

Valuable points on becoming a successful and fruitful pastor from a class I took

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Following are some valuable points from a class I took. I have organized them according to the following categories: 1) A pastor's need for personal refreshing, reviving, and retooling, 2) Change, 3) Assessing and understanding one's congregation, 4) The importance of a vision and mission, 5) Models for discipleship, 6) Leadership strategies, 7) Church growth and planting, and 8) Miscellaneous Pearls of Wisdom.

A pastor's need for personal refreshing, reviving, and retooling:

- It is important for ministers to refresh, revive, and retool themselves. They should participate in annual leadership development opportunities (retreats, continuing education seminars and courses). It is easy to burn out without this type of investment and taking these opportunities will allow leaders to remain current.
- We need to take care of the deity within ourselves.
- It's impossible to give what we do not have. This is not selfishness but rather being responsible and balanced. If we do not take care of ourselves, it is impossible to sustain value for God and others. Revive, reinforce, and rejuvenate.
- Self-Realization – heal the self from limitations. Actualization – refers to the ability to live in the moment. Determination – refers to the fulfillment of one's purpose.
- Pastors need to schedule time to be away from the people they serve. This is not easy to do but is needed in order to allow them to become better people and better pastors.
- Pastors need to involve their family in their ministry. Of course, there needs to be boundaries between their personal lives and their ministries but balance is the key here in order to be effective and successful in their first ministry (family) and their second ministry (their public responsibilities).
- Pastors need to cultivate friendships, both vertical and horizontal. It is dangerous to isolate from others.
- Church growth is closely related to pastoral health (spiritual and physical).

Change:

- Human beings are creatures of habit and are most comfortable with that which they are most familiar. They do not like change and will resist it strongly. Ministry leaders and

pastors are, however, agents of change. So it rests upon the shoulders of leaders to train, teach, and prepare people to change. Training and support must be given if leaders expect change and advancement. Part of that change should be focused on letting the church becoming aware of and also preparing the church to become relevant to emerging cultures and practices.

Assessing and understanding one's congregation:

- Ministry leaders need to continually assess the needs and situation of their congregation as well as those they will evangelize and minister to, and they need an effective tool for that assessment such as a survey or focus groups as part of that assessment process. There is a constant need for leaders to set goals and programs with a clear understanding of the needs of end-users and leaders, to close the gap between concept and reality.

The importance of a vision and mission:

- It's hard to get a congregation moving if they are not empowered. A wise leader will develop parameters, principles, and goals, and specific and detailed steps to attain those goals or practice those principles in order to empower his/her congregation or ministry members/leaders. When people know better, they can do better.
- It takes a long-term vision that is crafted by and accepted by the majority of a congregation to overcome factionalism. One way to insure this happens is through the use of focus groups, face to face dialogue, and surveys. Going through this process allows the leader to hold the congregation accountable to that vision/mission because the congregation has affirmed their acceptance. A group affirmed vision/mission diminishes differences and allows the group to focus on the positive.
- Unbounded spirituality can be dangerous. If there is no vision or mission, there is no target to aim for or motivation to develop skills to achieve those targets.
- Leaders tend to expect followers to know where they're trying to take them without instructing them about the purpose or goal – foolish!

- Build in opportunities for continual dialogue on the foundation of a shared goal. This facilitates continual cooperation and encompasses the expected interpersonal dynamic and challenges that exist in any organization and reinforces unity.
- If there is more than one person in your ministry, there is room for confusion. One clear way to counteract this situation is to have a clear purpose. Doing so also builds morale, reduces frustration, allows for concentration, attracts cooperation, and assists evaluation (Rick Warren. 1995. *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising your Mission & Mission*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, P. 86—93).
- How you start (your foundation) is often how you finish. The message can and will remain the same, while the methods will always change (innovation and style).
- Every good leader is a visionary.
- The vision needs to be transferrable (able to be shared and remembered) and owned. It should be short, articulate, and innovative – ie: 3 words. It should be created through a collaborative effort that the whole congregation or ministry is involved in, and should reflect the organism’s culture.
- Leaders absolutely need people to check them, to keep them accountable, and to be a safety net during times of challenge.
- The willingness of leaders to share their responsibilities is important; they shouldn’t take on a god complex. In managing your leadership team, be aware of and fill in the gaps in strengths, abilities, talents, and skills. For example, not everyone is good at HR issues, or not everyone possesses great administrative skills but some will be good in these. If a leader is willing to share leadership, the whole congregation will benefit.
- A church without a clearly defined structure and a vertically aligned goal and purpose is little more than a social club.
- From Rick Warren. 1995. *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising your Mission & Mission*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan: A purpose should be biblical, specific, transferrable, and measurable. (Pp. 100—101)
- A vision/mission must belong to the community. It must move from my vision to our vision.

Models for discipleship:

- The ultimate model for discipleship can be found in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus had to win and nurtured his disciples. The pattern he followed was:
 - He got their attention. He spoke their cultural language, in a way that was familiar to them.
 - He elevated them, giving them something they had not received before such as hope, clarity, direction, intellectual and spiritual nourishment, and positive influences. He poured something into them that was new and different.
 - He made them disciples, empowering them to follow him as committed individuals, and ultimately raised them up to the point where they were able to testify and bring forth new fruits/disciples.
- Leaders need to understand that those they disciple need to become spiritually mature before they can be expected to give to God unconditionally. Leaders cannot expect from others what they have not trained, empowered, and elevated them to achieve. And really, leaders need to be the first who are willing to change, be equipped and trained for the role of a leader.
- Good advice: Ask your team to instruct you (the leader) on the purpose, take written notes during all meeting, and always have a written agenda prior to a meeting. A written agenda: helps accomplish goals, reduces confusion, lessens frustration, allows for concentration, supports assessment and evaluation, helps people to collaborate and cooperate, and allows circumvention of hidden agendas.
- Self-realization, self-actualization, and self-determination.
- Remember we are children of the King and should carry ourselves with dignity, as princes and princesses, with a healthy and honest sense of our own strengths and weaknesses.
- Discipleship is what sustains and replenishes the church. A true disciple believes, accepts, and recruits. As well, disciples need to devote time, talent, and treasure into the mission of the church.
- Is it necessary to join the church to become a disciple? No, however a church and congregation can provide a structure for spiritual growth and be a reminder of our social responsibility (no man is an island). The church, however, must be ever vigilant to remain relevant.

- Disciples are not owners but rather stewards who will always be required to give an accounting to the true owner, God and Christ. As stewards, we must be faithful to whatever gifts, talents, responsibilities, or tasks we have been asked to oversee.
- From Rick Warren. 1995. *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message & Mission*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
 - Without a commitment to grow, any growth that occurs will be circumstantial, rather than intentional. Spiritual growth is too important to be left to circumstances. (P.333)
 - Anyone can become physically fit if he or she will regularly do certain exercises and practice good health habits. Likewise, spiritual fitness is simply a matter of learning certain *spiritual* exercises and being disciplined to do them until they become habits. Character is shaped by the habits we develop. (P. 334)
 - *The truth is this: It takes a variety of spiritual experiences with God to produce spiritual maturity.* Genuine spiritual maturity includes having a heart that worships and praises God, building and enjoying loving relationships, using your gifts and talents in service to others, and sharing your faith with lost people. (P. 340)
 - All I'm saying is that it is a mistake to assume that study *alone* will produce maturity. It is only one component of the maturity process. People need experiences in addition to study in order to grow. Churches must have a balanced strategy for developing disciples. (Pp. 342—343)
 - Saddleback's strategy for developing disciples is based on the six truths I identified in contrast to each myth. We believe that spiritual growth begins with commitment, is a gradual process, involves developing habits, is measured by five factors [knowledge, perspective, conviction, skills, and character], is stimulated by relationships, and requires participation in all five purposes of the church [refers to Saddleback church's vision and mission. This will be customized according to the vision/mission developed and implemented by each church congregation]. (P. 343)
 - Examples of habits: "The habit of time with God's Word, the habit of prayer, the habit of tithing, and the habit of fellowship . . . The purpose is to get people started on the journey. They leave committed to the process and to the basic habits that are necessary for growth . . . commit their time, money, and relationships to Christ. (P. 349)
- If you do not grow oak trees you will never have the ability to lean on them for support when you need rest from time to time. If you do grow oak trees, however, you shouldn't feel intimidated when you need to call upon their help.
- People may achieve happiness in their lives but if they live without applying spiritual laws and purposes to their mind, body, and soul, they will never achieve joyfulness. One of these spiritual laws is that we cannot be selfish in purpose or action. However, having a positive sense of oneself makes it easier to care for others and each person must be responsible for their own spiritual development and growth. Also, one needs to be in a relationship with God, Christ, and others as well in order to achieve that peace of mind that passes all understanding.
- Everybody has something they need to deal with, heal and overcome.

Leadership strategies:

- Two approaches to leadership are: 1) Man centered (anthropomorphic) and 2). God centered. A man centered approach is designed taking human needs into consideration. It is humanistic and represents God reaching to man. A God centered approach is one where man is reaching to God. A noteworthy approach would utilize a balanced paradigm. A man centered paradigm is potentially vulnerable to insolvency, especially if it is also empowered by a charismatic leader or a pastor that has held a position for an extended period of time. In practice, the entrance into a ministry often takes the form of a man centered approach, which then goes through a process to become a God centered one.
- How do you sustain a church that's man centered? You can't! If the leader leaves, falters, or collapses then the programs will fail and the followers will leave. It is crucial that pastors build into their leadership plan, mentorship and shared leadership.
- Sheep beget sheep; however a good shepherd begets new shepherds. Leaders need to look beyond the present in developing their leadership plans; they have to consider the future and the next steps. They need to spiritually nurture, educate, correct, and guide through love and the conveyance of principles that are clearly written down. Leaders can't do everything, so they absolutely need to build a team.
- Leaders need to focus on members and uncover their talents. They need to respond to the life of their congregation or ministry by showing that they care. Folks need to be given every opportunity to grow and develop themselves. Leaders need to know who they are working with including identifying their skills, talents, gifts, nature and personality.
- Leaders need to develop a multicultural strategy. Culture, worldviews (such as being inclusive of Millennials who are typically influenced by a post-modern worldview) and identity are powerful forces that need to be addressed with resources and awareness. Leaders who wish to be effective must create strategies to deal with multiculturalism. A good imagery for this type of approach is a salad bowl as opposed to a melting pot. The idea is not to amalgamate but rather to celebrate the cultural integrity of each member of a congregation, group, community, or society.

- Leaders need to develop a shared leadership structure which includes various team members (pillars of strengths and talents) that complement and compensate for weakness of the point leader. Such an organizational structure will not collapse or be destroyed easily. Part of that shared leadership plan must include clarifying responsibilities, continual training and re-tooling, rewards and recognition, and a means to evaluate progress. Also, it's important for a key leader to avoid surrounding themselves with others who are copies of themselves, but rather they should include in their team different personalities, strengths, abilities, and temperaments.
- The best management approach is neither top down nor bottom up but represents a blending of those two approaches, one which develops middle management and communication between the levels (and utilizes the Jethro Principle). This is a democratic approach in action. There should be written by-laws to mitigate conflict or confusion.
- Never assume that those you serve “get” what you have conveyed. Check by having them repeat it back to you!
- There is a difference between an organization and an organism. A church should be an organism – living and growing. Also, organisms: are threatened if there is no communication, are vulnerable to foreign invaders (viruses), ill-health in one component or area affects the whole, and it needs to incorporate healthy spiritual practices.
- There is church work and there is the work of the church. Never confuse the difference in these two perspectives.
- Related to shared leadership: If you are the smartest person in your circle, you need a new circle!
- True leadership must always incorporate knowledge based on God's word. Inspiration without wisdom is a form of godlessness. For growth to be sustainable, a depth of theology and the study of the word must be incorporated. One's actions are dictated by one's faith and beliefs, which must be constantly reinforced by devotional study.
- Leaders need to focus on the process of growing people. Also, leaders must be willing to allow leaders-in-process to fail for that is often one of the ways they learn.
- Leaders need to be wary of trying to take the responsibility of spiritual growth away from their congregants. This is a huge trap and ultimately unsustainable.

Church growth and planting:

- Ministers and congregations need to identify their target group for ministry and evangelism as well as the context and circumstances of that target group/people/location.
- Growth without sustainability is a revolving door. Any plan for growth must include a plan for sustainability. This includes a plan for effective mentorship, a succession plan, and shared leadership. Leaders need to empower and mentor others around them to practice and master skills and become effective in their own leadership.
- Church planting must encompass an awareness of the dominant culture of the context chosen for outreach as well as awareness of the culture of both the birthing and target community. Both of these need to be respected and considered and communication and genuinely encouraged.
- Major impediments for successful church growth are: unqualified leaders, weak support from host church, and lack of buy-in on the part of the new congregation. Good church planting starts with assessing and meeting the needs of the target community, providing support, should reflect love in action, and needs to contain an infrastructure that has the capacity to grow and be sustained. People need to understand that you care. Periodically retool, retrain, and survey those served and the leaders serving them in order to keep abreast of all needs and situations.
- To apply the indigenous principles (Ahlen, J. Timothy and J.V. Thomas. 1999. *One Church, Many Congregations: The Key Church Strategy*. Nashville: Abingdon Press) mission leaders must base their strategy, methods, and ministries on scripture and not on their own cultural interpretation of the Bible. The principles of scripture must be applied in the context of the target, rather than the host culture. The Indigenous Principle is: “*The indigenous missions principle states that congregations are healthier and more productive, and require little or no outside support, when started and developed in the context of the socioeconomic conditions and culture of the people who are to be evangelized or congregationalized*” (Ahlen and Thomas, 1999:32).
- Outreach must be guided by love and if it is not, that work will easily devolve into a me or I centered effort. We must serve with a great respect and appreciation for the value of each person we reach as the highest creation of God, a son or daughter.
- This type of outreach needs to reflect a healthy theological perspective and principles and stands in stark contrast to the history of colonialism and manifest destiny, where the

colonizers stole the value and richness of the lands they colonized, demeaned the people, and often enslaved them. Always serve motivated by love. One way to test the value of our efforts would be to check the fruits and defer to a credible source beyond ourselves

(Scripture, Holy Books): (Ahlen and Thomas, 1999: 67—68)

- People are the highest creation of God with infinite potential and value and as such are of infinite worth.
- People are whole beings made up of physical, emotional, and spiritual segments that cannot be separated or isolated.
- God desires the highest good for all people, which is life in fellowship with him on earth and in his eternal kingdom.
- People are motivated to serve by God's love for him and by the love of God as revealed in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Principles:

1. Because people are free agents, we must allow each person the right to make his or own decision.
 2. Because people are whole, and because God desires the highest good for all people, we are concerned with all aspects of a person's well-being. Not only do we meet his or her physical need, but we also seek to meet his or her emotional and spiritual needs. Community ministry and evangelism go hand in hand. (Ahlen and Thomas, 1999:67—68)
- Evangelism – it is important to include an educational component, to inspire those you educate to become witnesses and to model what you are teaching in order for them to inspire others to seek what they have. It is important to remember that God gives the increase. We need to water the plant, however, in order to make it grow and be attractive.
 - Remember to listen and respect the person(s) who holds the cultural history and currency of any organization.
 - Unfortunately, when the focus of evangelism is reduced to numbers, there will be a loss of sustainability in a church's growth and gained members will easily leave. If there is no benefit, impact, or value for members, evangelism outcomes lead too little more than a revolving door. Members need to develop spiritual growth and be connected to a ministry that reflects and taps into their specific gifts. If a member benefits, they will be committed and feel indebted.
 - If the church doesn't have an impact on the surrounding community it doesn't deserve the title of a church.
 - Church growth should not be accomplished by happenstance but rather it should be planned. The Holy Spirit is an intelligent spirit.

Miscellaneous Pearls of Wisdom:

- We need to plan for the desert experience that is to come in life, so that we can deal with those times.
- Be careful to avoid giving a responsibility to a new leader too quickly, doing so can potentially harm a person, allowing them to become prideful and arrogant. Elevating someone without training and education makes for bad leaders.
- Good leaders are good followers.
- If the shepherd incorrectly leads, don't blame the victim.
- There is a difference between ownership and partnership. Humanity's relationship with God is one where we are owned by God because we were created by Him. With others, our partnership is one based on relationship. Ownership isn't taken, it must be given. It's good to remember that we are stewards and will eventually be call to account by the owner.
- Without a plan, you should plan to fail.
- Be busy doing the work of the church rather than church work.
- The purpose of all faiths is to bring greater consciousness of God to the world.
- The ultimate motivation for all action is love (which is a verb). Love is best expressed through doing, giving, and receiving. Each of us needs to learn how to receive as this is often not easy.
- Thoughts on the meaning of a calling: It drives and consumes you. You are willing to sacrifice for its accomplishment. It relates to purpose. Its carries a unique urgency. It ties us to something larger in our lives, a higher purpose. However, when a calling emerges, the one who is called must respond by preparing, equipping, and training themselves in order to be successful. One who is called is anointed to fulfill a specific purpose. In the end, all glory must be given to God for, without the addition of God's help, ultimately the goal cannot be reached. Often being called leads to going a suffering course.
- When people know better, they can do better.