

**Pastor's Guide for Implementation of
*God, Give Us Your Vision:
Leading Your Church to Seek the
Face of God for Your Community*
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A picture of what we desire:

Throughout history, there have been many movements of God. These real-life stories quicken our hearts and minds to the possibilities of God moving in our context. They create in us a longing for something similar to take place in our day. They are a good reminder of how prayer might affect being on mission with God in today's culture.

For instance, one can read many of the first-hand accounts as penned by Samuel Prime, an 1800's Presbyterian minister, who shares great insight into what many refer to as the "Prayer Revival" during the 1850's. His reporting stirs our souls to the point of asking God to do likewise among us.

Here are a few excerpts from his book, *The Power of Prayer*:

Of the FULTON STREET REVIVAL. The early dawn of the revival was marked by love to Christ, love for all his people, love of prayer, and love of personal effort. Never in any former revival, since the days of the first Christians, was the name of Christ so honored, never so often mentioned, never so precious to the believer. Never was such ardent love to him expressed. Never was there so much devotedness to his service. The whole atmosphere was love. It is not strange, then, that those who so loved him, should love his image wherever and in whomsoever they saw it. It was a moral necessity. The union of Christians was felt. It needed no professions. Hence there was no room for sectarian jealousies. It was felt that all Christians had a right to pray; all were commanded to pray; all ought to pray. And if all

wished to pray, and pray together, who should hinder? This union of Christians in prayer struck the unbelieving world with amazement. It was felt that this was prayer. This love of Christians for one another, and this love of Christ, this love of prayer and love of souls, this union of all in prayer, whose names were lost sight of, disarmed all opposition, so that not a man opened his mouth in opposition.” (Prime, Samuel I., *The Power of Prayer*, Kindle Locations 233-242)

When we come to the history of the third month of prayer, what a change we find rapidly taking place, not only in the city, but all over the land. It was everywhere a revival of prayer. It was not prayer-meetings in imitation of the Fulton street meetings. Those that say so, or think so, greatly err. God was preparing his glorious way over the nation. It was the desire to pray. The same Power that moved to prayer in Fulton Street, moved to prayer elsewhere. The same characteristics that marked the Fulton street meeting, marked all similar meetings. The Spirit of the Lord was poured out upon these assemblages, and it was this that made the places of prayer all over the land places of great solemnity and earnest inquiry. Men did not doubt — could not doubt — that God was moving in answer to prayer. It was this solemn conviction that silenced all opposition — that awakened the careless and stupid — that encouraged and gladdened the hearts of Christians — causing a general turning to the Lord. Such a display of love and mercy, on the part of the ever blessed Spirit, was never made before. The religious press, all over the country, heralded the glad news of what the Lord was doing in some places; thus preparing the way for what he was about to do in others. Thousands on thousands of closets bore witness to strong crying and tears before God in prayer all over the land. Thousands of waiting hearts, hearing that Jesus was passing by, begged

that he would tarry long enough to look on them. On the very first days of the present year [1858], the secular press in this city began to notice and publish the facts of this great movement to prayer. With scarcely' an exception, this was done in the most respectful and approving terms. Most of the secular daily journals of this city spread abroad the intelligence of what was doing. The people demanded it, and the publication of it was a sort of necessity. The revival columns were read with the most eager interest over the whole country, and many thousands were influenced by them, who never looked into a religious paper. God's hand was in all this. (Samuel I. Prime, *The Power of Prayer*, Kindle Locations 288-302)

I hope you would agree that we do long for something like what happened in the great "Prayer Revival." It is rather apparent that prayer must be found in our churches as a primary means of strategy. Here is how Tom Elliff, former IMB president, said it, "God has given us prayer, not primarily as a method for getting things or changing circumstances, but as a means of cooperating with Him in His great plan for the redemption of the lost and other great spiritual exploits." (*A Passion for Prayer*, Tom Elliff, p. 19)

Hudson Taylor was rather strong in his statement about such praying. He reportedly said, "It is possible to move men, through God, by prayer alone."

Perhaps, we should follow the prayer of Habakkuk for God to make His name famous. Habakkuk cried to God, *I have heard the report about You; Lord, I stand in awe of Your deeds. Revive Your work in these years; make it known in these years.* (Hab. 3:2) May we, too, cry to God to show up in extraordinary ways just as He has in the past so that He gets the glory He so richly deserves.

The Unfortunate Reality of Our Evangelistic Efforts:

Such a mighty movement has not been seen in the U.S. for a very long time. Greg Frizzell paints a grim picture of the current reality in this way, "Let's face it, if intense promotion, strong funding and new strategies could produce sweeping revival, Southern Baptists would have long since seen the greatest awakening in history. Yet in spite of a fifty-year flood of new programs, the nation has witnessed its worst spiritual collapse and our baptisms their worst stagnation." (Greg Frizzell, *Biblical Patterns for Powerful Church Prayer Meetings*, p. 17)

Wow, that statement is not only disturbing but heartbreaking as we must admit it is all too true. If we took the time for some honest evaluation, we would likely discover a feeling of weariness in a good portion of our churches because they see so little impact upon their fields of ministry. Although there are many contributing factors to our current condition, I believe there is, at least, one action we should take in order to see a reversal of such disturbing trends.

This action is based on one particular process that is commanded in the Word of God, was commonly practiced by influential biblical leaders, and modeled in the early church. This process is a process of intentional prayer related to acquiring that which is on God's heart. This process calls the church to become intentional, persistent, and desperate in seeking the face of God for His leadership in our ministry of reconciliation in our communities. What we should seek is for prayer to be an essential part of the character of the church.

For prayer to be in our DNA, it is crucial for it to become the norm in the life and mission of the church. Jesus asked, *Is it not written? "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."* (Mk. 11:17) For anything to be considered a "house of" something, that quality must be found when people examine it. Thus, a "house of prayer" should, when examined, contain the unmistakable quality of prayer. That

being the case, the Church, your church, should pray so often that Christians and non-believers alike know you to be a house of prayer. You should be known as “praying people.”

Jesus illustrates the necessity of resolve to the process of prayer in Luke 18:1-8. There He uses the imperative mode (a command) to direct His disciples *that they should always pray and not give up* (vs. 1). Clearly, in this parable of the persistent widow He teaches us to keep praying those things related to the will of God even when it appears there is no answer. In fact, the expectation is that when He returns He will find His people praying persistently. In this particular context, praying without ceasing is an indication of our faith in God (vs. 8). He expects to find people of faith who believe He will move in due time so they pray, pray, and pray.

Influential biblical leaders taught and modeled a similar commitment to prayer. King David said, *Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always.* (1 Chron. 16:11) Wise kings who followed King David were most successful when they sought God and called His people to seek Him (2 Chron. 14:4-7, 20:3, 12-15, 26:5, 31:20-21). In contrast, when the king and the people did not seek God, disaster often struck (1 Chron. 15:13, 2 Chron. 26:16).

The early church’s immediate response to the ascension of Christ was to head to a private place to pray (Acts 1:12-14). While in that upper room, we are told *these were continually united in prayer*. The meaning of this phrase is that they were of one mind, accord, and purpose in their prayer. It was out of this ongoing prayer meeting that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit took place (Acts 2). T.W. Hunt wrote, “The most convincing proof of the power of unity in prayer is found in Acts 1:14: ‘These all (the eleven apostles) *with one mind* were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers’ (NASB, italics added). The result of that unified prayer was the greatest miracle in the Book of Acts—Pentecost. The outpouring of

the Holy Spirit on New Testament believers united in prayer in an upper room. God grant that somehow we may recapture that unity and that our times may see another Pentecost!" (Compiled by John Franklin, *A House of Prayer: Prayer Ministries in Your Church*, p. 11)

The early church had no need to be convinced of the necessity of prayer. They had a conviction that it was in prayer that they received renewed courage, clarity, direction, and the power of the Lord for mission. You see them gathering together on a regular basis to pray for God's direction in and power for ministry.

The pastor/leader of today's congregations will demonstrate similar wisdom by leading people to seek the face of God in all that they do. Once God's leaders and His people develop a conviction that the Lord always expects prayer to be the starting point and sustaining process to the Holy Spirit's power and guidance then our churches' will become alive, passionate and effective in our evangelism. We simply don't need more programs. We need to cry out to God to revolutionize our hearts so that we will joyfully join in His mission of total gospel saturation of our field of ministry.

By seeking Him diligently we can expect Him to be active in drawing people to Himself and building His church. We then fall in line with the instruction of the Lord Jesus who said, *I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.* (John 15:5, NIV)

In order to see God's hand upon us we must realize that it is not in our own might that we successfully touch others but by the power and leading of the Holy Spirit. One of the ways we are filled with such power and given such leading is through intense prayer. Frizzell expounds on the previous statement by saying, "Without intense prayer, programs easily become man-centered rather than God-dependent. Clearly there is immediate need for a fundamental change in priority and practice. That change is a widespread return

to the very root of our power – the dynamic corporate prayer meeting! (In truth, that's just about the only thing we haven't tried.)" (Frizzell, *Biblical Patterns for Powerful Church Prayer Meetings*, p. 17)

Some would challenge those who talk so strongly about prayer. They feel this gives approval to locking ourselves away in a closet so that we don't have to interact with the world. However, this type of prayer when based on the truth of the Word of God stimulates us for mission. In fact, the majority of prayers in the book of Acts and Paul's writings carried a theme of gospel advance so one would be hard pressed to hold to the belief that prayer merely leads us to hide. No, kingdom praying leads us to act but with the right motivation and with God's guidance. The kingdom praying in the Word of God is a cry for action and often implies as with Isaiah, "here I am, send me." Yet, praying through God's Word brings us to move forward in step with God while refraining us from rushing ahead of God. Such biblically-centered praying restores clarity in our understanding of the real source in our attempts to introduce others to Jesus.

J.E. Conant addresses this thought in his book, *Every-Member Evangelism*, "It is not *we* who win the lost by the *help* of Christ, it is *Christ himself* who does the soul-winning through the lives and lips of yielded disciples. And so it is not so much a question either of equipment or lack of it, as it is a question of his absolute possession and control, by the Holy Spirit, of whatever equipment we may have. When the Holy Spirit controls a Christian, he will be constrained, impelled, borne along, to go after the lost, command or no command. The great essential, therefore, in soul-winning is to be completely possessed, through the fullness of the Spirit, by him whose life on earth it was to seek and to save the lost." (J.E. Conant, *Every-Member Evangelism*, p. xi) Oh, that the Lord would raise up a generation of those who would live as Jesus in that He did nothing on His own but only that which He saw His Father doing (Jn. 5:19).

The Purpose of this Pastor's Guide:

The purpose of this Pastor's Guide is to assist you in leading your church into asking God for His vision for your field of ministry. It is hoped that your body of believers will faithfully pray over the coming month(s) with a mindset longing for God to show them His ways, His will, and to grant His leadership to your church to see the transformation of your field and our valley for the glory of God.

I've been involved in many discussions about why we seem so ineffective at reaching people for Christ. Obstacles that have been mentioned include lack of money, apathy, fear, misplaced priorities and many other obstacles too numerous to mention in this space.

Interestingly, when discussion on obstacles, excuses or arguments takes place, many times the common thread uncovered in this resistance relates to the condition and attitude of the believer's heart. Described one way or another, the general thinking among those with which I've discussed this is that the heart is somehow not right with God and thus there is little or no concern for witnessing, little compassion for our communities, and little desire to become influencers in our communities. When a person loses his/her focus on the truth of God's Word and His ability to do "impossible" things, then he/she becomes distracted by trivial matters and secondary agendas. People, then, are more focused on why it can't be done, or why we're not ready to do it, or why it shouldn't be done rather than on the simple will of God that all need to hear, that none should perish, and that He will give us power for witness. Therefore, an additional purpose is for the pastor/leader to assist His people in gaining a God-driven internal motivation for the sake of the gospel.

However, in order to see our people engage in a process of Word-based and prayer-focused strategy, the leader must set the example in word and deed. The pastor needs to strive to be a good example before his congregation. We as leaders, must become facilitators and

leaders who seek the face of God and, in turn, lead our people to search for the plan of God for our fields of ministry.

In addition, it is hoped and prayed for that pastors and their churches will consider how the plan of God ties in with sister congregations. Generating kingdom partnerships for transformation of surrounding cities will challenge pastors to make and take time to pray with, for, and over one another's ministry fields. It is apparent in both Scripture and history that God was not only concerned with the condition and purpose of the church but has a plan for community transformation in mind as His church is deployed into a lost world. Go to the book of Acts in the New Testament and read on the impact of the church on the cities. We need to remember; no one church can accomplish this alone.

This guide is intended to remind pastors and leaders to:

- Let God stimulate the desire for evangelism as the church seeks the heart and mind of God in prayer for His will and way of reaching the world.
- Display dependency upon God as the one who can bring about community transformation.
- Trust God to give clear guidance on how to go about saturating the local church's mission field and the Salt Lake Baptist Association field of ministry for Christ.
- Get us before God to allow Him to show the condition of our hearts.
- Experience a Word-based, prayer focused, God-empowered strategy that brings glory to God alone.

Henry and Richard Blackaby give a good summary that applies to the intent of this guide. "If Jesus provides the model for spiritual leadership, then the key is not for leaders to develop visions and to set the direction for their organizations. The key is to obey and to preserve everything the Father reveals to them of His will. Ultimately, the Father is the leader. God has the vision of what He

wants to do. God does not ask the leaders to dream big dreams for Him or to solve the problems that confront them. He asks leaders to walk with Him so intimately that, when He reveals what is on His agenda, they will immediately adjust their lives to His will and the results will bring glory to God.” (Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda*, p. 29)

The wise pastor/leader realizes that he is not the sole spiritual conduit of the voice of God to the congregation. He must realize that God not only reveals His will to the pastor but also to the congregation as they seek Him diligently (2 Chron. 20:11-17, Acts 1:15-26, 4:23-32). The pastor should facilitate opportunities for the congregation to hear from God while teaching them to listen for the voice of God in relation to the work of God in and through the local church.

As the pastor leads, he will need not only to help the congregation understand that *God speaks to them*, but, in addition, that *God wants to speak to them about His kingdom*. When taught about how to spend time with God in prayer and His Word, many have been taught to focus primarily upon what God is saying to them personally about issues related to their job and family. Certainly God cares about those things. But if that is the lone focus of our time before Him, we’ll miss His plan for advancing His kingdom most effectively. The plan of God includes the whole church to be on mission and not just scattered individuals. God answers prayers and reveals plans that guide the local body of believers to accomplish His mission.

But, there is a bigger picture than the local church. Jesus announced His bigger plan was to include reaching *Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth* (Acts 1:8). If that is His plan, then we should anticipate Him to remind us of additional areas of need beyond our direct ministry fields. With that being the case, pastors/leaders should instruct church members to make it a practice of asking God to shape a vision for a much wider field and with other kingdom

partners. In Southern Baptist life this would include the local association of churches, the work of the state convention in evangelism/ missions, the work of national entities like the North American Mission Board and the work internationally through the International Mission Board. However, we should be sensitive to working with other like-minded, biblically-centered, Christ-honoring, evangelical partners.

I define kingdom partners as other like-minded evangelical groups who believe in the one true God, the authority and veracity of the Word of God, believe in the sinfulness of man and His need for repentance, believe that Jesus Christ is the only means of forgiveness and salvation and believe the church has been given the assignment to proclaim the Good News of Jesus to the world.

It is hoped that pastors will experience the unexplainable when placing a high priority on passionately pursuing God's heart. Steve Gaines, in his book *When God Comes to Church*, writes, "I am convinced that one of the reasons so many people are turned off from the idea of church these days is that *it is all so explainable*. Too many churches are growing simply because they are well-oiled machines. Church programs, in and of themselves, will not change one person's life for eternity. Rather, what causes a thief to quit stealing from his employer, what causes divorced people to soften their hearts and remarry each other, what causes a man to stop using pornography, what causes a homosexual to turn away from his lifestyle, what causes grown men to reconcile after not speaking to each other in years is the touch of God. If the Lord is truly our focal point, needy people can come into the house of God and feel His convicting power even during the time of singing, before the preacher ever starts... We have to focus on Him first of all. It does no good to reach out to human beings ahead of reaching out to God. That's backwards. When we get close to God, He moves close to us – and people come running to get in on the action." (Steve Gaines, *When God Comes to Church*, p. 10)

A Call to be a Faithful Remnant:

Pastor/leader, what we really need is a movement of God that awakens the hearts of believers as we have not seen in a very long time in these United States. Although spoken in 1948, A.W. Tozer's statement still rings true today. Tozer wrote, "In this hour of all-but-universal darkness one cheering gleam appears: within the fold of conservative Christianity there are to be found increasing numbers of persons whose religious lives are marked by a growing hunger after God Himself. They are eager for spiritual realities and will not be put off with words, nor will they be content with correct 'interpretations' of truth. They are athirst for God, and they will not be satisfied till they have drunk deep at the Fountain of Living Water." (A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, p. 7).

Wouldn't you want to gain satisfaction from the true fountain of living water (Jn. 7:37-38)? Wouldn't you admit that such a dry spiritual experience is all too often the norm in the lives of followers of Christ perhaps even in your local church? Wouldn't you want to see your local church be touched by God in such a way that your members operate out God-given stimulation to be and do as He wills? Well, it is my conviction that this renewed filling and empowerment comes when we seek the Father sincerely and passionately. This happens when pastors lead their churches to align with the heart of God. The pastor who passionately desires this must be willing to seek God in spite of many who are lackadaisical in doing so. The pastor must commit to be one of the faithful few whether or not others display a diligence in seeking Him. The pastor/leader must determine to seek God and lead his church in doing so because he has settled in his heart and mind that there is no better way to see success than in total reliance upon God. Pastor, your people need your leadership on what it looks like to be led by God as a church.

Reasons why pastors/leaders should lead churches to align with God:

1. In order to humbly and respectfully respond to God's invitation of communion (Ps. 27:8). It is not only a common courtesy to respond to an invitation from God but it is an expectation of God Himself. Any desire to seek God originates with God as an expression of His mercy and grace, indicating that He truly does long for us to experience intimacy with Him. From the broken intimacy in the Garden of Eden to the present, the bent of humanity is to live life on our own (Ps. 53). Thus, for the Holy God to draw us to Him is an undeniable act of undeserved grace and mercy instead of deserved judgment.

A.W. Tozer refers to this wooing of God as "prevenient grace." He says, the doctrine of prevenient grace is this,

that before man can seek God; God must first have sought the man. Before a sinful man can think a right thought of God, there must have been a work of enlightenment done within him; imperfect it may be, but a true work nonetheless, and the secret cause of all desiring and seeking and praying which may follow. We pursue God because, and only because, He has first put an urge within us that spurs us to the pursuit. 'No man can come to me,' said our Lord, 'except the Father which hath sent me draw him,' and it is by this prevenient *drawing* that God takes from us every vestige of credit for the act of coming. The impulse to pursue God originates with God, but the outworking of that impulse is our following hard after Him; and all the time we are pursuing Him we are already in His hand. (A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, pp. 11-12).

Incredible! The God of the universe desires communion with us so much so that He first pursues us. The richest reward for us

awaits as we, in turn, pursue Him. Then we can join the Psalmist through *personal experience* in saying, *You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing* (Ps. 16:3), *Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. . . The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing* (Ps. 34:8, 10), *How priceless is your unfailing love* (Ps. 36:6) and shout without compulsion, *Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you* (Ps. 63:3). Dwelling in His presence gives us the sweetest taste that we will ever experience in this life on earth. And, in addition to our own experience, that attitude of uninhibited praise and personal experience positively affects the lives of others around us.

2. To follow the example of total dependence on God as set by the Lord Jesus. Christ, the very Son of God, the One who remains sinless, the One who gave up His place in heaven to become a man, the One who has seen the Father and lived with the Father, needed intimacy and guidance on an ongoing basis. His communion was as we say in our time “24/7.” He functioned out of the overflow of His fellowship with His Father.

These verses show us such intimacy with the Father (take note of key words are in bold font):

- Jn. 3:10-12: *You are Israel’s teacher and do you not understand these things. I tell you the truth, we **speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen.***
- Jn. 5:19-21: *I tell you the truth, the Son **can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the **Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.*****

- Jn. 5:30: ***By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.***
- Jn. 6:38: His task was ***not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me.***
- Jn. 8:26: ***But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world.***
- Jn. 8:28-29: ***When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.***
- Jn. 8:38: ***I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence and you do what you have heard from your father.***
- Jn. 8:42: ***I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me here.***
- Jn. 8:55: ***Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word.***
- Jn. 10:14-16: ***I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep follow me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.***

It is undeniably clear in these verses that Jesus received His life purpose and daily direction from His intimacy with the Father. Thus, the Christ follower who attempts to do anything in this life without the Father's direction is merely wasting time and effort. Likewise, this applies to the local church body or any ministry. J. Oswald Sanders speaks to this issue,

The Christian leader who seeks an example to follow does well to turn to the life of Jesus Himself. Our belief in the necessity of prayer comes from observing His life. Surely if

anyone could have sustained life without prayer, it would be the very Son of God Himself. If prayer is silly or unnecessary, Jesus would not have wasted His time at it. But wait! Prayer was the dominant feature of His life and a recurring part of His teaching. Prayer kept His moral vision sharp and clear. Prayer gave Him courage to endure the perfect but painful will of His Father. Prayer paved the way for transfiguration. To Jesus, prayer was not a hasty add-on, but a joyous necessity. (J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, p. 86-87)

3. To insure you keep Christ as Head of the church (Col. 1:18). As Head of the church, He is, respectfully, the “brains” behind the operation of the church. He has rightful authority over your church and is the source of direction for it. Another biblical metaphor is that Jesus is the vine and we are the branches (Jn. 15:1-8). The branch has no life without connection to the vine. Such intentionality in seeking God leads the church to willingly submit its will to His will in all things. By leading the church to seek guidance from God, the pastor makes a statement that he (and they, too) can do nothing on his/their own and need the mind and heart to be in sync with the heart of the Father. Furthermore, the church must remember it was Christ who said He would build His church (Matt. 16:18), so why attempt to do so without the true Head?
4. To lead the church to listen to God and to arrange and rearrange according to His leadership and not a man-made vision. It is my belief that one reason many of our churches experience difficulty in discussing change is due to the lack of the membership being involved in hearing from God on the direction of the church. Although the pastor is to be a leader, he must remember that God speaks to the whole body. A wise Christian leader helps his followers discover the purpose and gifting of God in relationship to their place in the body of Christ. He will lead them to know

how to hear from God so that they function out of personal revelation from God and not the pastor's assignment. After all, Jesus did indicate that He speaks to His sheep and they should follow His voice. He said, *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me* (Jn. 10:27).

The pastor's role is to equip the body to do the works of service; one means of doing so is by training members how to know and listen to God much as Eli did with young Samuel (1 Sam. 3). God reveals to the members of the body their individual and corporate responsibilities and functions in the body. The pastor must help them see that their relationship with God is not exclusive to themselves but is inclusive with the body of believers. Consider Thom Rainer's thought on vision.

A second fallacy in much of the literature about vision today is that the pastor must somehow get a direct word from God about the vision, communicate it to the church, and get the people to 'own' the vision. The biblical reality is that God desires to speak to all of the people of the church about vision. The very nature of spiritual gifts is that they are God's way of showing each believer's purpose (vision) in the larger vision of the church. The pastor who unilaterally determines the vision of the church without any awareness of the spiritual giftedness and passions of the people is headed for trouble. (Thom S. Rainer, *Eating the Elephant*, p. 40)

When members are taught and encouraged to listen to God for His direction, the body not only becomes excited about the future but is also more eager to commit to a defined future that comes from the heart and mind of God. Such joint listening to God will result in a more unified body of believers who increase in love for one another. It breeds confidence and builds experience among the body of believers confirming that God speaks to pastors, leaders and church members alike. It is not

uncommon for Christians to have the misconception that God does not speak to them.

Lest the pastor become anxious about people going off-base with unbiblical revelations, he should remember that God is not the author of chaos and that God will not contradict His Word, nor will He add new revelations to the closed Canon of the Scriptures. If there is any attempt at giving contradictory insights, then the pastor must step up and put a stop to it. Henry Blackaby has a wise statement on revelation. He wrote, "When God speaks, he does not give new *revelation* about himself that contradicts what he has already revealed in Scripture. Rather, God speaks to give *application* of his Word to the specific circumstances in your life. When God speaks to you, he is not writing a new book of Scripture; rather, he is applying to your life what he has already said in his Word." (Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Hearing God's Voice*, p. 18)

5. To allow the church to operate out of a sense of obedience to God rather than being coerced by any individual(s). When the body takes the time to listen to God, He will give them clear direction that must be followed. That direction may not simply include what the body is to do in order to accomplish His purpose in the world, but will often include instruction concerning issues in the church. Expect God to reveal issues related to relationships in the body of Christ that need repair and restoration. It is in our obedience to such revelation that the Lord strengthens the witness of His followers before the unsaved world. The Lord does not need the pastor or any individual to coerce people to do His will. Teaching the church to listen to God and obey His will thrusts the Lord to His rightful position and reminds the church that His will must be obeyed and is always best.

6. In order that the church might experience and know the difference of a church functioning under God's direction in contrast to life in the body with little intentionality of seeking His face. Jesus said, *Upon this rock I will build my church* (Matt. 16:18). "Although humans play key roles, church growth is not a human enterprise; it is a divine initiative. When all is said and done, God is the one who gives the increase and adds to the church." (Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Thom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth*, pp. 57-58)

In 1 Corinthians 3:7 the apostle Paul taught those who mistakenly thought they were better than others in the kingdom and were guilty of taking credit for something only God could do, *So neither is he who plants nor he who waters anything, but only God who makes things grow*. When the church leans on Christ for growth its fruit lasts and reproduces to yield more fruit. When the church truly relies upon God, the result will far exceed any thing that placed unhealthy reliance on human ability.

"The temptation in times of growth challenges us to take matters into our own hands and deal with them as we think best. We forget about the privilege of prayer and its power. Show me a church whose people in general and leaders in particular pray regularly and positively for the church, and I will show you a church that is being blessed by God... Positive prayer involves asking God to use the church to reach the lost, to grow believers up in the faith, and to uphold his reputation in our communities, all of which will glorify God." (Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, p. 83)

The pastor is wise to remember that our thoughts are not always consistent with His thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9). Thus, he must lead the church to our God who exceeds all of our best efforts, wisdom and tools. In fact, our thoughts can very well be a barrier to seeing an outpouring of the works of God. God views our works

as factory seconds, irregular displays of human effort in comparison to the brilliant, gleaming, unblemished, new works created and crafted by the Master Builder Himself.

Steps to Leading the Church to Align with God:

The following section gives the pastor guidance on how to lead the church to seek the face of God. Pastor, do not be surprised that this will bring some initial resistance. Some of this resistance might very well come from your own heart because you think you need to get things done. Our unfamiliarity with waiting on God can become a real enemy of slowing down and doing it God's way. The congregation might resist because they are used to programs and strategy as the way to get things done. Be patient, be persistent, and live this out by God-given conviction.

1. **Accept your God-given responsibility as a pastor/leader** is to keep the church dependent upon God. The pastor is the undershepherd of the church. Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd who will grant a crown of glory to those who have been faithful shepherds of *God's flock* placed under their care. The pastor has been entrusted to lead the flock (church) to know and serve the Lord faithfully (1 Peter 5:1-4). As one granted this opportunity he is to display a loving, compassionate spirit that is ready to serve. Thus, the pastor must keep in mind that the church is to operate under the lordship and leadership of the Lord Jesus and to model behavior that indicates this. God expects the pastor to care for the body with love in order that they may experience the fullness of the Lord's will and love. Furthermore, you must believe and lead in such a way to demonstrate without doubt that without the leadership and lordship of Christ the church can do nothing (Jn. 15:5).

2. As pastor, **set the pace** for seeking God. People will respect your walk with God and your leadership as they see you diligent in the pursuit of God and desiring a church that will bring Him honor. “The spiritual leader should outpace the rest of the church, above all, in prayer. And yet the most advanced leader is conscious of the possibility of endless development in his prayer life. Nor does he ever feel that he has ‘already attained.’” (J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, p. 85) God views our behavior as evil when we do not seek Him (2 Chron. 12:14).

3. Maintain a **prophetic voice** in leading the church to seek the Lord with wholehearted diligence. During the period of the Kings of Judah and Israel, the people of God often followed the leadership of the king. In a sense, as the king went so went the nation. The evidence was clear. When a king decided to follow God faithfully he would strongly proclaim what the Lord required. As the king and people sought God diligently and followed Him obediently the nation would go through periods of peace and success. When a king did not, generally the nation would find itself in great internal turmoil and external threat (2 Chron. 12:14, 26:5, 16-21, 28:5-6). The turning point, under *godly* kings, was when the king called the people back to God. In order to do so, the king used his position to insist that the people seek God wholeheartedly (2 Chron. 14:2-7, 15:1-15, 20:1-15, 26:5, 31:20-21).

If a pastor expects the people to seek the Lord, it will be necessary for him to cast a firm call with a prophetic voice insisting the church seek God with a renewed passion. Such a call must be given definitively so the membership knows God expects His people to receive vision from Him and not the pastor. This definitive call must come first from the pastor. Once it does, casting the call can come through various other means such as sermons, newsletters, repeatedly mentioning from the

pulpit and by other church leaders. It is important that the pastor and others in leadership be committed to this means of seeking God for direction since some will want to resist this new way of doing things. Whatever you do, don't quit or compromise on this call. Anything less will fail to lead the church to be the house of prayer that God expects (Is. 56:6-8, Mk. 11:17). When the church seeks God diligently it can expect God's hand of favor (2 Chron. 26:5); when the church relies on its own strength and wisdom it can expect failure when it comes to eternal matters (2 Chron. 26:16-21).

4. **Set a date** for starting and continuing a ***month long process** of congregational prayer. It is advisable to immediately start leading and practicing such a process. Time is short, the days are evil and the church cannot afford to continue operating in its own strength with misplaced priorities and lack of obedience to the Great Commission. It is not a matter of *if* He wants you to seek Him. Jesus teaches that we can do nothing on our own so it's not worth trying (Jn. 15:5). In doing this the church will demonstrate love for Christ, dwell in His presence on a daily basis and learn to come before Him with an open and teachable heart.

*A month long intercessor's prayer guide entitled "*God, Give us Your Vision: Intercessor's Kingdom Prayer Guide*" is available at www.slba.org. For printed copies contact ron.clement@slba.org.

5. **Start introducing such passion to seek God into current church activity**, i.e. worship activity, committee meetings, any church-related event. Your aim should be to create a *culture* which pursues God's leadership in all it does. This will mean that prayer should be your first option in the work of the church. Avoid making it an addendum to your ministry. Instead, prayer should

be the foundation supporting, the umbrella covering and the yeast permeating the ministry of the church.

A. Establish a culture of prayer in worship:

- Elevate the time of prayer during corporate worship. In times of prayer, lead the people to acknowledge the need for God's leadership, admit their own lack of wisdom and commit to trusting God for guidance in who you are and what you do as a church. Consider dividing the people into small groups to specifically pray for God's leading on critical decisions before the church.
- Be sensitive to times during corporate worship when the Spirit of God is leading you to stop to pray/seek God.
- Train those who lead in corporate prayer to understand the intended purpose of public prayer. Exhort them to pray from the heart under the Spirit's leading. Teach them to pray with passion and a sincere desire to lead the people of the congregation to connect with God whether through the music, offering or preaching of the Word. Remember, God seeks those who worship Him in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:24).
- Model prayer-walking prior to the worship times so the people see the serious nature of gathering together to worship and hear from God. Practice prayer-walking the worship center while offering prayers for those who lead in worship. Prayer-walk the seating areas asking God's Spirit to touch the hearts of those who attend. He will remind you of where people tend to sit and draw you to pray more specifically about needs of that individual and/or family.
- Recruit intercessors to pray during the worship times. Often, Satan will attempt to cause distractions to both pastor and member. His goal is to snatch away any seeds that would bear fruit for the kingdom of God (Matt. 13:19).

B. Establish a culture of prayer among the leadership:

- Work with your leadership by teaching them to take time in meetings to faithfully pray for God's guidance and to admit their need for Him. Be careful about giving too much value to simply leading in "a **word** of prayer" to start a meeting. This can create a dangerous mindset that prayer is to be short so we can get on to the **real** business. The danger is that this indicates that your opinions and wisdom are better than hearing from God.

Dave Butts says that when the church really becomes a house of prayer, "Leaders and members of the congregation cannot imagine prayer not being a part of everything they do. This will not happen automatically. It must be an intentional decision made first by the leaders and then carried out systematically in the life of the church. There can be a basic church-wide accountability system in which, for every proposal made or program initiated, the question is asked, 'Where is prayer in this?'" (Dave Butts, *Giving Ourselves to Prayer*, Chapter 44, *How to Build a House of Prayer*, p. 299).

- Train your elders and/or deacons on how to seek God's guidance concerning how best to perform their responsibilities. As Spirit-filled men (Acts 6:3), they should be demonstrating dependence upon God. They should be men of prayer who do not merely give verbal assent to prayer but actually practice praying with the membership and have devoted personal prayer lives. As your leadership is faithful in seeking God they will experience a new found effectiveness in ministry (2 Chron. 31:20-21).
- Gather your team ministry leaders in order to train them about how to give extensive times of prayer to church matters. Prayer should not simply be what Thomas

Wright (former NAMB prayer leader) calls “zipper prayers” where you open and close with prayer. God may very well speed up your process, prevent you from critical errors, and bring a Spirit-given sense of unity when your committees take time to wait before the Lord and display a desire to hear what He is saying to the church.

C. Establish a culture of prayer in decision-making:

- When considering the budget for the next year, the church should be praying about what God is asking them to prioritize. This demonstrates trust in God and will result in a budget based on faith, not what the church feels it can afford. Such prayer may very well lead the church to realign the budget in a way not previously considered. I would suggest you lead the church to pray over a number of weeks about what He is leading the church to become and do. Once that time is spent, gather the people together to discuss what God is saying and showing you. Then, you can be certain that the budget will reflect God’s leading.
- When the church comes before God, it is common for the Lord to show them how to carry out His purpose. His purposes will stretch the church to make decisions it normally would not make.

Let me share an illustration of this. Our local church was approached by the woman who was an adjacent land owner to us offering us first option to purchase that land. As pastor, I told her that we would not make the decision before asking God what He desired and that we would need 30 days to pray about it. We wouldn’t consider buying without asking God. I admitted to her that this was a bit of a risk for her to wait on us without certainty that we would purchase. She was a bit hesitant but agreed. During the 30-day time, we prioritized

corporate prayer, cancelled some regular meetings so that we could pray and challenged each member to pray about this decision. At the end of the 30 days, we gathered together for a town-hall meeting to share what we believed God was saying. Unanimously, those gathered shared that they believed God was saying “go ahead.” This opportunity came in the midst of raising a very large sum of money for a new building. However, we followed God’s leading and purchased the land. Not coincidentally, the payments on the property were nearly the exact amount we were paying for the housing allowance of our youth pastor. The land included a house that he and his family moved into, with more space and was used for ministry to young people. Although we were in the process of raising funds for the new building, without going into additional fund raising, we were able to pay off that additional property in about three years. Seeking God first gave us certainty of what to do and God honored that by providing the funding.

6. **Personally model this.** As you engage people who have needs, seek your wisdom or come to you with difficult problems stop first and pray with them asking God to show all involved His will in the situation. Although you, as pastor, might have spent a good deal of time with God that very morning, this will demonstrate that you receive your guidance from God. This draws attention to God’s guidance and goodness above your own.

Robert Boyd Munger, who wrote the book *My Heart—Christ’s Home*, spent his latter years teaching in a seminary. He addressed a class of seniors just a few weeks before graduation about his concern. “You’re all very bright. You’ve just about completed your seminary training. You’ve acquired great knowledge and a wide range of skills. I’m

impressed with you. But I'm also worried about something. I'm not sure you really believe John 15:5, 'Apart from Me you can do nothing.' That doesn't seem to fit with all the competence represented by earning your degree, does it? You think more highly of yourself than that. I need to remind you, though, that Jesus told the truth that night. Without Him, you will go out of this seminary and fail miserably."
(Robert Boyd Munger, *My Heart – Christ's Home*)

Some Suggestions for the Month-Long Process of Prayer:

1. **Call the people into a *month-long process** of prayer for God's direction.

*A month long guide mentioned earlier, "**God, Give Us Your Vision: Intercessors Kingdom Prayer Guide**" is a suggested tool for leading your church through a month long process. This can be found at www.slba.org or by contacting Ron Clement at ron.clement@slba.org.

In doing so, encourage the church to spend time daily, for one month, in the Word of God and in prayer. This allows the Holy Spirit the opportunity to speak to the members individually about their role in the corporate body as well as the direction and ministries of the church. In addition, this creates a good habit of getting into the Word of God on a daily basis with a heart listening to what God is saying. It might be necessary to provide a guide for those who need assistance in getting in the habit of having a daily devotional time as mentioned beforehand in this paper. However, there are other good devotionals that could assist in developing the habit of listening to God such as, Oswald Chambers' classic "*My Utmost for His Highest*" or Henry and Richard Blackaby's "*Experiencing God Day-by-Day*." Make sure you point people to the Word of God as the normal practice for listening to God.

2. **Provide multiple corporate prayer opportunities** seeking God for direction.
 - A. Set aside time in corporate worship specifically aimed at asking God for His vision. Make sure to include instruction to pray for God's kingdom to come and will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10).
 - B. Schedule special prayer meetings where the church gathers to state its need for God and to ask for His direction. Be sensitive to the Lord's prompting to include times of confession. As Psalm 66:18 reminds us, *If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*
 - C. Consider holding prayer meetings in homes of deacons and other ministry leaders for the purpose of asking God to clearly show you how to align the church with His will.
 - D. Consider holding a 24-hour prayer time. Such times can be a real blessing in this process of asking God for direction.
 - E. Plan prayer-walking excursions into your ministry field and throughout your associational area.

3. **Gather corporately to share** the God-given vision.
 - A. At the conclusion of the month-long prayer process hold a "town hall" type meeting. This should be held so all the members can come together to share what God has been saying to them about the direction of the church. This could be a type of Consecration Sunday. The pastor can share a God-given message on Sunday morning regarding what God has been saying to him. That same afternoon or evening the church body can have an opportunity to share and celebrate God's leading in their lives. During the church gathering, it is important to record what God is saying so this information can be reviewed and prioritized according to what God is telling you as a church. I suggest having multiple white boards and/or easels with paper to record upon. Assign someone to take notes for future reference so that you can

“ponder” and “treasure” these things much as Mary, mother of Jesus, did when the angel spoke to her about the coming birth of Jesus.

- B. Expect a time of excitement and renewed loyalty to the church because God will show the people they are a part of His body and have a God-sized task before them. During the month-long process, as pastor and leaders, begin watching and listening to what the people are doing and saying. As people get into the Bible and pray sincerely, it is not uncommon for the body to begin to see God answer prayer. Often, God begins to develop a more humble, contrite spirit and call them to deeper commitment to His ways and plan.

When that happens you see people committed to believing God can do the impossible as in the story told by Pastor Charles Sullivan.

Pastor Charles Sullivan tells of a time when he gave the invitation and a man in his seventies came forward to give his life to Christ. His wife came down the aisle behind him with the glow of God on her face. After Sullivan counseled the man and prayed with him, he reached for a membership card to fill out, as we Baptists do, but the wife stopped him. She told Sullivan that he wouldn't need a card. She reached in her Bible and pulled out an old, yellow, tattered card. 'Forty years ago, I made a commitment to pray for my husband's salvation daily,' she explained. 'As a sign of my commitment, I filled out a membership card with my husband's name, and checked 'profession of faith' and 'baptism.' The only thing we need to complete is the date.'" (Alvin L. Reid, *Giving Ourselves to Prayer*, p. 428-429)

- C. There will be direction given by God that will require some shifting of priorities that may include finances and steps of faith. These should be considered in light of God's will

instead of viewing them with an attitude of “we’ve never done that before,” “that’s not possible,” or “we’ll need to wait until next year for the transition.”

4. Plan to **meet with your leadership soon thereafter to begin to consider action plans** and implementation of what God has revealed. It will be important to help the leadership and members see this as a process that will need to be worked at in order for obedience and implementation to take place. However, be careful not to avoid acting upon what God has revealed.
5. **Give God praise** for speaking to His people. God speaking to His people is an act of His grace. We should consider the Lord’s response to Simon Peter when Peter pronounced that Jesus was the Christ. *Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.* (Matt. 16:13-17) This is an act of God’s mercy because there are times when God chooses to withhold His instruction due to sin among His people. Amos tells us, *The days are coming,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.* (Amos 8:11-12) We should feel humbled and thrilled that God would reveal His plan for humans to be engaged in matters that affect the eternal destiny of mankind when the vast majority of people waste their lives on things that are temporal.
6. **Establish this as a pattern** for getting vision from God. It would be a grave mistake to merely go through this as an event to boost your church’s attendance. God calls His people to be people of prayer and Jesus reaffirmed this in the temple (Is. 56:6-7; 62:6-7; Mark 11:17). Determine to inquire of God in all

circumstances (1 Chron. 16:10-11), especially during times of difficulty (2 Chron. 20:3-4, 12-18). Determine to be as Jehoshaphat who declared, *For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.* (2 Chron. 20:12) And then move with confidence in the promise that *the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him* (2 Chron. 16:9).

7. **Begin planning for and praying about next steps.** Ask God to show you ahead of time and during the town hall meeting those who truly have a heart for God and are passionate about the future and gifted in ways that will help you carry out God's plan. Remember that godly character does count. It would be a huge mistake to not move out in faith and obedience to what God has shown. The key to success is implementation of God's plan by God's leadership.
8. Once again, **don't quit.** Keep leading in this direction. Make prayer and such prayer processes the highest of your priorities corporately and personally. It will be challenging and difficult to do this, but there are great rewards in seeing the God of the universe pour out His Spirit, His people living by faith and the world being transformed by those transformed by their intimacy with the Father.

Stanley Grenz writes, "The church of Jesus Christ faces many challenges today. Yet the greatest challenge is not what might initially come to mind. The greatest challenge is not that of urging Christians to speak out on the great social issues of the day. . . Nor is our greatest challenge that of encouraging each other to be more fervent in evangelizing the world. . . Rather, the greatest challenge facing the church of Jesus Christ today, and therefore every local congregation, is motivating the people of God to engage in sincere, honest,

fervent prayer” (Stanley J. Grenz, *Prayer: The Cry for the Kingdom*, p. 1).

However, perhaps great days lie ahead for us when we implement this into our midst. Andrew Murray once wrote, “The man who mobilized the Christian church to prayer will make the greatest contribution to world evangelization in history.” (Ivan French, *The IFCA Voice*, Sept. 2, 2003) That sounds worth our time and effort. Wouldn’t you agree?