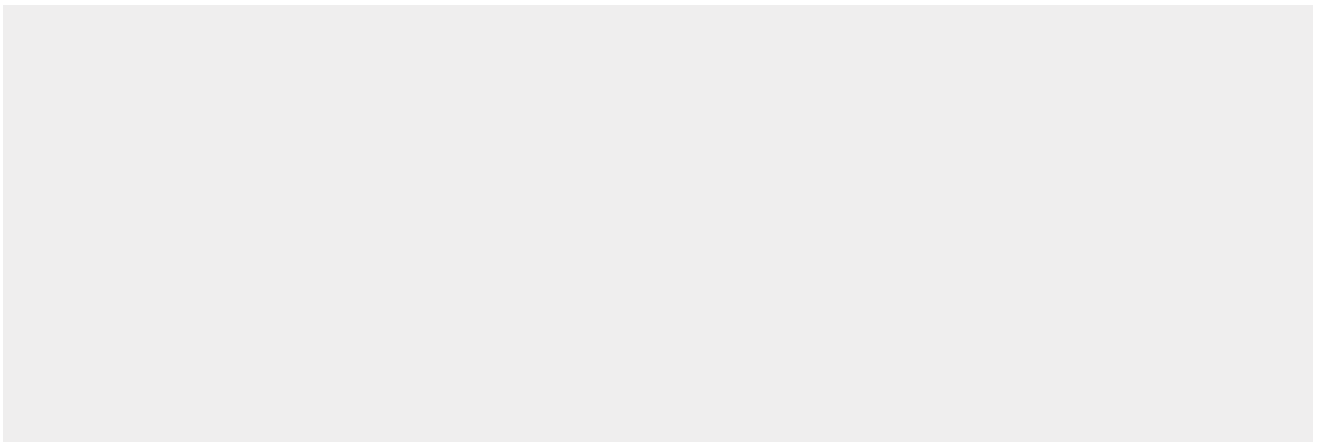
Over these eight sessions, we're going to share some principles that can help you break the 200 barrier and stay past it in a way that is sustainable for your church and for you as a leader.

Discussion Questions

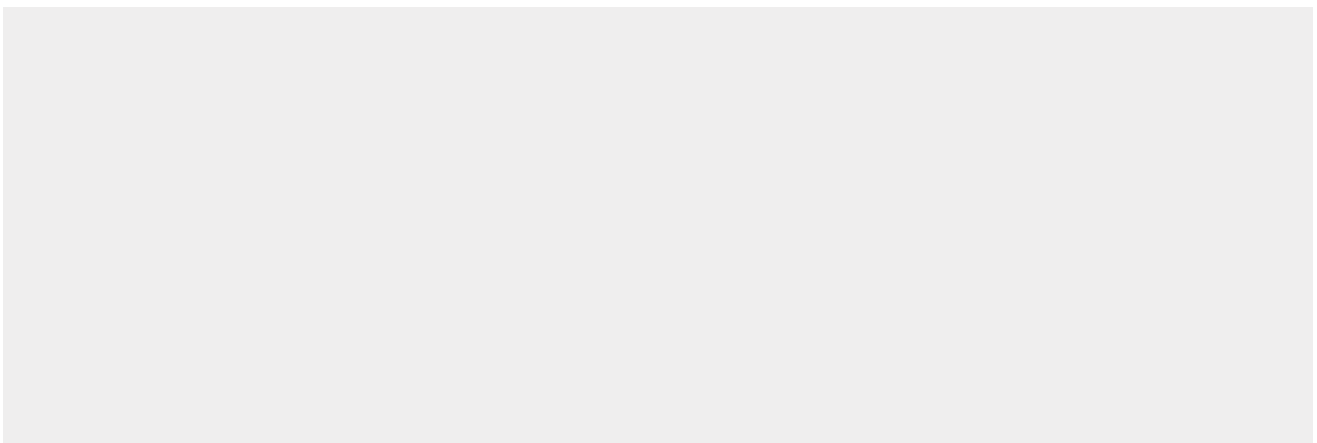
1. Think about your current beliefs. Why do you think your church hasn't been able to grow sustainably past 200 attendees?



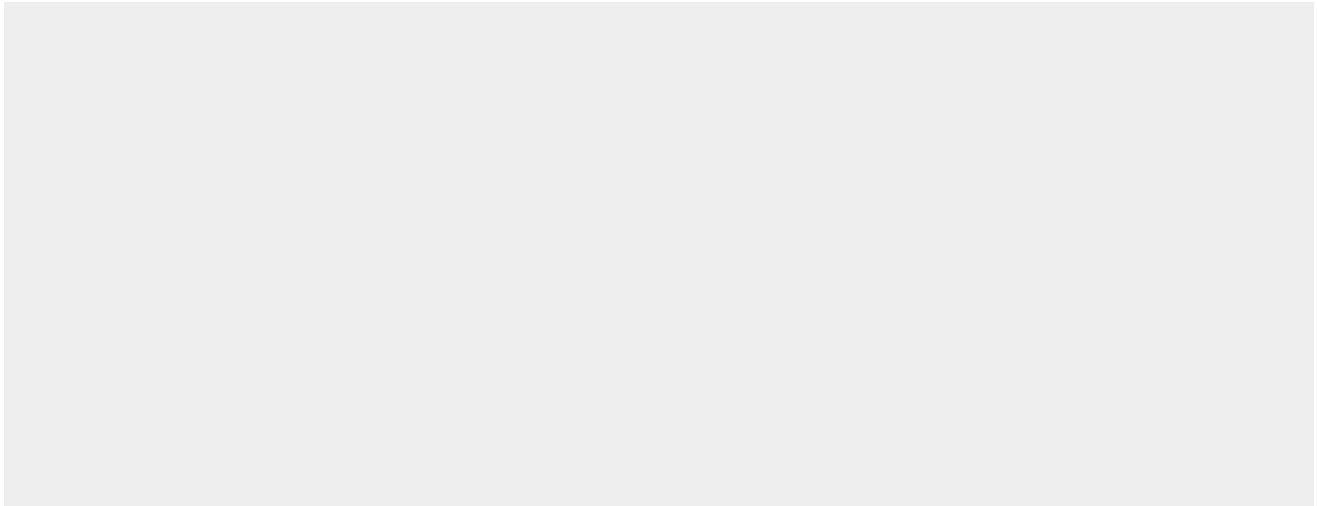
2. In what ways does your church run like a mom-and-pop shop?



3. Are there ways in which you're starting to structure things more like a supermarket would?

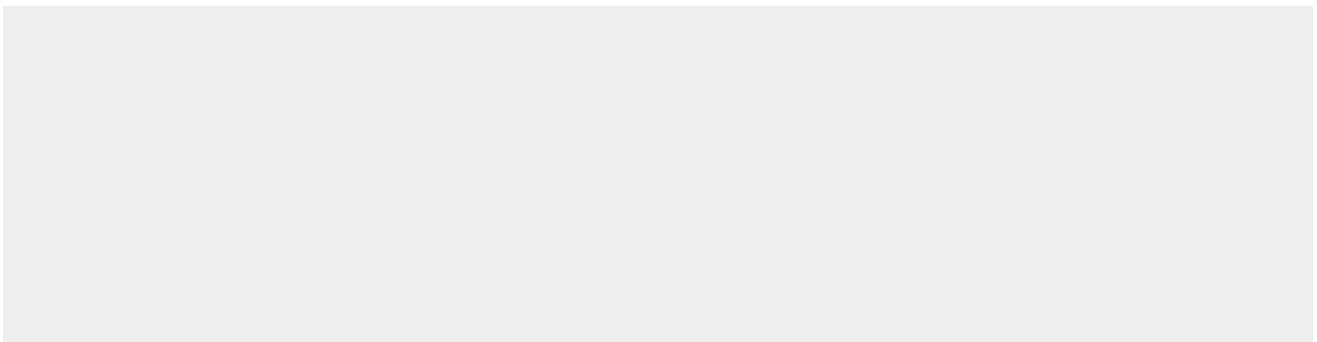


4. In other jobs you've held, have you seen the company scale and structure bigger to grow bigger? What did you learn from that?

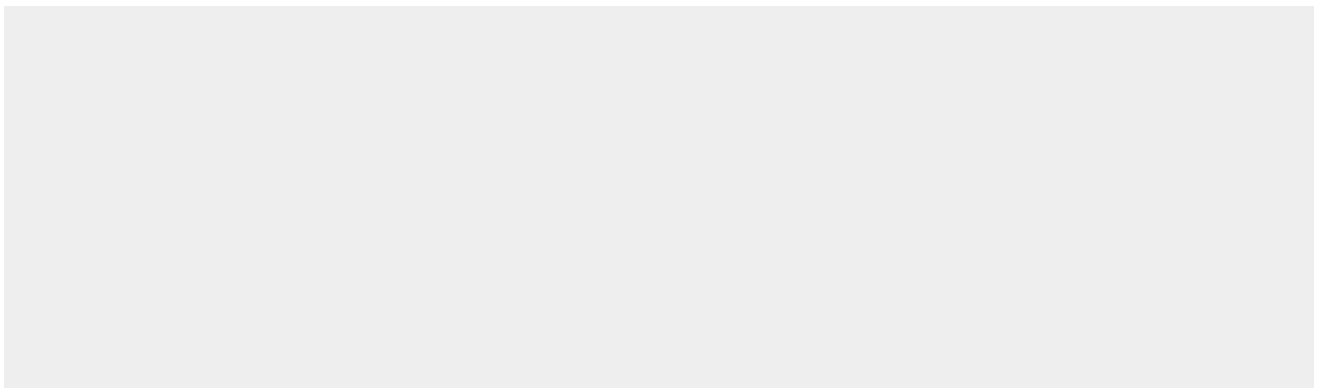


Get Practical

1. Name at least three structural obstacles you believe your church is currently facing.



2. While this course will take you through how to tackle specific obstacles, are there initial steps you can take as a team to tackle them?

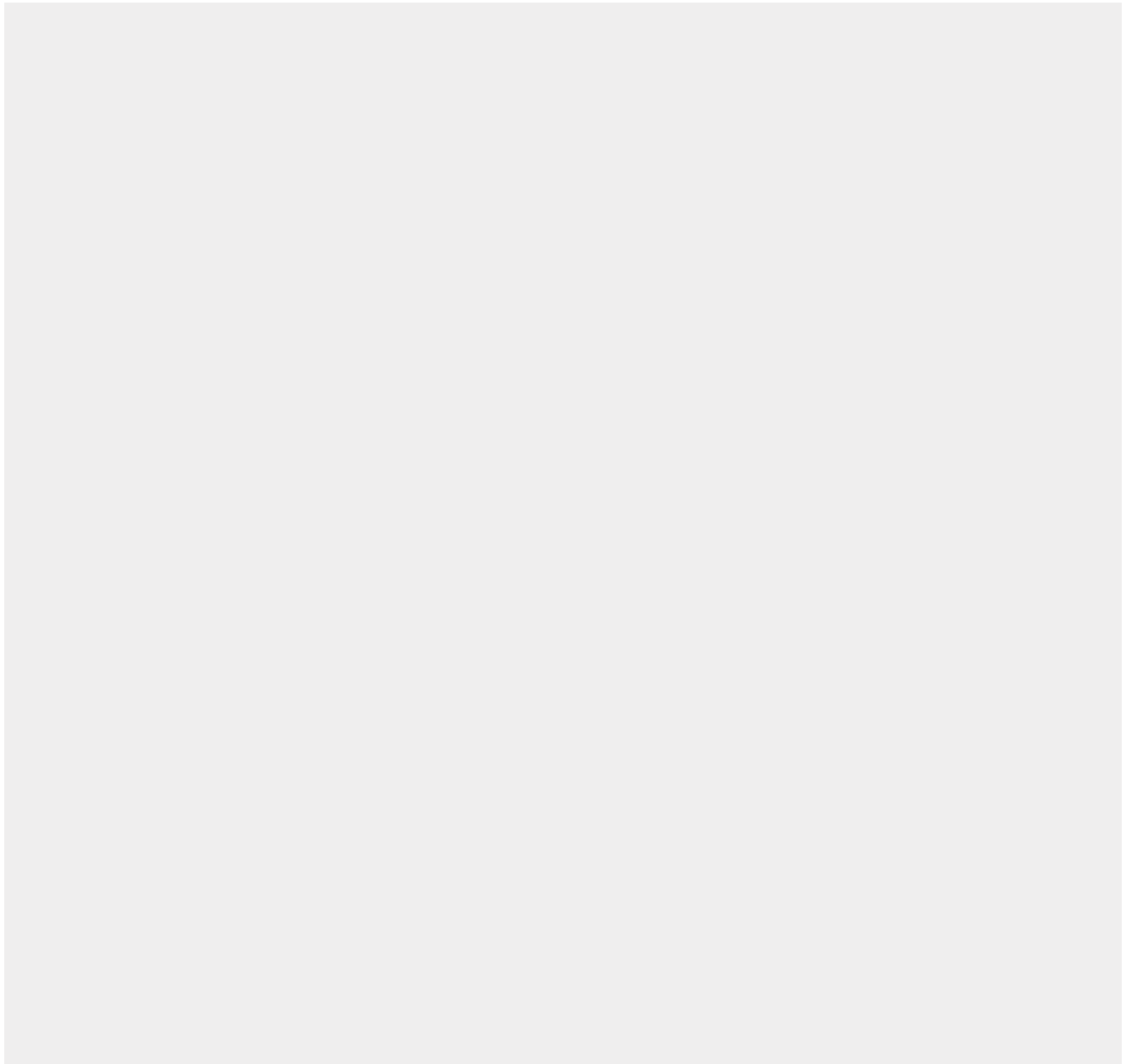


Make it Happen

Talk is cheap. Action produces traction. End this first session by designing an action plan for the remainder of this course. Here's a simple framework you can use for the plan:

1. Assign responsibilities (Who will do what?).
2. Determine accountability (What happens if we don't do what we say we're going to do?).
3. Create a timeline (When will you do what you say you're going to do?).

Starting with Session Two, you'll develop specific tasks to add to your action plan.





Session 2

The Pastor Who Does Everything

In Session One, we saw that the key to breaking the 200 barrier is to structure bigger to grow bigger. But what does that look like? That's what the rest of this course is about.

The first barrier you need to scale in order to structure bigger deals with the expectation that the pastor should do everything. In any small church, the idea that the pastor does everything probably sounds familiar. The expectations on the pastor are significant. He or she is supposed to prepare a message, lead the Bible study, show up early to set up chairs, organize the next event, make hospital visits, recruit volunteers, and make sure to care for themselves well enough that they don't burn out. The list of activities is as comprehensive as anything and everything the church does. Whether you're in a mainline denomination or in a church plant that meets in a school, there is a predominant bias in small churches toward the pastor doing everything.

So why do we end up there? Why do almost all small (and even midsized) churches expect the pastor to do everything?

There are at least three reasons.

First, seminaries expect pastors to lead this way. We lead this way because most of us are trained this way. The long-established tradition is that the pastor is going to be present at everything, involved in everything, initiate everything, and maybe even lead everything.

The second reason involves congregational expectations. Since this is the way most people have seen their churches operate for decades, they simply expect that the pastor will be part of everything. After all, you are the pastor.

Finally, there are the personal expectations of the pastors themselves. Most pastors have never considered an alternative to doing everything themselves. In their minds, it's the only way to do it.

But push this line of thinking a little further, and you'll soon see a myriad of problems. I ran into an uncomfortable reality as our church began to push past 200.

I quickly learned that there are plenty of things I could do but which I'm not that good at. As I tried to do everything, I soon saw the limits of my gifting and ability. I realized I could create a bulletin for Sunday (complete with clip art), but I wasn't good at it. I could (and did) run a Vacation Bible Camp, but I wasn't great at it.

What's the point? Most of us are only good at a few things. I've learned over time that my principal giftings are communication and vision casting. If I spend time trying to teach myself graphic design so I can create better bulletins, I'm cheating the time that I have available to become a better communicator and a better vision caster (which will help us accomplish our mission far more powerfully than good graphics would anyway). If I'm trying to organize every fundraiser, bake sale, and event and lead every Bible study, that's cheating my gifts, because I've only got so much time.

My time is finite. My energy is finite. My reach is finite. The same is true for every leader.

If you do everything, your church's ministry will only be as large as your personal reach.

Think about it. Your reach is only so big, and the ministry of the church is inevitably bigger than the senior pastor's personal reach.

Further, if the pastor does everything, it's a complete denial of how God designed the church to work.

Beyond the pastor, there's something deeper at work. God designed the church to work through the giftings of the people who are a part of it— the gifts of all the believers. This isn't just leadership theory, it's biblical (see 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4). When you convince yourself that you are the one who has to lead everything, you're actually denying the gifting of the people God has brought into your midst. These people would not only do a good job but, ultimately, they will do a better job than you can alone. God designed it that way.

According to Scripture, the job of pastors and leaders is to equip and prepare God's people for ministry in order to release their God-given abilities and giftings (Eph. 4:11–13). The church works when we all work.

So how do you get from the place where you're doing everything to the point where the church is doing what the church should do?

There's a journey you must take in order get there. I had to make it. It's hard, but it's doable. Here are the five shifts you need to make if you're going to stop doing everything.

Shift One: Stop Leading Everything

When you're leading something, especially when it's going well, it's difficult to look around and take notice of the others who could lead. When you encourage and release them to lead, they get to use their gifts and you see growth. It's the difference between leading the Bible study yourself in your home and reaching a dozen people or sending those people out to lead in their homes so that, together, you have dozens of leaders leading hundreds of people. The first step is simply this: stop leading every ministry your church offers. Move others into places of leadership.

Shift Two: Stop Controlling Everything

Leading is one thing; controlling is another. Many leaders struggle with controlling tendencies. The reality is, you're going to limit your reach if you have to have input on every decision and detail. Even if you're not leading everything, your desire to control things will limit the scope and effectiveness of your ministry. You have to empower and release leaders to lead. Having a clear mission, vision, and strategy will help you feel you don't need to jump in all the time, and it will help your leaders know exactly what they're released to do.

Shift Three: Stop Initiating Everything

As you begin to release the need to lead and control every aspect of your ministry, you may still be tempted to hold on to the desire to initiate everything. The problem with this desire is it assumes you have all the best ideas. When you gather smart and passionate people, they'll have great ideas. Harness those ideas in service of your mission and let them lead.

Shift Four: Stop Attending Everything

This shift is perhaps the hardest one to make. At least it was hard for me. I didn't make this shift until we were around three or four hundred in attendance. I should have made it sooner. It's a defining moment for the church when the pastor no longer attends every event the church holds. It's also a sign that the church is finally embracing a mission bigger than one person. But it's a hard transition to make. The first time I didn't go to an event at our church, I stayed at home and felt guilty all night long. It did get easier with practice though. You'll need to do this for practical reasons; you will have so much ministry taking place that it will be physically exhausting to attend it all.

Even as the senior leader who is passionate about the mission of the church and who cares deeply about reaching people, you can't attend everything, because you also have a ministry to your family. You have a responsibility for self-care. In order to be a healthy leader, you must allow yourself time to rest and to be refueled. You simply cannot do that while working eighty hours a week. It isn't sustainable.

But more importantly, when you stop attending everything, you release people to be the church. While this is a tough shift for leaders to make, it can also be a difficult one for congregations. There will be a season during which people are disappointed when you aren't the one present at every event or leading every meeting. Lead them through this season by providing clarity of the vision that's before you and by releasing them to use the gifts God has given them.

Shift Five: Stop Knowing Everything

As things grow, you will also need to stop knowing everything that's going on at your church. While the senior leader is ultimately responsible for everything in the organization, you simply can't know every little detail. In all honesty, you shouldn't even try. When God is doing so many amazing things, one person shouldn't be able to keep track of it all. There are wonderful people at work in your organization doing incredible things. If you release them to do what they do best, you will get phenomenal results. As you become more comfortable releasing ministry, your ministry will grow beyond your personal reach.

And that is how you will see your ministry fully realized.

While this is a tough journey, it's a necessary one if you're going to reach more people. The senior leader can't lead, control, initiate, attend, or know everything. However, when you make the shifts to let go of doing everything, then God can grow the ministry to the size that God wants to grow the ministry.

All of this begs the question: As the senior leader, what do you do once you have taken this journey?

You're not responsible for the whole thing, but you need to know your role. There are a couple of important questions to ask yourself. While they're simple questions, answering them ought to involve some research, self-examination, input from trusted advisors, and the help of some ministry gifts assessments.

Ask yourself:

1. What am I best at?
2. Where do I add the greatest value to the mission?

You should spend the majority of your time doing these things.

Let me give you a specific case study. When I asked myself these questions at our church, I discovered a few things about myself and how I could best serve our church. I discovered that when I was preaching well, and the series were fresh and alive, our church did better. I discovered that it was critical for me to pour my time and energy into making sure the staff, volunteers, and the church were aligned passionately around a common mission, vision, strategy, and culture. (We will spend an entire session on how to do this.) Another discovery I made is that I had to stay healthy as a leader, because if I became burnt out or exhausted, it had a negative ripple effect throughout the entire church.

When I was pursuing health, I could then help make sure our staff, elders, and leaders were doing the same. When we were aligned around a common mission, vision, and strategy; when we had healthy debate and discussion; when we were getting along, our whole church benefited. Finally, I learned that it was a major part of my role as a senior leader to make sure that the church was well-funded and had the resources needed to pursue the mission God had called us to.

These were the things that I focused the majority of my time on. When I was doing them well, our church would do well. When I wasn't, we saw a negative impact on the church. By asking yourself the two questions above, you'll discover what you do best and which of those things actually moves the mission forward.

You'll find your sweet spot. When you focus your efforts toward those tasks and release everything else, powerful things will happen in your ministry.

Here's one more thing I discovered: Leaders who do less actually accomplish more. It seems counterintuitive, but it's a well-established leadership principle. If you do less as the senior leader by focusing primarily on the things you do best—the things that add the most value to the mission— your entire organization is going to accomplish more.

When the senior leader begins to release ministry, it allows your church to go through a key progression most churches never make it through, and frankly, most businesses don't either. There are three phases in this progression.

Phase One: Nothing Runs Without You

You know you're in this stage if things only work when the senior leader is in the room. If you're in this stage, you can't miss an event, you have to be present, and if you take a vacation week, it's a miracle if the church can stay open.

In this stage, if you are not around, things become shaky fast. A majority of churches run this way, just like every mom-and-pop shop. But a better, healthier phase is possible.

Phase Two: The Church Runs Without You

In this phase, the church has learned to live without you being present every moment. You can go on vacation or take a sick day or even head off to a conference, and when you return, things have functioned well and you can go right back to operating in your sweet spot.

This is a great phase to be in, and it's the result of a leader delegating to and releasing many other leaders. But it's not the ultimate stage for any church. There's one more that only a few churches ever arrive at. But it's the most powerful and important phase.

Phase Three: The Church Grows Without You

You'll know you have a thriving mission if, without your direct involvement—even if you're away for a month or longer, or you decide to move on or into a new role—your church can grow without you.

Running without the senior leader present is one thing. But to grow without the direct input or involvement of the senior leader is another.

I faced this reality recently after having served as lead pastor for two decades. I knew the church could run without me, but I wondered whether it could grow without me. I decided that it was time to tap another leader to be the lead pastor of our church, and I moved into a founding and teaching pastor role. I'm less involved now than I've ever been in the day-to-day decisions. I attend an occasional meeting, but I basically focus on teaching, and there's a new leader running the church. One of the key reasons I did this is because I wanted to ensure that what started with me didn't end with me.

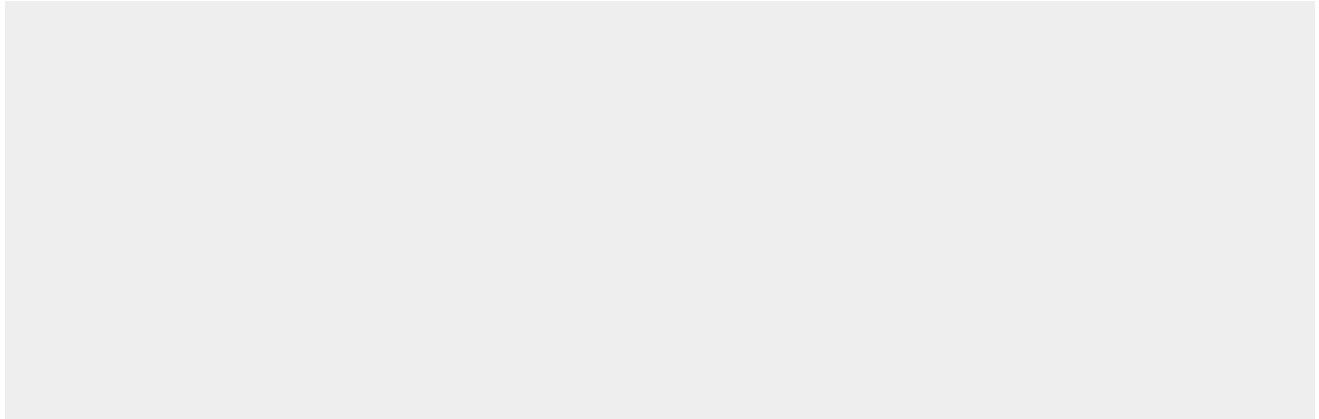
I'm grateful to say that after two years with another leader in charge, our church is larger and healthier than it's ever been. Although I still play a reduced role, the church has grown without me.

It's this phase that puts the success in succession. I believe this is the type of willingness you need in order to become the leader who doesn't have to do everything. Those of us who struggle with being control freaks, people pleasers, and insecure leaders will certainly trip up on this journey. Through God's grace, we have to be willing to confront the reality that someone may do things differently than we do, people may be disappointed from time to time, and we may not be the smartest person in the room. All of it is worth it to move the mission forward and to reach more people.

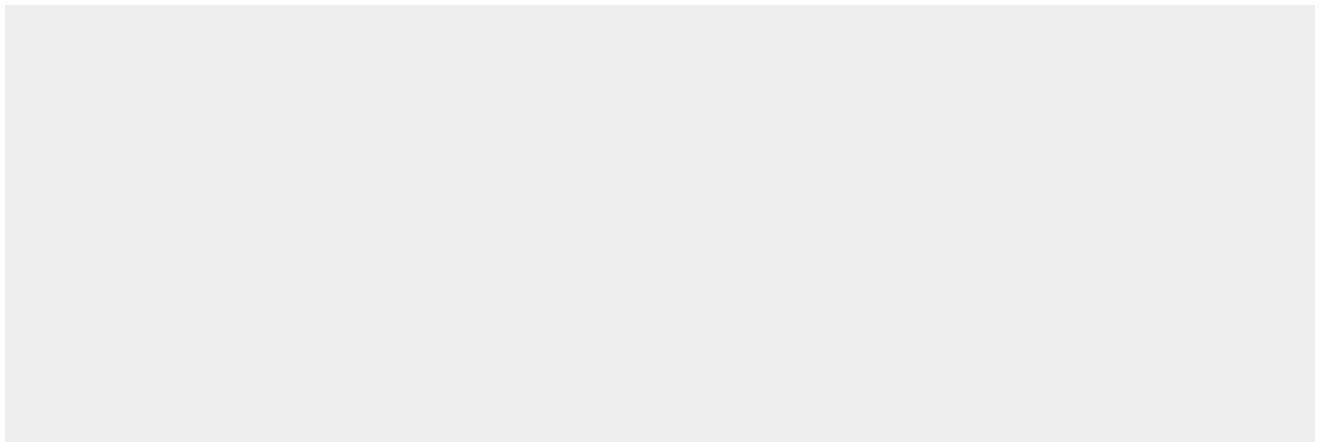
Take this journey, make the shifts, and ask the hard questions. You'll soon be the leader who doesn't have to do everything. And you'll find yourself leading a church that is poised to move past the 200 barrier.

Discussion Questions

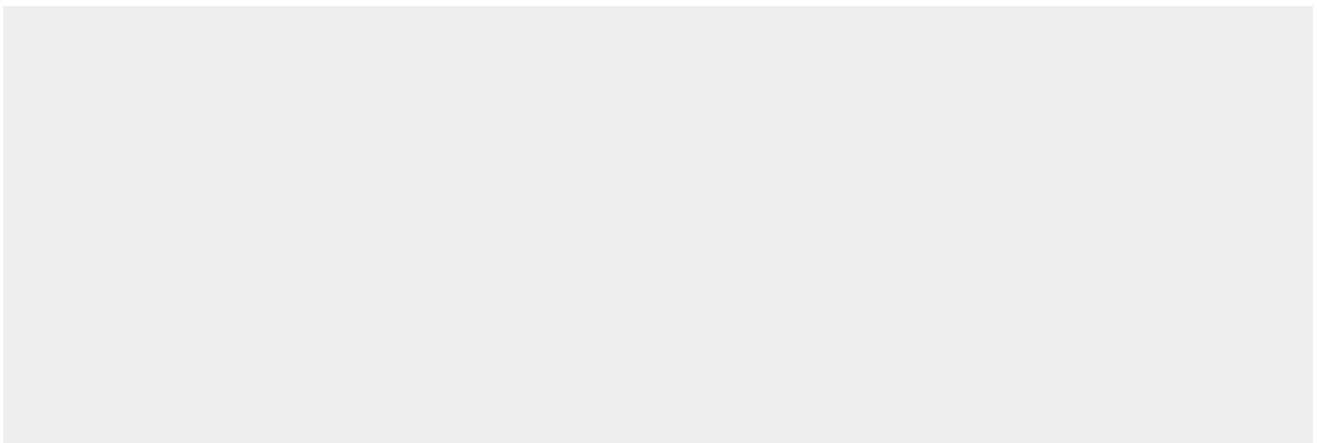
1. What current expectations does your church have about the personal involvement of the senior leader in its ministries? In your view, are they realistic or not?



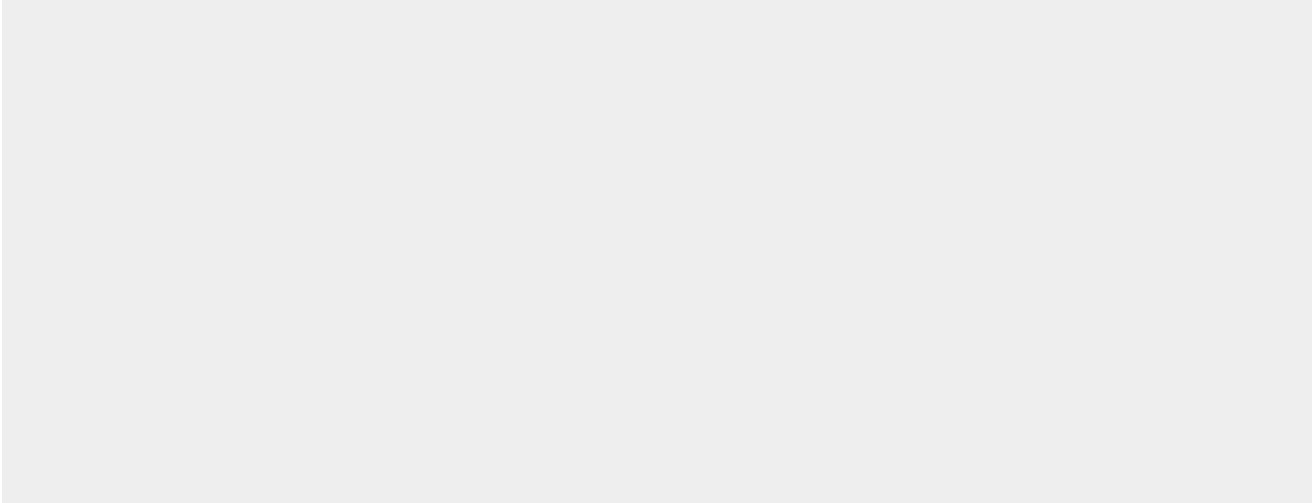
2. Review the Five Shifts described in this session. Which shifts (if any) have you made?



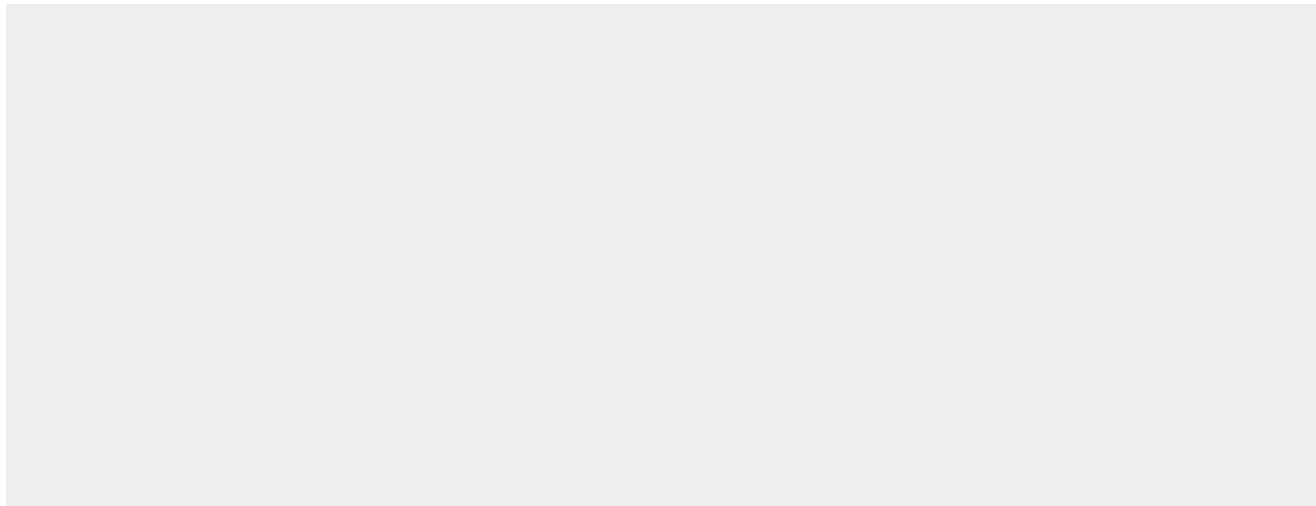
3. What do you think your senior leader is best at?



4. Where does he or she add the most value to the mission?

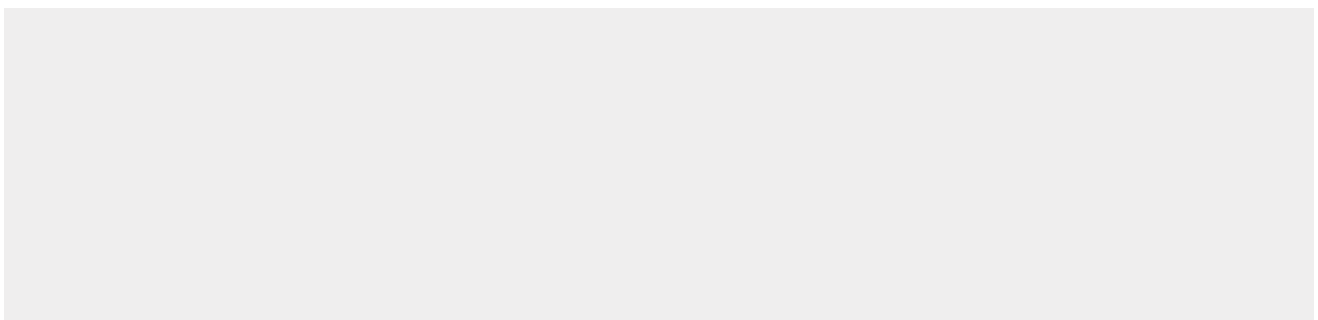


5. Of the three phases each church could be in (nothing runs without the senior leader; things run without the senior leader; things grow without the senior leader), which phase do you believe you're in?



Get Practical

1. There's a lot of content in this session. Prioritize which steps are the most important for you to tackle first.



2. What is the single most strategic step you can take to help the senior leader empower others?

Make it Happen

Talk is cheap. Action produces traction. Review your action plan from Session One and add these things to it:

1. Decide how you will help the senior leader move through the Five Shifts of leading, controlling, initiating, attending, and knowing everything. Make sure you include how to adjust the board's and the congregation's expectations of the pastor.
2. Determine what your senior pastor is best at and how he or she brings the most value to the mission. Then design a plan to help him or her focus on their best area of contribution.
3. Review the three phases described above and make a plan to help your church move to the next phase. What, specifically, can you do to help your church begin to run or grow without the senior leader?



Session 3

Scaling Pastoral Care

In Sessions One and Two, we covered structuring bigger to grow bigger and the idea that the pastor cannot do everything. These ideas are never more true than when you set out to create a sustainable system for pastoral care.

If you're in a small church, the expectation is not only that the pastor will do everything, but also that the pastor must personally shepherd every single person who attends the church. This includes visiting nursing homes and hospitals, attending graduations, performing funerals, officiating weddings—all of it. But as your church grows, doing all of the pastoral care becomes more and more difficult. Not only do you have more ministry, more programs, and more responsibility to attend to, but you have more people. The reality is that, if you're well-organized and you're a good pastoral caregiver, it's possible to do that for about 100 to 150 people with some predictability and some sustainability. When attendance begins to push 150, however, it becomes very difficult. When you push past 200, it becomes unsustainable. It doesn't scale.

Something I've learned in my years of developing as a leader and studying churches is that there's a paradox surrounding pastoral care: If you're good at it, your church is likely to grow because you're known as a warm, caring, personal church. The growth creates more and more care needs. The senior leader, under the pressure of the growing need, either a) burns out and leaves, causing the church to shrink in size to a level of need that is sustainable for one person, or b) stays, but eventually, people's needs are missed and they get upset, causing the church to shrink down in size to the number of needs that that pastor can sustain. Neither of these is a good scenario. Neither of them allows your church to continue to reach more people and lead them to growing relationships with Jesus.

Thankfully, I read a book back in the 1990s called *How to Break Growth Barriers*.¹ In this book, Carl George and Warren Bird solve this problem for us by asserting that the best thing you can do is to move from being the sole caregiver to having people care for each other.

Groups ministry has become the heartbeat of what we do at our church today. Providing pastoral care through our groups ministry means that the senior leader and the pastors are not doing most of the care. Groups are caring for each other. We have dozens of group leaders who are walking with and caring for hundreds of people each week. They're incredibly skilled at it, maybe even more skilled than some of our staff! They know each other, so they know how to personally care for each other. When someone is sick, the whole group goes to the hospital. When someone is in need, they buy grocery cards.

¹ Fortunately, the book was re-released and updated in 2017. Carl F. George and Warren Bird, *How to Break Growth Barriers: Revise Your Role, Release Your People, and Capture Overlooked Opportunities for Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

The generosity that is unleashed is unmatched. It's also a structure that's infinitely scalable. When a group begins to grow too large, it launches a new group so that there are now two instead of one.

Here is what I believe about pastoral care: 98 percent of pastoral care is having someone who cares. It doesn't have to be the pastor.

This idea might be met with resistance initially, as many new ideas are. But it all comes back to casting vision. Recalibrate expectations. Begin with why. When you explain to people that not only will they receive prompt, personal care from people who already know and love them but that your church will also be well-equipped to reach more people and care for their needs effectively, the outcome is remarkable. Groups-based care isn't just practical; it's biblical.

When Moses was on the brink of personal burnout and the people he was leading were frustrated that their needs were not being met well, his father-in-law Jethro confronted him with this ever-so-gentle admonition- "What you are doing is not good" (Ex. 18:17). His wise advice was that Moses couldn't do it all on his own. He needed to appoint leaders of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands. In this way, neither Moses nor the people would be worn out, and everyone's needs would be well served.

Even Jesus divided his disciples into groups of seventy, twelve, three, and within the three, there was the one he spent the most time with. The house churches of the New Testament were incredible caregivers to each other. Though we may have bought into the idea that pastoral care can only be conducted by pastors, it's clear that historically, biblically, and functionally, it's simply not true. It's not an example of structuring bigger so you can grow bigger.

While you guide groups to care for each other, there will be times when the need someone has exceeds the ability of the group to care for it appropriately. These needs are the remaining 2 percent. If 98 percent of pastoral care is having someone who cares, the other 2 percent involves needs that are best met through trained counselors.

The reality is, most pastors are not trained in counseling. But you likely have fantastic Christian counselors in your community. They have extensive training and can really help people. It will serve your church in incredible ways if you develop a network of trusted Christian counselors to whom you refer those whose needs cannot be met in groups.

Some people may have difficulty with the financial commitment of counseling, but I would suggest that your church subsidize that in some way. Doing so will certainly be less expensive than hiring a staff counselor. And having a varied network of counselors is a more sustainable option.

Now that we've developed a plan to meet the pastoral care needs of your congregation, let's cover a few additional objections that frequently come up in the pastoral care conversation. The first is the question of who will conduct weddings and funerals. This question gives you, the senior leader, an opportunity to make some decisions and establish some boundaries so that your systems can scale for growth. Will you accept weddings or funerals for those within your church only, or from the community as well? Which other team members can you train and develop to share in these opportunities? Keep in mind the time commitment for preparation, premarital counseling, visitation, rehearsal dinner, and everything else involved in officiating weddings and funerals. Then, taking into consideration the time needed, your schedule, and your priorities, decide how many you'll do a year and for whom.

For me, I limit the number of weddings I do each year to just a couple, and I do them only for people who are in my inner circle. I weighed the cost of that time away from my family and elected to protect my family time. While I no longer do community funerals, I do occasional funerals for deaths within our congregation. We have built a great team that shares these responsibilities, and I highly recommend a team approach to weddings and funerals.

Another pressure point of growth that is loosely related to pastoral care is people's reluctance about the church getting so big that people don't know each other anymore. A lot of churches feel this pressure when they consider transitioning from one to two services. Don't give in to the pressure to stay one big happy family. By offering multiple services, you're actually opening up more spaces, being better stewards of your building, and giving people options for when they can attend.

Though some people will be disappointed that they don't know everyone anymore, that's not a realistic goal. Truthfully, it's not the goal at all. **The goal is not to create a church where everybody knows everybody. The goal is to create a church where everyone is known, and there's a world of difference.**

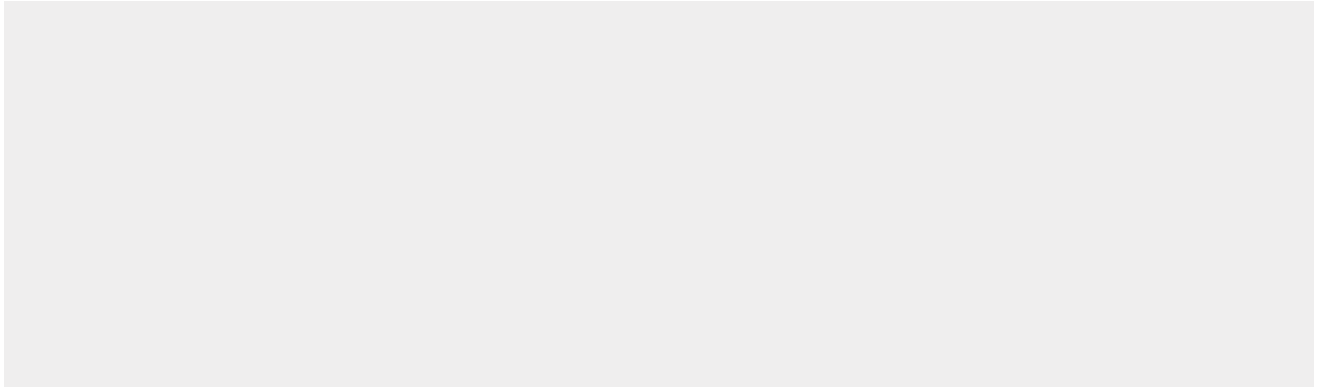
The last big question people have about accomplishing pastoral care through groups is this: If pastoral care is taking place in groups, does the pastor have no responsibility to care for others within the church? Actually, the senior leader does do pastoral care, just for a different group of people. The best practice, in my experience and research, is the senior pastor caring for the most senior leaders. In my case, that meant that my span of care went to the elders and to the staff. As our staff grew, it went to the leadership team. As the leadership team grew, it went to the executive team.

Not only is this sustainable, but it's also healthy for the entire church. If there is a loving, caring atmosphere at the top of an organization, the people who go to your church notice. It provides a sense of security and a model for how to care for their groups, and then you have people who serve longer and who get along well. It becomes a joy to journey with people when it comes to pastoral care.

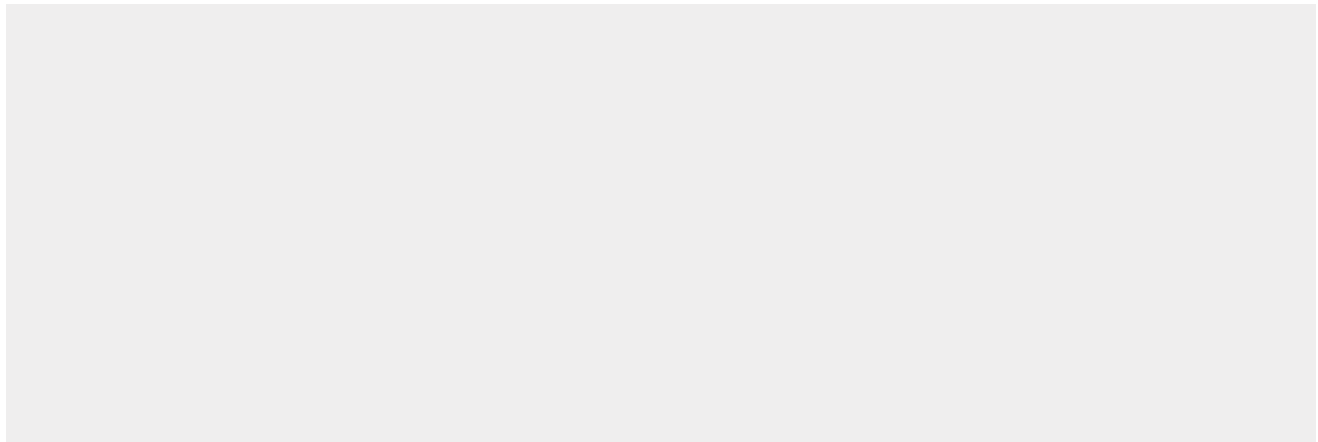
As you put these ideas into your action plan and begin to live them out, you're going to see a healthy church emerge, and you'll have pastoral care that scales to however big God grows your church and however many people you end up reaching.

Discussion Questions

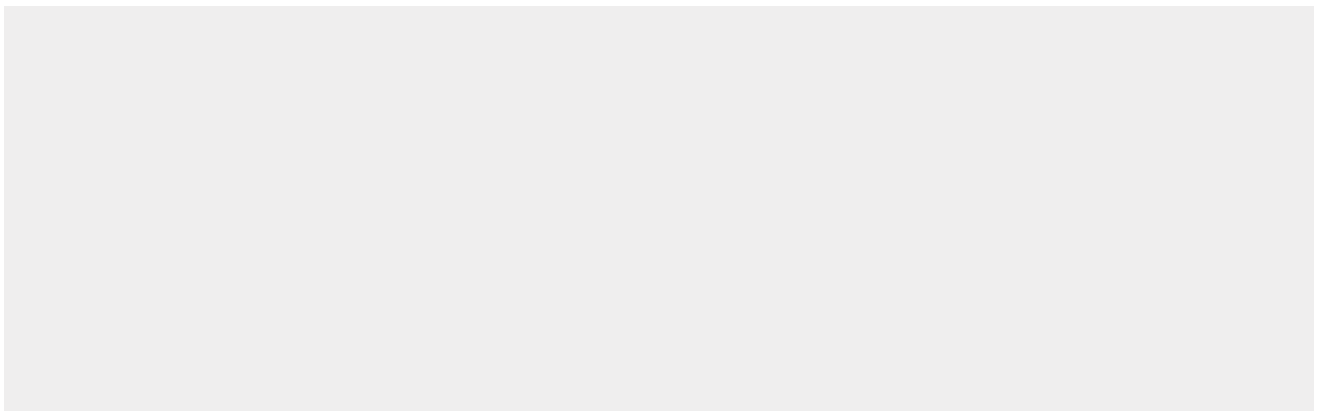
1. What expectations does your congregation have about pastoral care?



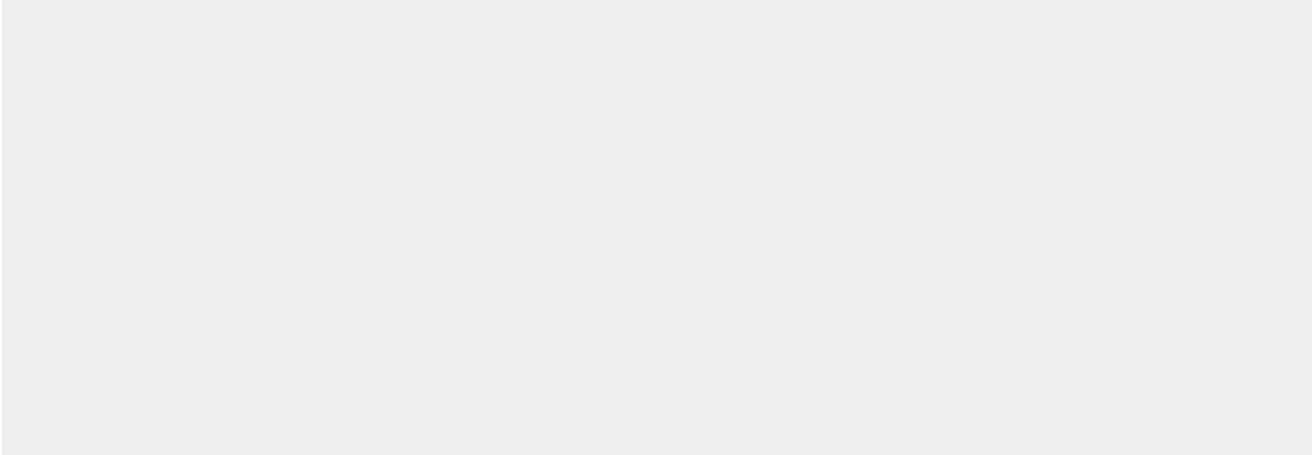
2. “Ninety-eight percent of pastoral care is having someone who cares.” Discuss how you’ve been cared for personally by people other than a pastor during your lifetime. How has this helped you?



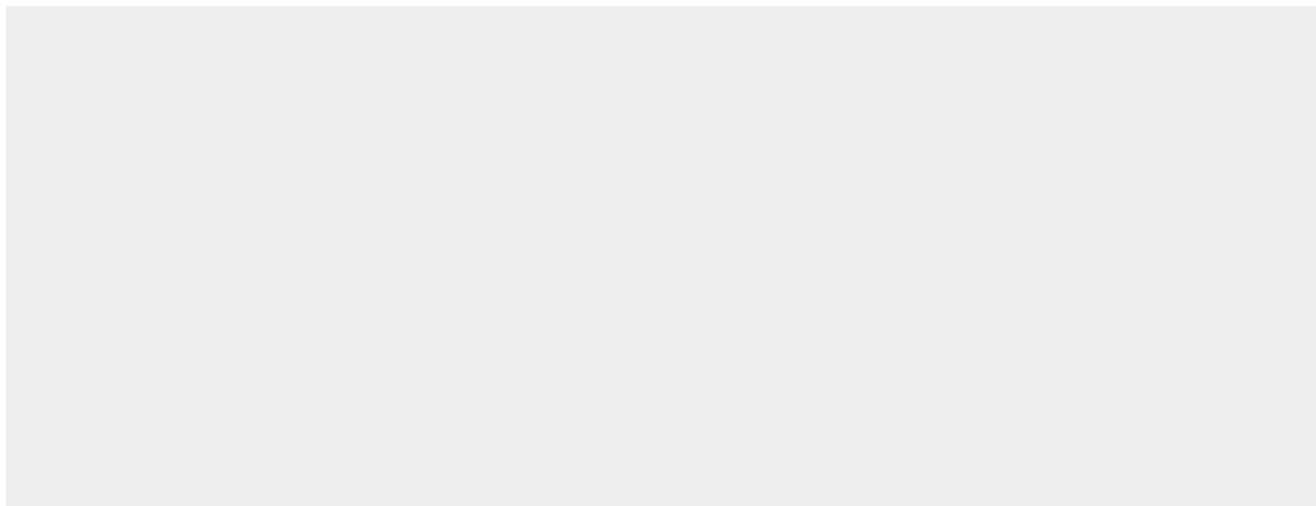
3. What will you need to do to help your congregation catch a vision for caring for each other?



4. Does your congregation expect to know everyone? Does everybody truly know everybody well?

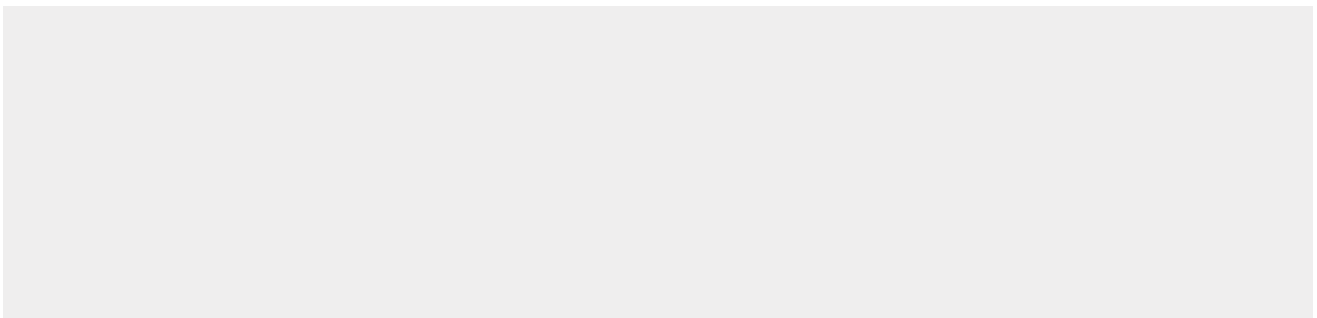


5. What's the difference between having a church where everybody knows everybody and a church where everyone is known?



Get Practical

1. What is the single most strategic step you can take to prepare your pastor to release the congregation to care for each other?



2. What's the single most strategic step you can take to get your congregation ready to care for each other?

Make it Happen

Talk is cheap. Action produces traction. Review your action plan and add these things to it:

1. Decide how you will cast vision to shift pastoral care from the pastor to the congregation.
2. Establish a timeline and action plan to create a groups ministry in your church where care (as well as Bible study and accountability) can happen.



Session 4

Finding the Right Leaders

In my research for this course, I interviewed more than fourteen hundred leaders of small and midsize churches. This session (and the next) focus on one of the main concerns they raised. It's a major point of tension for pastors in the pursuit of growing beyond the 200 barrier: How do I find the right leaders?

It's easy to go to a conference or visit a larger church, to hear about the great people and things going on elsewhere, and to become discouraged and overwhelmed. Where did they find such great leaders? You might begin to think that great people just randomly appear. Or that you just need a sizeable budget increase so that you can attract and hire them.

Growing churches don't buy great leaders, they build them.

The truth is, great people don't randomly assemble. They are attracted by clear and compelling missions like the mission of the church. They are challenged, nurtured, and inspired by skillful, humble, passionate leaders who have devoted their lives to a cause greater than themselves.

The reason your people aren't like the people of the churches you admire is because you haven't led them there yet. It's your opportunity. When you lead with all diligence, you call something out in people that God has planted within them.

So, what's the key to building a team when you're in a smaller context?

The key is: start where you are. Even if you think you don't have the right people, look at this issue humbly and honestly. This session may open up some challenging conversations or raise some issues of insecurity. If you lean into it, though, I believe it will help you find the leaders to take your church into the future.

How do you start where you are?

The first step is to look for the best leaders you can find.

Believe it or not, you do have leaders in your church right now. They may not be Fortune 100 leaders or start-up entrepreneurs, but you do have leaders.

THE KEY IS: START WHERE YOU ARE. EVEN IF YOU THINK YOU DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT PEOPLE, LOOK AT THIS ISSUE HUMBLY AND HONESTLY.

How can you tell who the leaders are? Simply put, they're leading something. Maybe they're not leading at your church, but they're leading somewhere. They're running a shift at the local coffee shop and doing it well. There's a mom who is running her neighborhood—the play groups, the book clubs. She's a leader. There's a young man running a small business or a woman running a music studio. In some context somewhere, they're leading something.

If they're leading well in their life and they believe in your mission, there's a good chance that they are going to lead well in your church.

The simplest definition of leadership I know is from John Maxwell: leadership is influence. You can see whether or not people have influence by whether or not anyone is following them. Look for the people others follow, and they will help you start where you are.

The second step is to look beyond your official structure.

The best leaders you have may not be on your board or on your current team.

The conversation can get a little sensitive at this point, so proceed with wisdom and humility.

In a smaller church, board positions and volunteer roles aren't always filled by people with the gift of leadership. Often, they're filled by people who have been around a long time or by some good-hearted person who stepped up when no one else was willing.

Thank you for having the humility and grace to be willing to discuss this around your leadership table. In fact, some of you reading this right now might be grateful that the issue is being raised, because you've never fully felt comfortable on the board or in leadership at your church. Maybe you volunteered because no one else would, but the fit has never been great. That could be a sign that you're not operating fully in the area of your gifting. Being able to admit that maybe the current leaders aren't the best leaders to take the church forward is a remarkable and humble start to preparing your church for the future.

Moving forward, you have to build the church of the future in the present, and the way you do that is by finding the best leaders you can find, whether they're officially in leadership positions or not. How do you engage them? Incorporate them when the time comes to elect new board members, or create new teams to allow a new leadership core to emerge.

A third issue you may need to face is dealing with matriarchs or patriarchs.

A fairly common dynamic in a small church setting is that sometimes the church isn't run by the pastor or the board at all. Sometimes it's actually run by someone referred to by experts as the matriarch or patriarch of the church.

Occasionally this person is on the board, but often they're not.

How can you spot a matriarch or patriarch? It's simple. Nothing gets done or approved without his or her blessing. This happens even if the person isn't on the board. The board meets and afterward says, "Well, we'll see what George says about it." Even without elected office, and often without accountability, this person has a disproportionate amount of power.

This isn't a healthy dynamic, and you can't run a church beyond 200 in a healthy way if a matriarch or patriarch is in control. It simply will not grow.

Be careful, however, not to vilify the matriarch or patriarch. Often, they've poured more into the church than anyone else, financially or with their time, because they love it so much. Maybe their family history is closely tied to the church. So gratitude is a wonderful place to begin with a matriarch or patriarch. But then you need to move into the key issue. How do you handle a matriarch or patriarch?

In my experience at the small churches I led, there were three matriarchs. Over the course of a few months, I started making decisions they were used to making, such as which songs to sing, who our guest preachers would be, and when events would be held.

Then I started giving those decisions away to new leaders as they stepped into leadership.

Two out of the three matriarchs had a hard time with it, and they ended up leaving the church. Many conversations didn't make a difference as the church moved in a new direction in the future. But their leaving wasn't divisive. It was just a quiet acknowledgment that the future was going to be different than the past.

The other matriarch had the humility to allow new leadership to emerge and to find her role within the new system. She's still part of our church today, where she attends and serves every week along with her now-grown kids and grandkids. I just love that!

When it comes to matriarchs or patriarchs, honor the past, but don't live in it. And don't be controlled by it. Thank them for their efforts, but build around them.

The healthy ones will accept and even eventually embrace the change. The other ones may move on, and as tough as that may be to deal with, it will open the doors for a season in which new leaders can fully step into their roles.

Always place the needs of the organization ahead of the needs of an individual.

Put another way, the mission is more important than any one man or woman. The church should start operating that way.

Once you have gently but firmly dealt with the matriarchs or patriarchs, what do you do next? The open door for new leadership and decision-making capacity gives you the chance to build a fantastic volunteer culture. It's likely that, as you're attracting and building great leaders, you'll encounter a situation that many churches struggle with.

When you're introducing high-capacity leaders into existing volunteer teams, you'll need to address if you value excellence over inclusion, or if it's the other way around.

The fourth step in finding the right leaders is to embrace excellence over inclusion.

Another awkward reality that exists in small churches is that it's too easy to have non-leaders leading, non-communicators communicating, non-singers singing, non-musicians playing, and so on.

One of the dynamics you have to wrestle down is whether you value inclusion over excellence. Most small churches choose inclusion.

It plays out like this. Emily auditions for the music team, but Emily can't really sing well. What do you do? A lot of leaders flinch at the thought of hurting Emily's feelings or of angering her parents, so they include her even though she's not excellent. In fact, that's probably an understatement. Not only is she not excellent, she's simply not gifted at singing at all.

If she is the best you have to work with, that's one thing. Often, though, that's not the issue. We shy away from having honest conversations under the guise of being nice and inclusive.

When we place people into roles where they are not gifted, theologically, it's a denial of the diversity and giftedness of the body of Christ. God designed some people to sing. Get them singing. He gave others the gift of rhythm. Get them drumming. He gave some the gift of leadership or communication. Get them leading and communicating.

Sometimes this means telling someone on the team that they need to move on to another opportunity. These are the moments when leadership requires courage, wisdom, humility, and strength. It's awkward. There are good resources out there that can help you have those difficult conversations.

The reality is, we live in a world that values excellence. The people we're trying to reach, who don't yet know Jesus, want to hear good music. It's our responsibility to create the best experiences for them with the most excellent teams we can assemble. We need to match the gifts with the roles. When you start to match the gift to the role, incredible things happen.

This is when the biblical vision of the body of Christ comes alive. You have singers singing, leaders leading, administrators administering, spreadsheet people doing spreadsheets, and friendly people greeting others when they come through the door. It's the body at its best.

The tension you're going to wrestle with as you find the right leaders is the one between excellence and inclusion. Choose excellence. Inclusion leads to temporary comfort through the avoidance of difficult conversations, but it creates substandard experiences for those attending your church and causes insecurity in those who are serving in roles they aren't gifted for. In the end, it doesn't do anyone any good.

Finally, a lesson we learned when we were small, and which my wife often reminds me of, is the importance of prayer.

Pray for more leaders and build them.

Years ago, we were starting to transition from traditional worship music to what we do today, and we didn't have good guitarists. We didn't have good drummers. We didn't have good keyboard players. We didn't have anyone who could play at any decent skill level. We started to pray, "God, send us a bass player. God, send us a guitar player. Send us a worship leader." In his generous goodness, he did. They started to arrive as we changed the culture. Word began to spread that this church in town was doing things a new way, and God brought the people we needed. They weren't all pro-level at the beginning, but we simply used the best people we could find. We haven't stopped doing that. As your church grows and you keep looking for great people, the quality of your music and of all areas of your ministry will continually improve.

Keep looking for the best potential you can find among the people who currently attend your church. Build from within. Here are two quick examples.

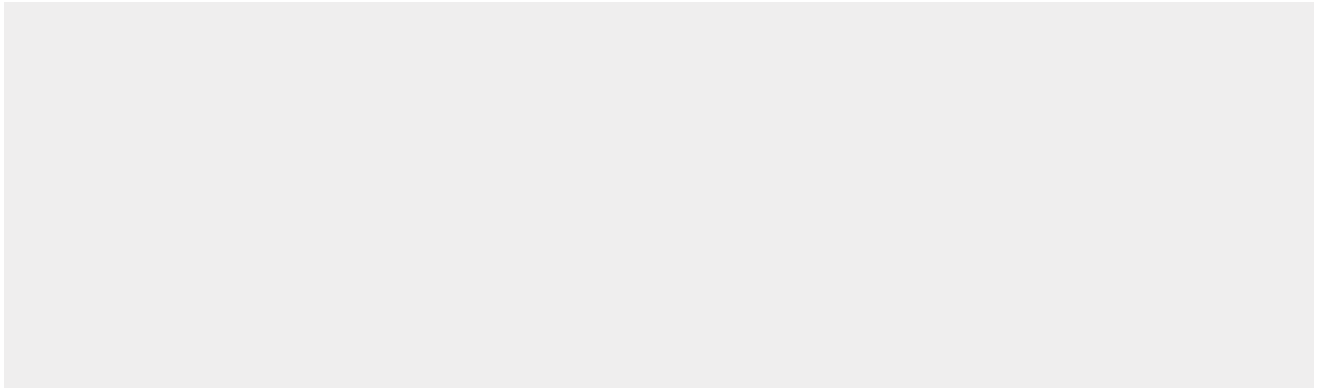
Years ago, I was talking with one of the recent high school graduates from our youth group. She told me where she was going to college and what she would be studying, and I casually told her to come back when she was done and maybe we would have a job for her. She did come back, and we were able to hire her as an intern when we started Connexus Church. A year or two later, she became my assistant. At that time, she didn't know how to be an assistant, so we trained her. Today, eight years later, Sarah is one of the best assistants out there, and I'm so grateful for her. Keep in mind that 99 percent of the team that will surround you in the future will be team members that you're going to build.

It turns out that Sarah married Justin, who was in our youth group as well. We were able to hire him in a service programming role when he was fresh out of college. While his original area of expertise was audio, he has trained, developed, and honed his craft over the last few years to become a great leader in all of the disciplines of church production.

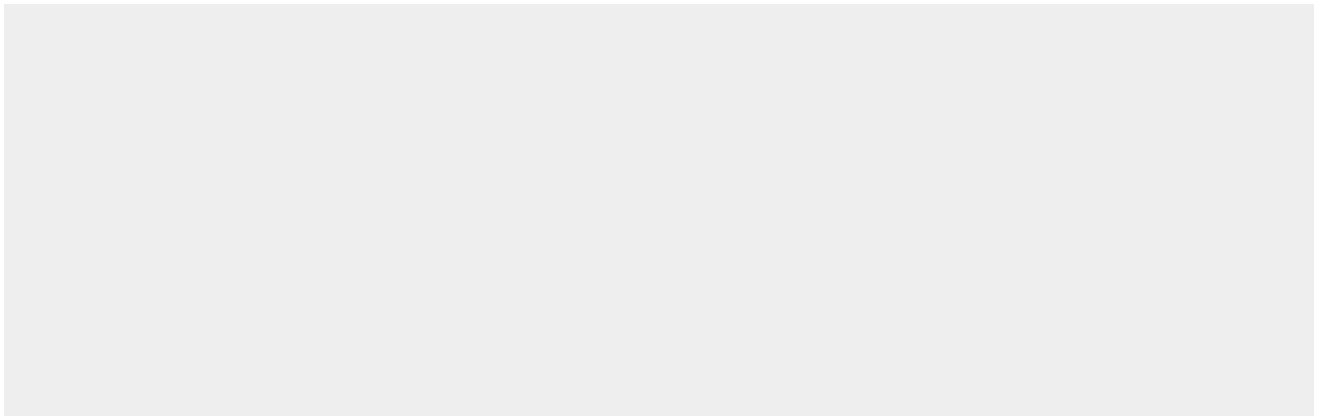
Great leaders, like Justin and Sarah, are built—they are not bought. The leaders you need for your church tomorrow are probably already in your building today. When you invite them to use their gifts and support them with the development and training they need, the results will be incredible.

Discussion Questions

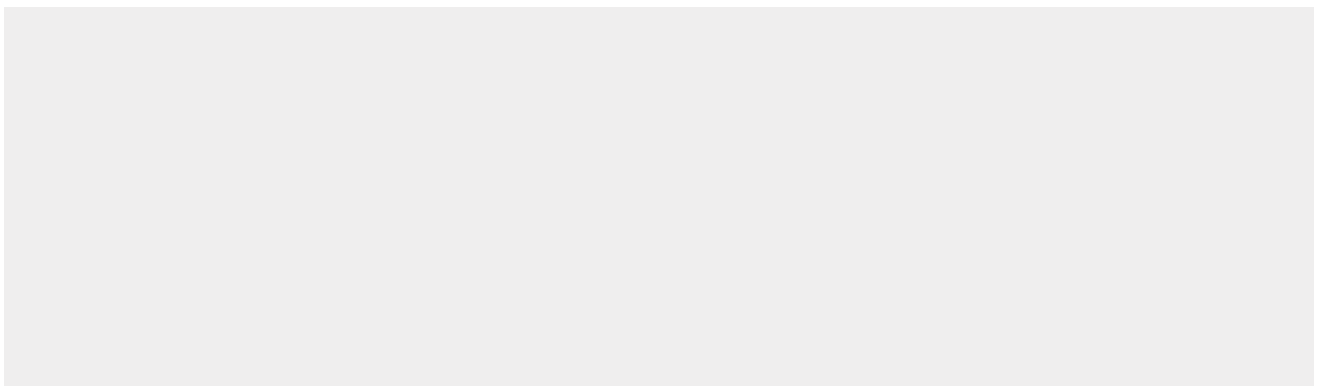
1. To what extent are people in your church serving in their areas of gifting? Where do you see them serving because “nobody else will do it” or because they’ve simply been there a long time?



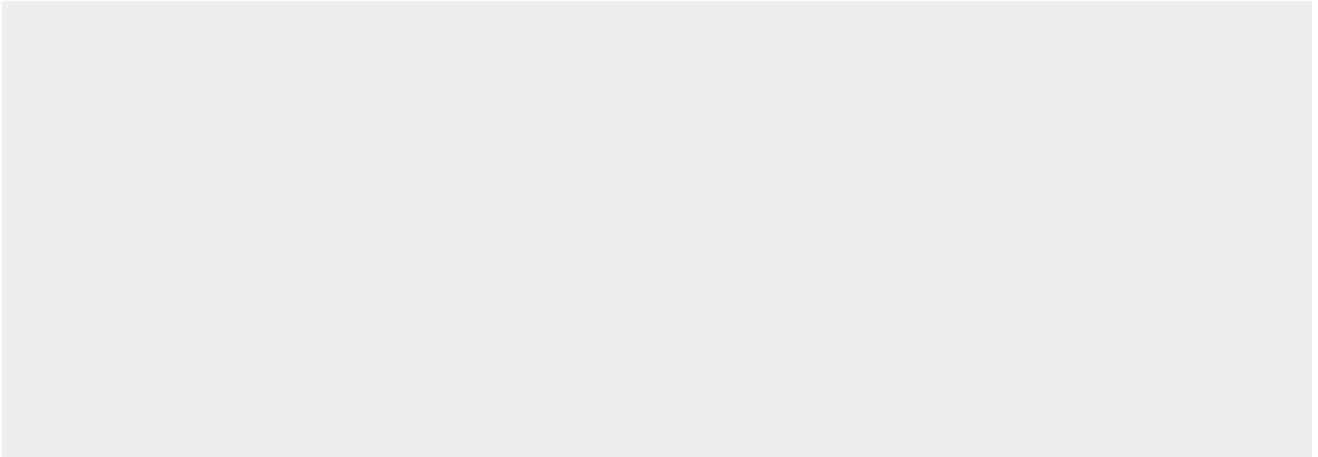
2. These questions will take great humility to discuss well, but I believe each of you has it in you. Think about your board composition. Are leaders leading your church? If not, what would need to change to place leaders on your board who have the gifts of wisdom, insight, and greater discernment about building a larger mission?



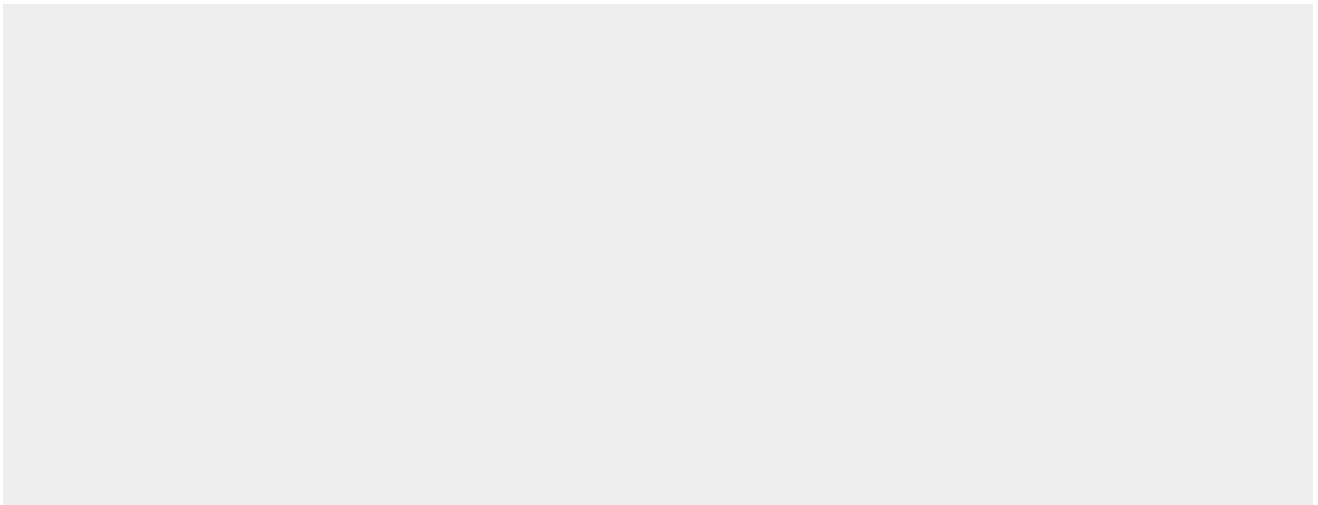
3. To what extent are matriarchs and patriarchs a factor in the ministry of your church?



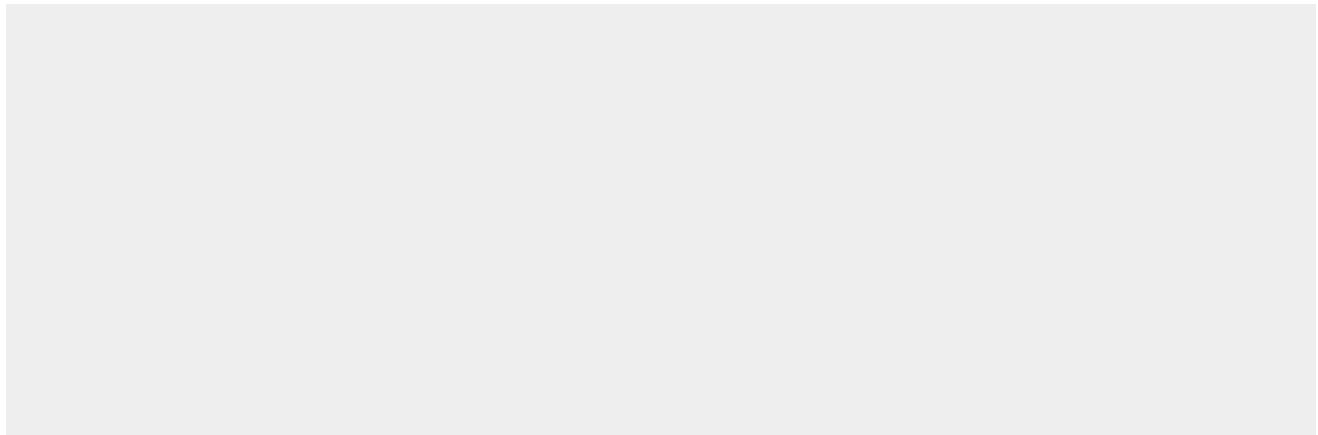
4. Would you say your church places more value on excellence or inclusion? Why?



5. What changes would you have to make for your church to begin valuing excellence over inclusion?



6. “Growing churches don’t buy leaders, they build them.” What process do you have right now for developing future leaders?



Get Practical

1. What changes will you have to make to get leaders with the right gifting serving at every level in your church, from the board to the music team to greeters to kids ministry?

2. Who will have the tough conversations with the people you need to move out of current positions into new roles? Hint: It shouldn't always be the pastor. Look for leaders who are filled with both grace and truth. Grace will give them the people skills to handle delicate conversations and transitions. Truth will keep them on mission and help them stick to the plan you make.

Make it Happen

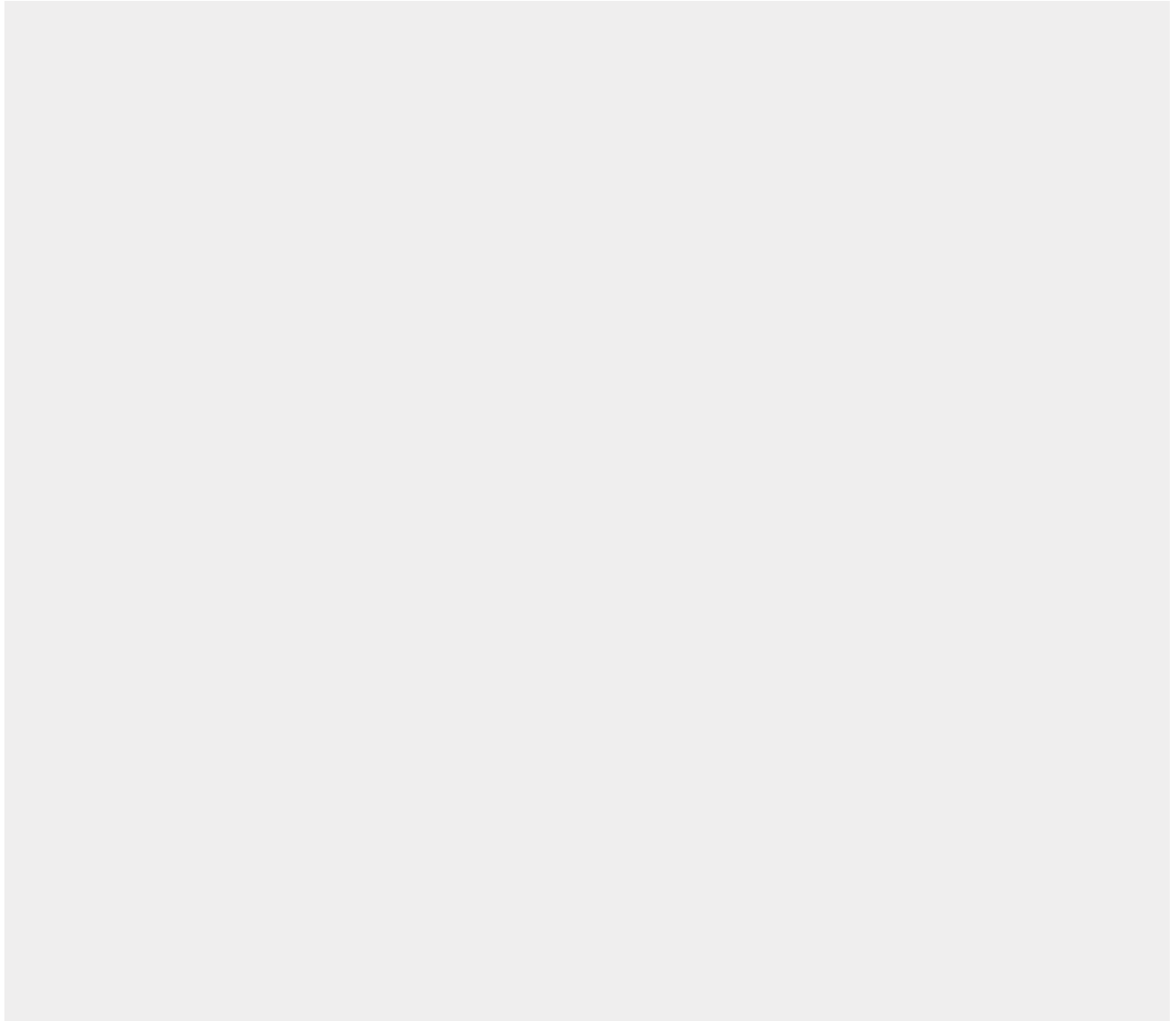
Talk is cheap. Action produces traction. Review your action plan and add these things to it:

1. Decide whether you are going to value excellence or inclusion. So much springs from that simple choice. Remember, just because you choose excellence doesn't mean everyone's not included; they are simply included in the area of their gifting.

2. Determine what your senior pastor is best at and how he or she brings the most value to the mission. Then design a plan to help him or her focus on their best area of contribution.

3. Develop a timeline that will help your church transition to a place where everyone who serves is serving in an area for which they are gifted. It's wise to take at least a few months to make the changes. It might even take a year. (If your timeline approaches two years, there's a good chance you're either procrastinating or avoiding the issue.)

4. Start praying regularly for God to show you new leaders in your church (or to bring new leaders in) with the gifting you need to advance your mission.
5. Create a plan to develop leaders. There are many resources out there that can help you with this. But simply deciding you are going to invest in leadership development is a major first step.





Session 5

Moving From Teams That Do to Teams That Lead

As we already discussed, one of the biggest points of tension in moving past 200 attenders is the challenge of finding the right leaders. But it's even more complicated than that. Once you've found leaders, how do you move them from being task-oriented doers to empowered leaders? That's the focus of this session.

Effective churches build teams of leaders, not just teams of doers.

Why is it so important to make this shift from doers to leaders? Because doing doesn't scale. Leadership does. If you really want to reach the full potential of your mission, developing a culture of leadership will take you there in a sustainable way. You will always need doers, but you'll also need a solid group of leaders in place to manage the doers.

When taking inventory of who you have on your team, it's key to distinguish between the leaders and the doers. The first difference between them, which we discussed in Session Four, is that leaders have followers. When you entrust a project or initiative to a leader, you "inherit" that person's network of influence within the church and the community. Look for leaders who have followers.

The second distinction is that leaders make things happen while doers tend to respond to what's happening. Doers can take direction and execute someone else's vision, but they will require energy and follow-up that a leader doesn't require. A leader is a catalyst—creating change, momentum, and progress. You want to build your teams with people who make things happen.

The third difference between a doer and a leader is that leaders love responsibility. While doers might become overwhelmed by the weight of responsibility, leaders are energized by it. You'll find a leader constantly asking, "What else can I do?" Even better, a leader will proactively pursue more responsibility without even asking.

The fourth distinction is this: leaders lead other people; doers only lead themselves. Leaders don't mind having a team of people to manage. Doers would rather worry about themselves and their specific assignment.

Finally, leaders love a challenge. Doers don't. They are overwhelmed by challenge. When you have a big vision for something new and you cast that vision to a leader, she will be energized, excited. She will immediately add her own ideas and begin envisioning whom she'll invite into carrying out this venture with her. Be on the lookout for people who respond this way to a challenge. They are leaders.

Once you're clear on the difference between leaders and doers, how do you create a culture of leadership, not a culture of doer-ship?

It comes down to building a culture in which high-capacity leaders thrive. This is something that I've had to learn over the years as a leader. It takes time and it takes intentionality, but there are specific shifts you can make that will create a culture where high-capacity leaders love to serve and love to stay.

It's one thing to attract a leader. It's another thing to keep a leader. If you're going to realize the full potential of your mission and reach as many people as possible, you've got to build your team with high-capacity people who are capable of leading dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of others. There are some cultural characteristics at play here that every church leader should pay attention to. Some of these are counterintuitive, but I've found them to be true. They'll help you on your journey to creating a culture in which leaders thrive.

Here are five principles that will help you create a culture of leadership in your church.

1. Give volunteers a significant challenge

If you want to attract and keep high-capacity leaders, give them a high level of challenge. Sometimes as church leaders, we're tempted to apologize for the needs we have or to downplay the importance of our mission. Have you ever shared a need for volunteers like this? "We really need people to serve in the preschool ministry. I know it's not glamorous to take care of crying kids and you'd probably rather stay home, so we've set up a rotation and you'll only have to serve once a quarter. Just let us know if you're interested."

Who would want to raise their hand for that?

If you want leaders, give them a significant challenge. Try saying something like: "We need leaders who want to invest in the next generation of kids. We need leaders who are committed to praying for kids, partnering with kids, and partnering with parents. We want leaders who want to see the next generation honoring Jesus' name and moving into a personal relationship with him. Who's in?"

Do you see the difference?

So can the church issue a big challenge? You bet. In fact, **there is no bigger mission on planet Earth than that of the local church.** Quite seriously, we have the most important mission in the world. When you raise the bar and unapologetically call people to the level of commitment and passion the church's mission involves, the right people—leaders—rise to the occasion.

2. Be organized

If you want to attract high-capacity leaders, you have to be organized. If you want to have high-capacity volunteers serving in your church, make sure that your staff team is well organized.

While that sounds simple, far too many church staff miss the mark. They keep leaders waiting until Saturday for a Bible study guide they promised on Thursday. Or the schedule for kids ministry isn't done on time (again).

What's the key to being organized? It's simple: do what you say you are going to do when you say you are going to do it. If you and your staff operate this way, high-capacity leaders will love serving with you.

3. Hold volunteers accountable

The third way to build a culture of leaders rather than doers is to have consistent accountability. Let's face it: it's easy to let volunteers off the hook when they fail to deliver what they promised or show up late. It seems like the kind, gracious thing to do. We convince ourselves that, since volunteers are volunteering their time, we can't hold them accountable. After all, what if they leave? I can't afford that, you tell yourself.

As a result, many churches create a culture in which volunteers do the bare minimum. That's a mistake. What you truly can't afford is a church full of volunteers who don't meet the agreed-upon expectations. Without everyone on the team showing up on time, bringing their gifts to the task at hand, and working full-out toward the mission, the mission isn't realized. And even if you make some progress, it's at the expense of the leaders who do show up on time. When you consistently let people off the hook, you dishonor the commitment of others and you devalue your mission.

It's not only advisable but critical that you have the difficult conversations with underperforming volunteers to hold them accountable. Either move them to another opportunity where their gifts better match the role, or risk angering or losing the other leaders on your team.

High-capacity leaders don't want to be let off the hook—they want to rise to the challenge of excellence.

4. Play favorites

The fourth principle for creating a high-capacity leadership culture is to play favorites. While this may also sound counterintuitive, I've learned this truly works (it's also biblical... just read Exodus 18 or study how Jesus led his inner circle).

Many times church leaders spend a great deal of their week following up with volunteers who didn't show up or didn't deliver on their commitment. Not only is this draining, but it eats up time you could be spending with your highest-performing leaders.

You should spend 80 percent of your time with the leaders who deliver 80 percent of the progress toward your mission. Strangely, they rarely ask for your time. They're happy doing their job, and they do it exceedingly well. Even if they ask for your time, investing in them is so worth it. You'll be energized. They'll feel valued. The result is that they will pour even more into the mission and you will see God move through them in incredible ways.

YOU SHOULD SPEND 80 PERCENT OF YOUR TIME WITH THE LEADERS WHO DELIVER 80 PERCENT OF THE PROGRESS TOWARD YOUR MISSION.

That still leaves you with a question. What do you do with the bottom 20 percent of your volunteers who are underperforming? Honestly, it might be time to let them go. You can let them go to a different volunteer team, to a season in which they don't serve, or to another church.

What you can't do is build the future on people who are not reliable. There is too much at stake in pursuing your mission.

5. Pay leaders in non-financial currencies

Finally, if you want a high-capacity leadership culture, you reward the people who are delivering your best results. While it could seem the best way to do that is with a paycheck, not only can you probably not afford them, but that practice doesn't scale. You'll run out of money before you run out of places for great leaders to lead. So instead, pay them in non-financial currencies.

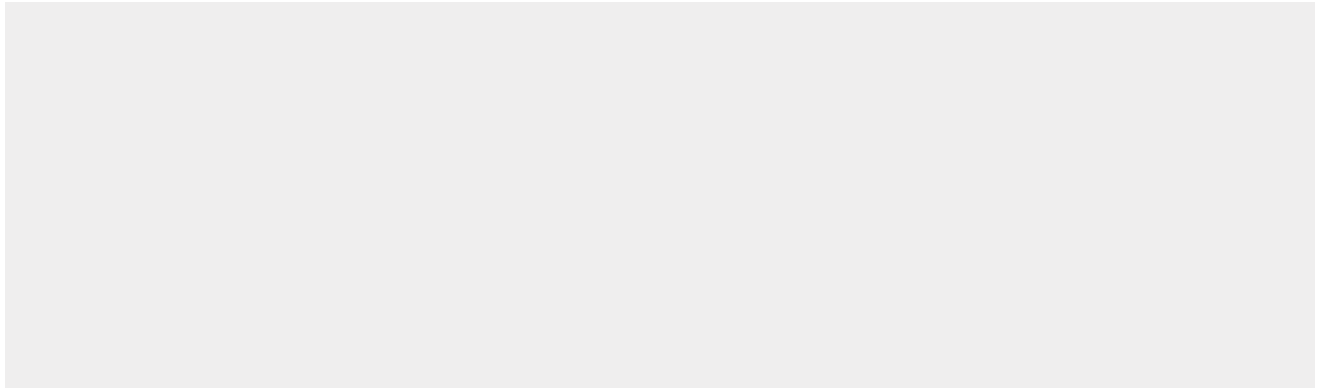
How does that work? Well, start with gratitude. Say thank-you or send a handwritten note. Pay them with respect and public praise. Pay them with trust and empowerment. Give them additional responsibility that infuses purpose into their lives.

When you do this, your high-capacity leaders will come back again and again. They will gladly volunteer, sacrificially and enthusiastically, because here's a little secret: no matter what great jobs or lives they have, sometimes what they do in your church is the greatest, most meaningful thing they do all week.

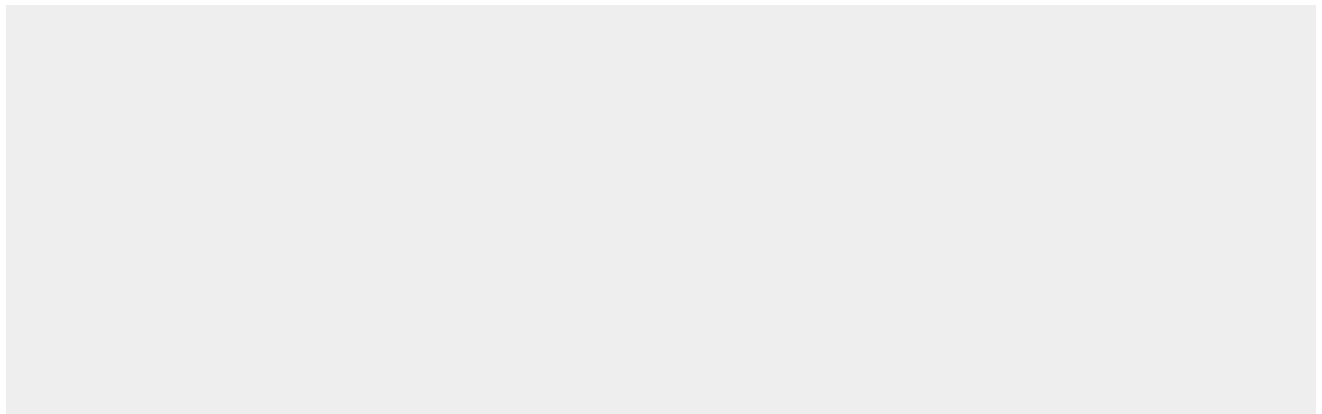
Creating this type of culture will ensure that you have high-capacity leaders poised and ready to move the mission of your church forward. It will set you up to break 200 in healthy, sustainable ways.

Discussion Questions

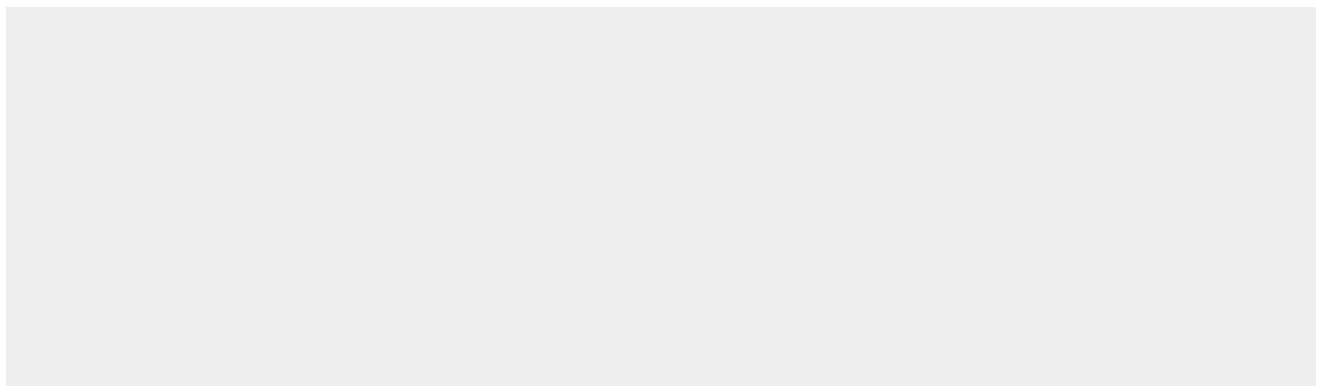
1. Is your volunteer base more a base of doers or a base of leaders? How did it get that way?



2. Who in your church displays the characteristics of leadership more than the characteristics of doer-ship?

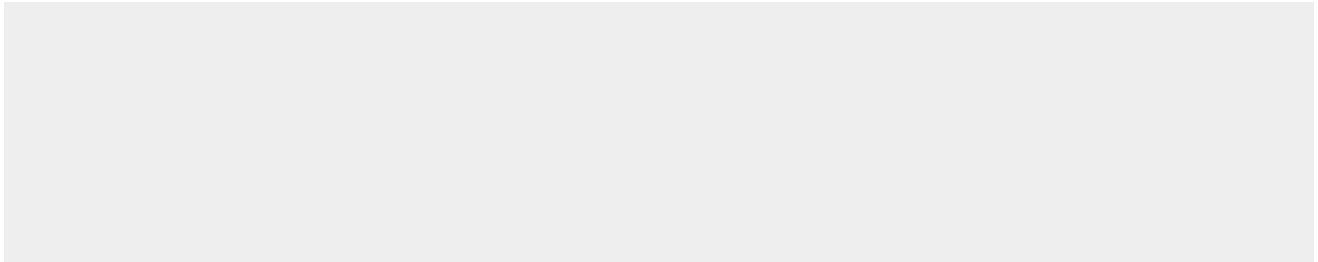


3. Review the five characteristics of a leadership culture that attracts and keeps high-capacity leaders. How is your church doing in each of the five areas?

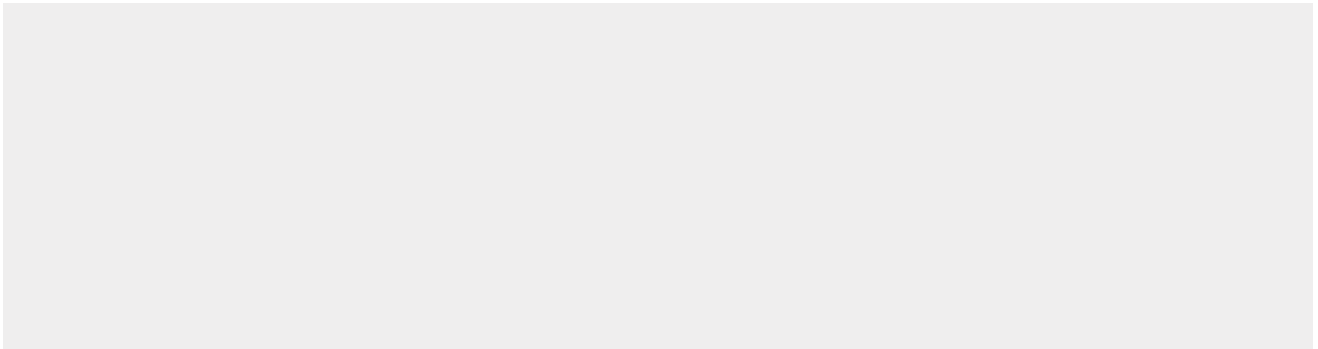


Get Practical

1. What key changes will you need to make to move from a culture of doing to a culture of leading?



2. Review all five characteristics of cultures that attract and keep high-capacity leaders. What specific changes will you make to create a culture in which high-capacity leaders thrive?



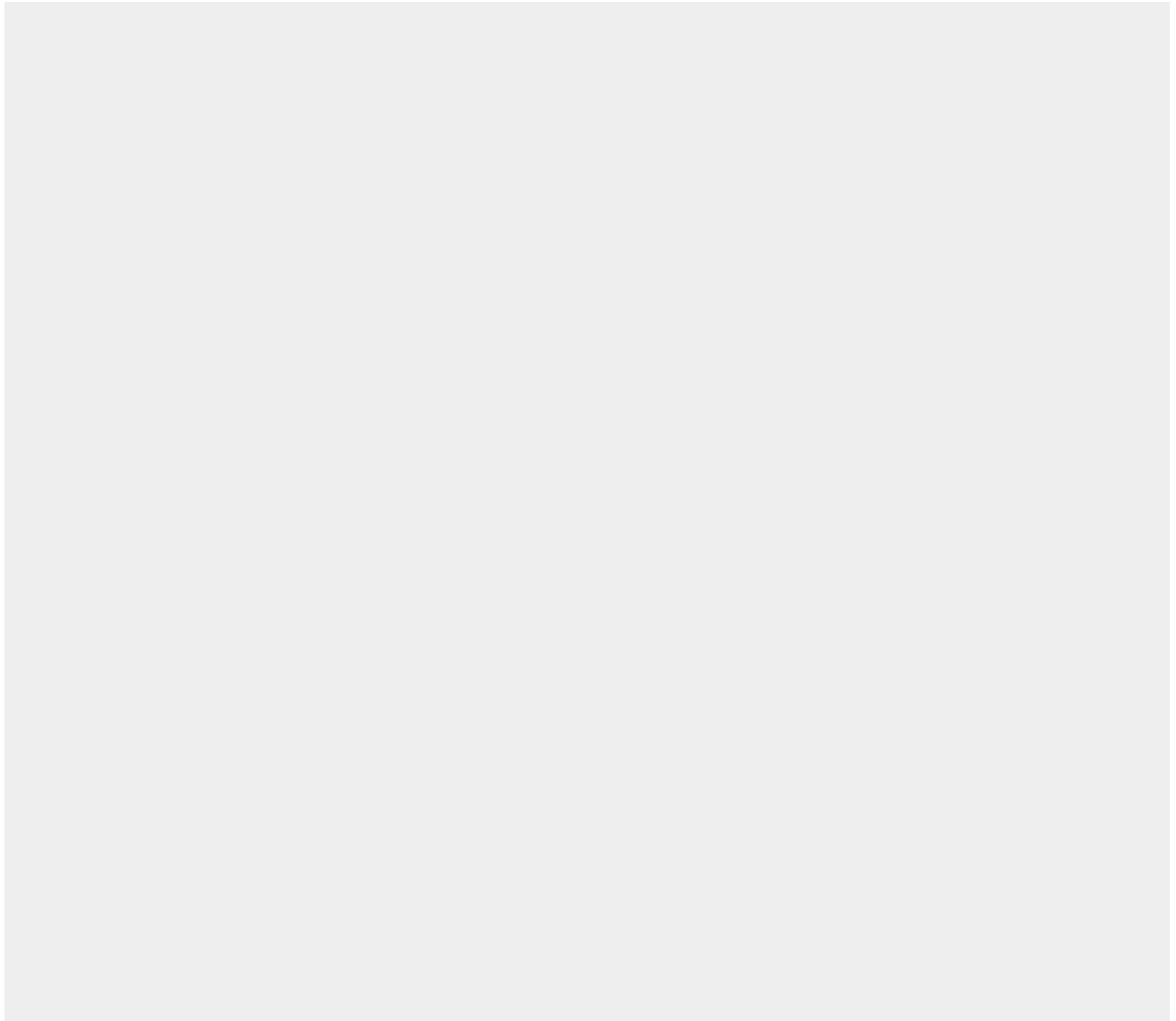
Make it Happen

Talk is cheap. Action produces traction. Review your action plan and add these things to it:

1. Appoint someone to lead the team that will change the volunteer culture at your church by:
 - Giving volunteers a significant challenge
 - Being organized
 - Holding volunteers accountable
 - Playing favorites
 - Paying leaders in non-financial currencies

Create a six-month to one-year plan to help transition your church to a better volunteer culture.

2. Make a list of as many people as you can who fit the characteristics of “leader” rather than “doer.” Then make a plan to invite them into positions of leadership and responsibility throughout every area of ministry in your church.





Session 6

Aligning Your Church

At this point in the journey, you've grappled with the structural changes needed to set your church up to break 200. You're scaling pastoral care, and it's working because everyone has someone who cares about them. You're released to focused on what only you can do. You've identified leaders, and you're building teams of leaders, not doers.

Growing churches that attract great leaders often have an influx of well-intentioned ideas and suggestions, enthusiasm, and opinions. Your role as the leader is to harness all of this newfound energy and steer it in the same direction. This can be far more challenging than it sounds.

During this season in my own ministry, I found myself waking up at night wondering, How do I keep all these well-intentioned people from accidentally running the mission of the church off course? How do I convey what is so clear in my head—the mission, vision, strategy, and values of our church—to everyone else in a way that's clear to them?

Those questions (and the fear associated with them) are focused around one key leadership issue: alignment. Alignment is getting a team of people committed to a common mission, vision, and set of values.

Alignment is so critical because if you don't do it, it's like releasing the stallions from the barn. They'll run wild and in every direction. That's why some leaders fear empowering leaders: they fear those leaders will run the church in various directions.

I want to introduce you to a formula that can help you take all the leaders in your church in the same direction.

CLARITY + SIMPLICITY + ALIGNMENT = SCALABILITY

If you can be clear, keep your ministry simple, and get your team aligned around your vision, then you will have almost infinite scalability. You'll have the ability to reach not just two hundred people but maybe one day two thousand. You can have not just one campus but two or three locations. You can scale to wherever God leads you in your mission.

This formula is crucial because, in the absence of a clear mission, vision, and strategy, people will make up their own. Without clarity, well-intentioned leaders will begin trying to take control of whatever area of ministry you have given them.

What's the difference between an aligned organization and an unaligned organization? Well, imagine one hundred different people running in one hundred different directions—they'll cover a lot of ground, but there will be chaos. That's what an unaligned organization looks like. But when one hundred people run together in the same direction, there's not only tremendous power, there's progress.

make sure things stay simple. In fact, a flexible, agile organization always does better than a complicated bureaucracy. Identify the things that produce 80 percent of your traction and progress toward your mission, and focus on those things. Connexus has always been a simple church. We want everyone to be in a small group. We want everyone to serve. We want everyone to invite a friend. And we want everyone to give. We found that when we focus on those four things, it allows us to lead a lot more people into life change, and it keeps it simple enough that we can become excellent at the few things that we do.

YOU NEED TO PAY ATTENTION TO SIMPLICITY BECAUSE, IN A GROWING CHURCH, THERE'S A GRAVITATIONAL PULL TOWARDS COMPLEXITY.

That's the power of simplicity—to do a few things and to do them well. You've got to decide what is going to move the mission forward the fastest and the furthest, and then say no to all the other options. Once both clarity and simplicity exist within a church or organization, the stage is set for the third critical ingredient: **alignment**.

As we've already suggested, alignment happens when you have a team of people, from the top leadership right through to the newest volunteer, pulling in the same direction. The team will not only have the same goals but also the same strategy and values. Team and organizational alignment is a powerful force. Alignment is hard work, but it's worth your time. Here are four things alignment around a clear mission, vision, and strategy provides.

First, **alignment creates a badly needed dividing line.** Being everything to everyone means being nothing to no one. Few organizations struggle with this more than the church. Alignment forces you to be about a few defined things rather than about everything. Once you choose the few things you are going to focus on, the people who want you to be about everything will sometimes leave, but that's okay. Being aligned almost always means you will accomplish more.

Second, alignment forces out personal agendas. When the organization's agenda is clear and is the main priority for everyone, it forces out competing personal agendas. Everything from politics to selfish personal goals are exposed because people's commitment is to a cause greater than themselves. This eliminates sideways energy and makes room for forward progress. Alignment smokes out people who are in it for selfish reasons and who refuse to surrender to a cause bigger than themselves.

Third, **alignment does not mean full agreement; instead it produces focus.** Critics of alignment say that pursuing it means you snuff out independent thought and that it can create a culture of "yes people." I disagree. If you have five high-capacity leaders in a room, you'll have five opinions worth considering. But they won't be divisive. Because you have clarity around mission, vision, strategy, and values, your discussion will be on how to best accomplish your mission. You won't be fighting about what your mission should be.

Finally, **alignment allows you to harness more creativity, not less.** Rather counterintuitively, having a common mission and strategy means that your team can harness more—not less—creativity. Because you agree on direction and priorities, you can spend significant time getting creative about implementing your vision. You no longer waste hours debating what to do. Instead, you can spend those hours getting better at what you've agreed you'll do.

The result is: **people's spiritual gifts have maximum impact when aligned in pursuit of a common mission, vision, and strategy.**

The combination of clarity, plus simplicity, plus alignment, equals scalability.

A study of any growing, effective organization will reveal that they have a clearly defined mission, vision, strategy, and set of values. You'll discover that they've kept things simple. And they have an aligned team. This takes the lid off of their leadership and allows them to grow as much as God wants them to grow.

Discussion Questions

1. How have you seen the formula **Clarity + Simplicity + Alignment = Scalability** at work in other churches or organizations? To what extent do you see it at work in your church?

2. Do you have a clear mission, vision, strategy, and set of values? Don't feel bad, most churches don't. If you don't, take some time to develop them. Patrick Lencioni shows you how in his book *The Advantage*, and Andy Stanley offers North Point's mission, vision, and strategy in *Deep and Wide*.

3. If you do have a clearly defined mission, vision, strategy, and set of values, to what extent would people in your church know them and be able to repeat them to you?

4. How aligned do you think your team truly is?

Get Practical

1. If you don't have a clear, simple, written vision, mission, strategy, and set of values, take the time to draft them.

Make it Happen

Talk is cheap. Action produces traction. Review your action plan and add these things to it:

1. Bring your core team together for some time to discuss and align around your mission, vision, strategy, and values. Take time to explain them, and then brainstorm ways to align your church around them.

2. Next, roll out your plan to align at least all your volunteers (and maybe your whole church) around the mission, vision, strategy, and values.



Session 7

A New Way to Make Decisions

We all want to see our churches reach their full potential. Another factor that affects our ability to break the 200 barrier (and to grow in general) is—surprisingly— how churches make decisions.

So let's start there. Who makes decisions at your church? The answer to this question is critical. Lean and nimble decision-making is key to growth and effectiveness.

Small congregations (less than one thousand people) usually make decisions in one of four ways. Each approach has a size limiter, and only one is scalable past five hundred people. In fact, only one is infinitely scalable.

When you look at these different approaches to decision-making one by one, it's easy to see the ways in which they can be limiting and the ways in which (some much more than others) they can be effective. So let's look at each approach in turn.

The Single, Unelected Decision Maker—the Matriarch or Patriarch

Dysfunctional at its core, especially since the matriarch or patriarch may not be elected or even on the board, this type of decision-making is not sustainable because it causes time-sensitive decisions to be delayed and it relies on the opinions of only one person rather than the wisdom of the elected board. As we saw in Session Four, where we first discussed matriarchs and patriarchs in the small church, I would caution against vilifying a matriarch or patriarch. Oftentimes they've poured more into the church than anyone else, financially or in terms of time, simply because they love it so much.

That said, the needs of the organization must always be placed ahead of the needs of an individual. Put another way, the mission is more important than any one man or woman, and the church has to start operating that way. The single, unelected decision maker is a model that never scales beyond one hundred people.

Congregation-Based Decision-Making

Another approach for small churches is to embrace congregation-based decision-making, usually expressed through congregational meetings and congregational votes.

Small churches are rather famous for wanting approval on every decision, from the paint color in the kids ministry rooms to every hire for the church staff to every minute curriculum change. Some are constitutionally set up so that the majority of the church decisions must be approved by the congregation. At a minimum, most churches are set up so the congregation has to approve the call of a pastor, or the annual budget, or other important decisions. However, many small churches function in a congregational model, whether they're constitutionally required to do so or not.

Another drawback to this type of governance is that when there are one hundred different people in a room, they typically have one hundred different opinions. Frequently, few of them have all the information needed to make an educated decision on the matter at hand. A leader will usually give hours or days of prayer and thought to an issue. A congregation may have thirty seconds to review an issue or read a short paragraph that summarizes it before they vote. It's a limited method at best.

We all know the dynamics at congregational meetings. There are always naysayers in the room, and they are often some of the loudest voices. Congregational decision-making lends itself to consensus decision-making, which itself is problematic. If Moses had waited for consensus before leaving Egypt, the Israelites would still be in slavery. The reality is: **consensus kills courage**. When you drive for consensus, decisions get watered down to the point where all the risk is gone and any boldness evaporates.

Almost nothing gets accomplished if everyone has a say.

Once you reach a certain size, ministry becomes complex enough that a monthly congregational meeting isn't nearly enough time to meaningfully review all the issues. This type of decision-making will keep you from growing past 200 in a sustainable way.

That's not to say that consulting some members of the congregation occasionally isn't a good idea. At my church, we have forums of volunteers that we ask for input and ideas. We listen to them, but we allow decision-making to rest with the people who ultimately have the responsibility.

What happens to a lot of churches when they start to grow and reach people is they move from congregational decision-making to ascribing that responsibility to the board. While this is a better move, it is still not a scalable model.

Board-Based Decision-Making

The pull in a growing church is to anchor discussion in the board. This is good, yet it too has its limits. It caps out at about five hundred people or a budget of a million dollars. At that point, the board becomes unable to process all of the complex issues in a timely fashion.

As a church grows and attracts new people, new board members will typically be elected or begin serving. There may be some entrepreneurs on that board, some small business owners, or other community members. They're used to leading in their own arenas, and their tendency will be to micromanage. They might want more information or to approve all purchasing. They will tend to get in the weeds. Trying to distill 160 hours (a month's worth of a ministry leader's work) into a two-hour monthly meeting will bog down the decision-making process. It doesn't scale.

So how should boards function?

Staff-Led Decision-Making

This leads us to the fourth, and really, the only scalable model of decision-making, and that is staff-led decision-making. **The model of decision-making that almost every growing, large church embraces can be summarized this way: staff led, board guided, and people gifted.**

I would encourage every church to move toward a staff-led, board-guided, people-gifted structure. So why does almost every growing church end up being staff led? Well, it's simple actually. The staff makes decisions because they're in on the situations day in and day out. They fully understand the issues because they are immersed in them.

The reason the board (and congregation) can trust the senior leader and staff to make decisions is because (as we saw in Session Five) the church has a clear mission, vision, strategy, and values. It also has a clear budget. And, presumably, the church has a really great team that the board trusts. So as long as the staff is on mission, on strategy, and on budget, they have permission to make decisions. They don't need approval from anybody. Many people call this "push-down decision-making."

The more you can push decisions down in the organization, the more you can grow.

So do the staff or senior leader ever need permission? Sure! If it's new or different than the strategy or different than the mission, the staff should seek permission. If it impacts another area of ministry, they know a discussion is in order. If it's over budget by even one dollar, then the team member needs permission for that. But if it's on budget, on mission, and on strategy, your staff team should be making the decisions.

Ideally, the board only has one direct report—the senior pastor. The senior pastor gets permission from the board on major initiatives and is fully accountable, but the staff seek permission for day-to-day decisions from the senior staff—either the senior leader or his or her senior team members. In other words, if the youth pastor needs permission, he sees his boss, not the board. If it's a major strategy or vision shift, then the senior pastor would present that to the board. It's an incredibly efficient model of decision-making.

Now you're probably asking, What if the staff or senior leader make bad decisions? If that's the case, then you have a team issue, not a decision-making issue. If the board continually finds the staff going off mission, it's a team issue.

Others may wonder how you can give the staff or the senior pastor that much authority. This, again, is a trust issue. There comes a point at which the board has to say to the pastor, "You're the leader God has called. We trust you, and we'll hold you accountable, but we trust you."

The senior pastor then understands that he or she has the full mantel of responsibility for the church, and he or she stewards that as a trust. The senior pastor and his or her team deal with all of the personnel issues and day-to-day issues, and the board deals with the senior leader. In many cases, and this is the case at Connexus Church, the board has the power to hire or fire the senior pastor.

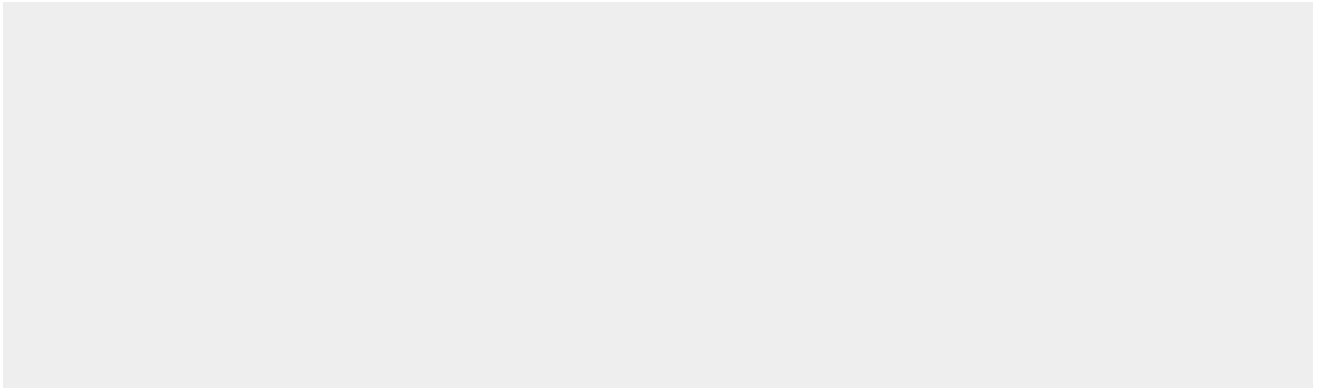
A healthy senior leader will realize that this is an incredible amount of responsibility to be entrusted with. When he is working with a board of great leaders who love the mission and who are keeping track of the thirty-thousand-foot view, he knows he can come to them with issues and trust them to advise and help him. This is a sustainable and scalable partnership that will set your church up for growth.

In this model, the role of the people —the volunteers and those in attendance—is to work together using their gifts and abilities to do the mission.

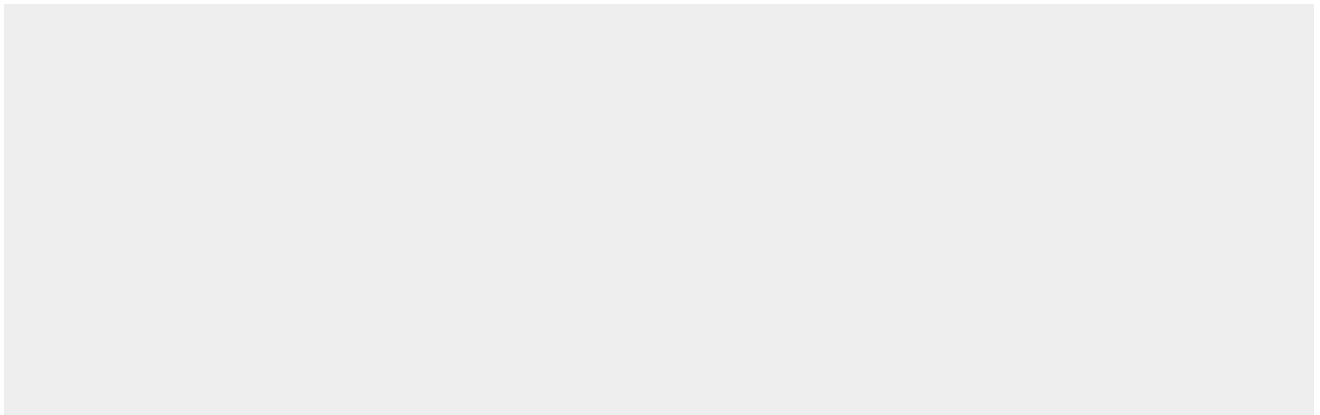
If you study growing churches, this is the model you'll see again and again, regardless of denomination and geography—it is the staff-led, board-guided, and people-gifted model.

Discussion Questions

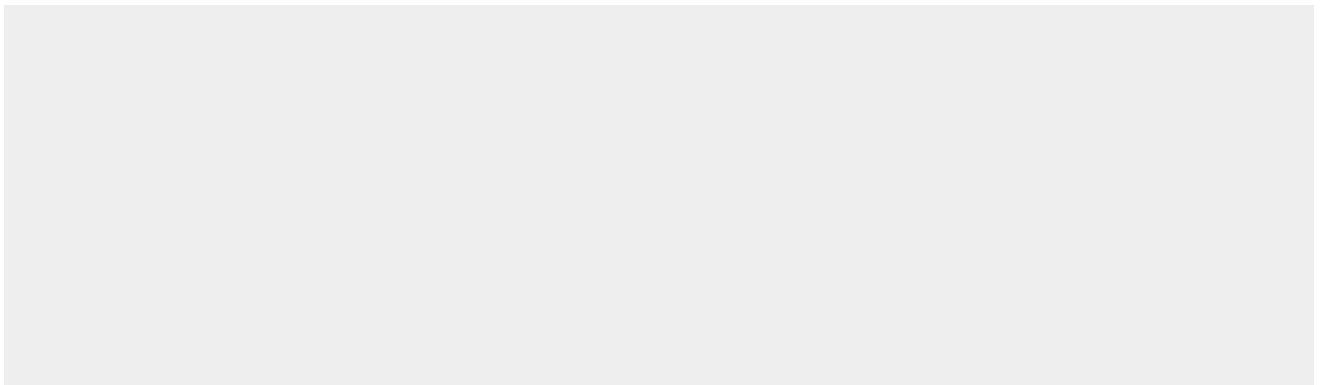
1. Which of the four models of decision-making best reflects how things are done at your church?



2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the model you've adopted?

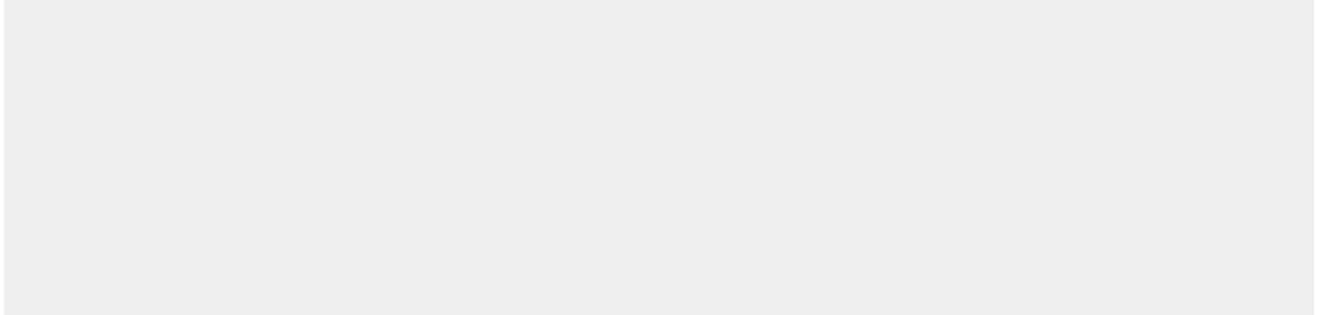


3. If you find your congregation or board likes to micromanage things, discuss what the challenges are with that approach.



Get Practical

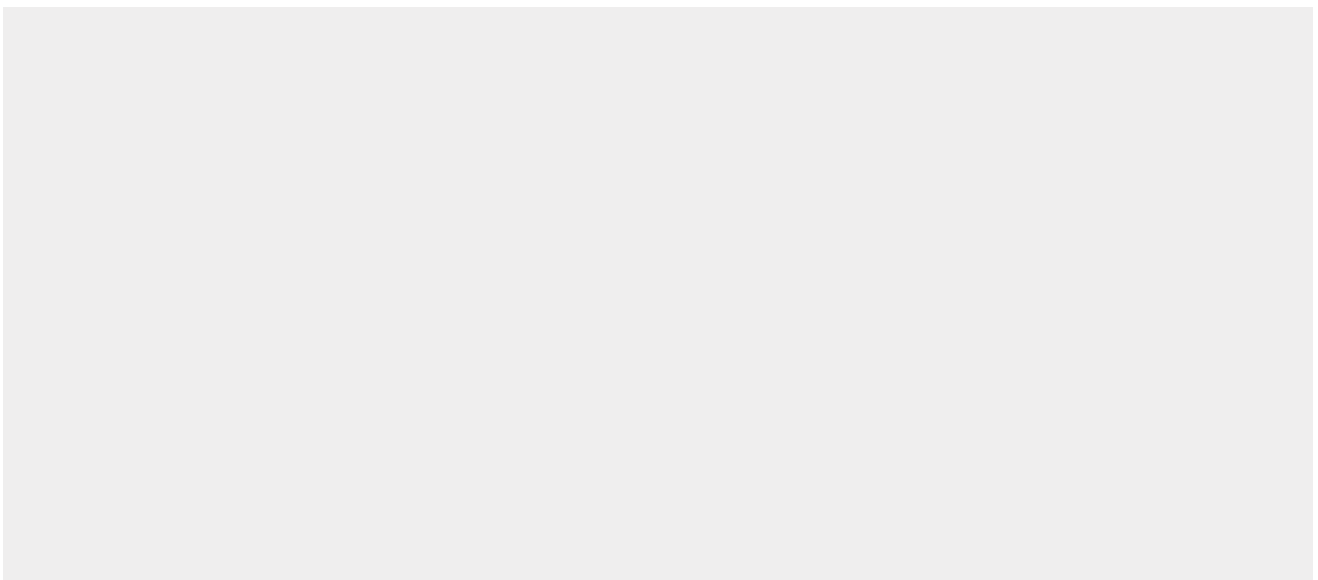
1. Having seen the four models, decide which one would help you make the best decisions as your ministry grows and you reach more people.



Make it Happen

Talk is cheap. Action produces traction. Review your action plan and add these things to it:

1. Make a transition plan to move your team from your current model toward staff-led decision-making. Be sensitive to congregational dynamics and matriarch/patriarch dynamics, and create a timeline that allows you to usher in change over a period of months or a year. If you have congregational requirements in your constitution, limit them to only what is legally required. Many churches function as though the congregation needs to approve everything, when in fact, they only need to approve a few things.
2. Work on ways to improve trust between the congregation and church leadership and between the board and the staff. What can you do to ensure trust stays high between all parties?





Session 8

Stop Making Excuses

While we've been exploring ideas that will help you Break 200 Without Breaking You, I hope you've been encouraged that it can be done. We have covered many tactical and strategic issues. Now let's look at the heart issues that have the potential to slow us down more than anything else.

All too often when I'm interacting with church leaders, I hear the same excuses over and over—reasons that something won't work or that another idea can't be done. Here's what's true: you can make excuses or you can make progress, but you can't make both.

In fact, the leaders who make the most progress make the fewest excuses. And the leaders who make the most excuses make the least progress.

Here's an example. My youngest son competed in track-and-field in high school. He and his team qualified as provincial finalists in the 4x100-meter high school relay. If you've watched a relay race, you know that one of the most crucial points is the handoff. It can make or break the race. Training for the handoff can be what separates the winners from the losers.

The challenge for my son and his track team was that they trained on a gravel track. It didn't have marked lanes. They literally practiced crucial handoffs with lines drawn in the sand. That's what his school had, so that is what they used.

In a nearby city, one of their rival teams attended a school that had a state-of-the-art, million-dollar track. The irony was that the team with the million-dollar track didn't make it to the provincial track meet. My son's team did. As he and I talked about it, it was clear that he and his team could've used the excuse of a mediocre track facility to stop trying as hard and convince themselves that they would never make it to the finals. But they didn't. They trained like crazy anyway and went all the way to the finals.

The conversation convicted me again: you and I have to absolutely stop making excuses. Now. Our mission is the greatest endeavor in the world, and we must resolve not to let excuses hold us back. Let's look at some common excuses church leaders use to explain why their ministry isn't more effective than it is. We're going to expose and explore them so that we can avoid falling into their trap.

Excuse One: "The soil is harder here."

I hear this excuse all the time. If this is true at your church, my encouragement to you is to grab a shovel. Better yet, find a pickax.

Where one person sees an obstacle, a leader sees an opportunity. Don't look at the problems—look for the possibilities. Don't allow the trap of comparison to distract you or discourage you from cultivating the soil you have. God placed you where you are with a unique calling to reach those in your community with his hope. Dig in!

Excuse Two: “Our context is different.”

This is another excuse I hear regularly. Of course your context is different; no two communities or churches are exactly alike. But I've heard leaders say X approach to ministry won't work on the west side of the city because it's so different from the east side of the city. Really? Is it that different? Is that why the church isn't growing?

The church where I serve, Connexus, is aligned with North Point and Orange. We're in Canada. Both Orange and North Point are US-based ministries. People always ask me how much from these US organizations translates to Canada. The answer I always give them is, “About 90 percent.”

Even though we're in two different countries, Canadians listen to the same music, wear the same clothes, watch the same movies and TV shows, and drive the same cars as Americans do. If something clearly doesn't work in our context, we change it. The key is not to dwell on the differences. Instead, dwell on what's effective.

Most of the church leaders I know who say something won't work in their context end up with stuck or dying churches. Excuses become a way of justifying a lack of progress.

Rather than making excuses about your context, create something that works in your context.

Excuse Three: “We don't have the money.”

Lack of funds is perhaps the most common excuse that is thrown around in church leadership circles. When I was getting my start, we definitely had a small budget. The three congregations I was leading had a combined annual budget of less than \$40,000 my first year there. You'd be tempted to think we could do nothing because of a chronic lack of funds. I learned that wasn't true in the least.

You know what's true? Vision always precedes resources.

I distinctly remember a conversation in the early days in which someone said, “We don't have any children. That's why we don't have a children's ministry.” I proposed that maybe we didn't have any children because we didn't have a children's ministry. So I said, “Maybe if we start one, we'll have some children.” Come to find out, it worked.

We didn't have any money, but we had vision and we had passion. We prayed, did what was in our power to do, and people started to come. It was amazing. Eventually, money followed and leaders were attracted. Vision always precedes resources. Rather than sitting around waiting for resources, start with a strong and passionate vision.

Here are three reasons most leaders don't have enough money:

1. Your vision isn't big enough. People give small sums to small visions. Dream big for what God wants to do in your midst.
2. Your vision isn't fully aligned with the real purposes of the church. When your mission, vision, and strategy are aligned with the biblical vision of the church, it resonates with people. They give more to something they know is authentic.
3. You haven't challenged people to give sacrificially. My wife and I have always tried to give generously and sacrificially to ministry. But we weren't seeing a completely generous culture at our church. I asked Casey Graham at The Rocket Company for help. Casey told me that I did a great job informing and inspiring people to give, but I did a terrible job asking people. I learned to ask, directly. People now give sacrificially. We've freed up significantly more money for ministry as a result.

Excuse Four: "Our people won't do that."

Other objections I hear with some regularity are "I can't get permission to do that" or "Our people won't do that." Craig Groeschel, the pastor of Life.Church, one of the largest churches in North America, won't let anyone on his team to say, "Our people won't . . ." Instead they have to say, "I have not led our people to . . ." Consequently, instead of "Our people won't invite their friends," it's "We haven't led our people to reach out to their friends . . . we haven't led our people to be generous . . . we haven't led our people to serve willingly." That shift in perspective forces us to take responsibility as leaders.

It's the leader's responsibility to lead, to point the way, to model sacrificial and generous behaviors. If your people aren't generous, start by being generous yourself. You lead the way. You don't have to wait for somebody else to be generous. Neither do you have to wait for permission to follow God's calling. Quietly, humbly, skillfully work for change if you see that your church needs it. Structure and culture should be subordinate to mission.

Excuse Five: "The church down the road took all the people."

This is another common excuse for staying stuck as a church. Rather than focusing on other churches and the people who attend them, why not focus on the unreached, the people who are not in church?

Churches that are gaining momentum and picking up people don't necessarily do it at the expense of other churches. In fact, a lot of them see true conversion growth. They see people who don't have a church background, who didn't grow up as Christians, become Christians.

While that's a huge win, other kinds of conversions happen too. Oftentimes in a thriving church, you'll meet people who have attended church all their life who encounter the gospel in a new way. They escape mere religious ritual to discover that the gospel is about Jesus and a relationship with him. As a result, their faith comes to life.

Another type of conversion happens when people who have attended church and have a relationship with Christ become converted to the mission of the church. Maybe they knew Jesus, but they never participated in the mission of the local church. Converting them to get on board with the mission is a huge win for everyone.

A thriving church has all three of these conversions happening, and yours will too as you grow.

So what do you do with the growing church down the road? Realize you're on the same team. Cooperate with them. Don't compete with them. Don't give in to a scarcity mindset. Simply set out to reach the unreached in your community. There are plenty of people who don't go to church to fill all the local churches.

Excuse Six: "If our church were in Texas, we'd have ten thousand people."

I understand the temptation to think that things are easier in someone else's context. The truth is, not every church in Texas grows either.

It's so easy to think it would be great if we weren't where we are or if we weren't who we are. The truth is, you don't have to be faithful with what God gave other people. You just need to be faithful with what he's given you.

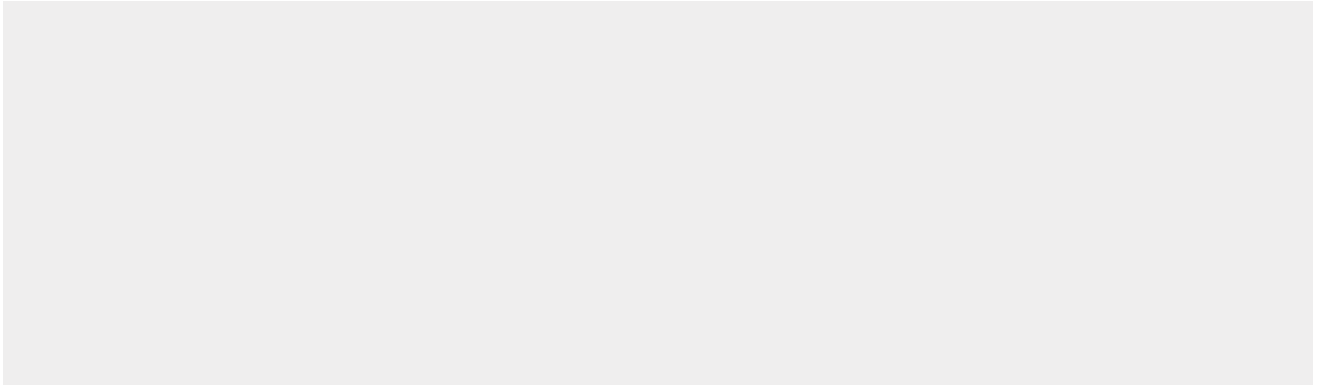
Stop wishing that God had put you somewhere he hasn't placed you. God has called you to your context, and we need men and women in every city, in every town, in every community, in every country. We need people everywhere to bring the gospel and the hope of Christ to people who desperately need it.

I've listed six common excuses here, but as you already know, it's not that hard to invent a dozen more. The human mind is a virtual excuse factory: it pumps out one after another. How you think ultimately determines what you do. One of my favorite quotes is from Henry Ford: "Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right." There's a lot of truth to that idea.

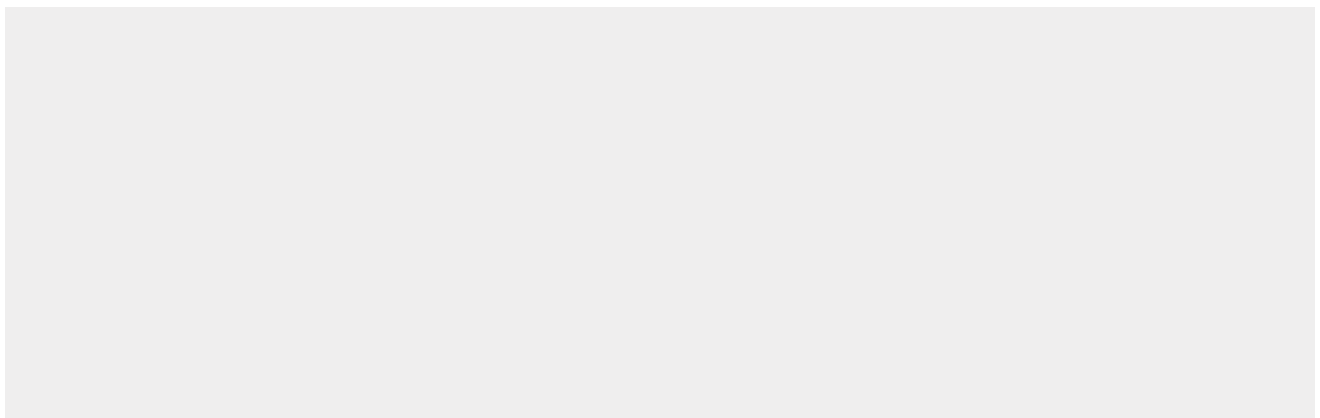
So . . . stop making excuses. You can make excuses or you can make progress, but you can't make both. Leaders who make the greatest progress make the fewest excuses. So stop making excuses and you'll start making progress.

Discussion Questions

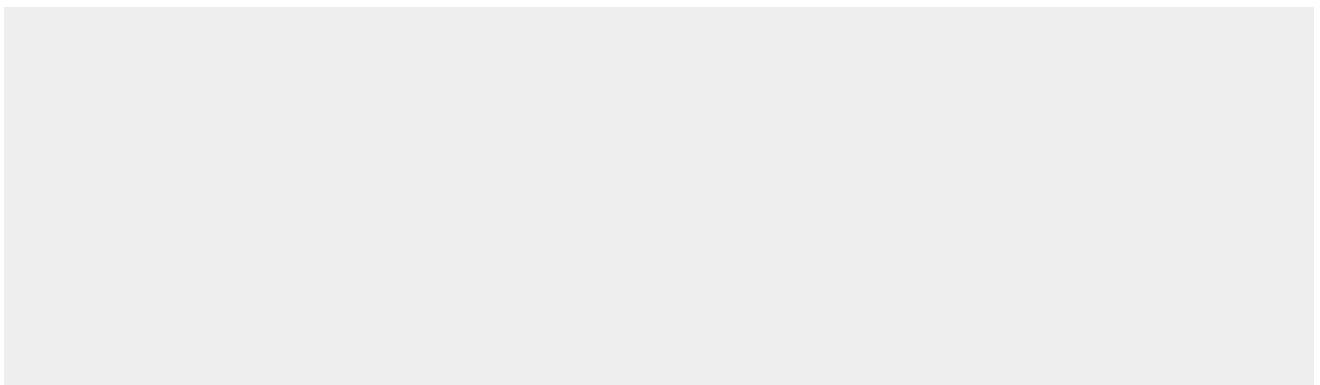
1. Of the six excuses listed, which excuses have you heard most often?



2. What excuses do you tend to make in your church for a lack of progress?

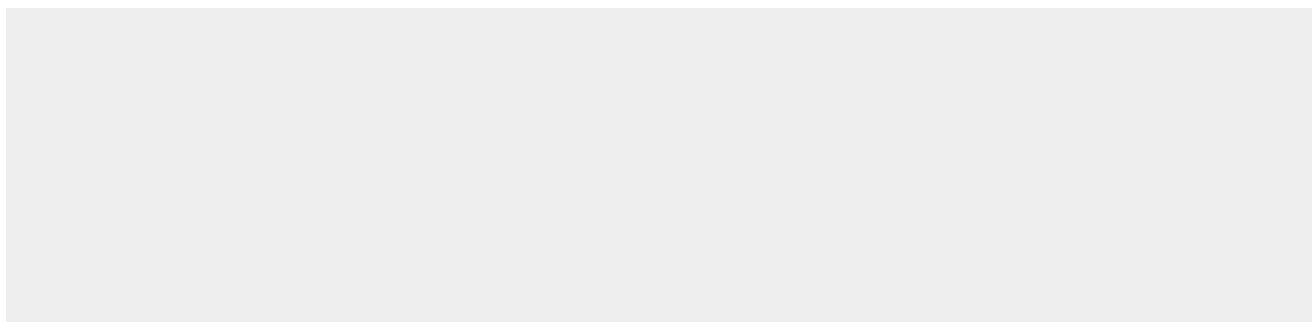


3. Would you say your church has a culture of excuse making? If so, how did it develop?



Get Practical

1. Discuss what it will take for your team to stop making excuses.



Make it Happen

Talk is cheap. Action produces traction. Review your action plan and add these things to it:

1. Your culture is formed by your attitude and habits. As you seek to stop making excuses, discuss what steps you'll take to make sure excuses die a quick death in your church or stop being made altogether. What will you need to do to accomplish this?

