



Gospel Ministry Wisdom

Lesson 6 Vision and Planning

In our last session I spoke to you about *Pastoral Leadership and Vision*. I spoke about how important it is to the gospel ministry for a man of God to think ahead, and to pay attention to where he is and to where he is going. He pays attention to what is going on around him, and sees trends. He must also be able to see solutions and how to implement them.

We will now consider a new dimension of *Vision and Planning*. I'm going to talk to you about the practical side, about putting *Vision and Planning* to work in the ministry. Oh how I pray that the concepts I'm about to present will find fertile soil in you listen! I have spent an entire lifetime in and around the Gospel ministry. As of this recording, I am 76 years old; I surrendered to preach when I was 13. At 14 I became the pastor of a small country church in East Texas. The rest of my life has been consumed with the gospel ministry. Almost 60 of those 63 years I served as a pastor of one church or another, 33 years at Berean at Baptist Church in Houston. I have been in hundreds of churches as a field representative for the Christian Law Association. I have been up close and personal with lots of preachers. Many of them are in heaven and several are still alive on earth. I saw them when they were young, and I saw them grow old. I observed their post-pastorate years. I've watched what happened to their wives when they died; and sooner or later they all grow old and die. If you don't die young, it will happen to you and to your widow. Oh yes, I pray that the concepts I am presenting will find a resting place in your life. They can help you. They have the potential to keep you from lots of trouble. What I'm about to present here is an extension of what I presented in our last session. This is mainly the practical application side of *Pastoral Leadership and Vision*.

Leadership requires *vision*, and for the vision to become reality there must be a *plan*. Primary responsibility for the implementation of the plan rests on the man of God. He is God's chosen vessel to lead the flock, to see that the business of God is properly attended. His is the role of *Pastoral Leadership*. *Pastoral Leadership* is not the role of deacons, committees, wealthy members, old scholars or women. The concept of a *committee run church* is not in the Scriptures.

I. PROACTIVE VERSUS REACTIVE.

A. To be proactive means:

1. Initiative.

- a) It is acting before being forced to act, before there is a crisis or emergency, before most people even realize something needs to be done. It is decisive action up front.
- b) Initiative, decisive action grows naturally out of vision. The leader sees the picture and realizes action should be taken. The leader does not wait for someone else to bring up the issue and propose a solution; he brings up the issue and proposes the solution.

c) Pastoral leadership is always on the offense; rarely on the defense. The pastor is acting, driving the action, out front!

2. A proactive approach puts direction into the picture.

a) It prevents crises. It minimizes last-minute, reactionary behavior where so often tempers flare, there's not enough money and the finger of blame points in every direction.

b) A proactive approach structures and organizes. Provisions and solutions are put into place *ahead of time*, not after the fact. Crises and reactive behavior are usually very stressful. A proactive approach cuts down on stress and the hostility that often goes with it.

c) Most preachers function under enormous stress. They're *under the gun* when the church doors are not open on time, the heating or cooling were not turned on in time, it's late in the week and Sunday's sermons are not ready, no one followed up on that prospect and some bully is running the church. This list could go on for a long time.

Most of these stressing things happen because no proactive action is in place to prevent them. Who is the real culprit? The person who is responsible for leading, but who is not doing it. He's supposed to be out front, proactive; but for one reason or another, steps are not taken to take care of the business of the church. Consequently there is criticism, chaos and stress. It's much easier to point a blaming finger than it is to look in the mirror.

3. Being proactive is inseparable from leadership.

B. To be reactive means:

1. *Waiting for something to happen* or some other person to act first. It is a *follow-up*, not an *act first* approach. There is little, if any firm direction.

2. With a reactive approach comes aimlessness, wondering and uncertainty. A reactive approach by a pastor is a morale killer. "*The people perish.*"

3. Inevitably *reaction* is a defensive posture. Some event or some person has already gone on the offense and created a situation which now demands action.

4. Many churches have no deliberate direction. This is especially true in the case of older churches, and older pastors. They are in a *survival mode*, just holding on, not sure of what's coming and no vision or plan for recovery or a prosperous future. A pastor who is just *riding it out* with them! No vision, no plan, no pastoral leadership! Always reacting instead of acting, nobody *taking the bull by the horns*; everybody just waiting, waiting, waiting; kids waiting to grow up and leave the church, good old members waiting to become invalids or die, pastor waiting to get *a call from God* to another church.

5. Many pastors don't know what they're going to do. Everybody has to be somewhere and right now this is where they are. They have a few hopes, but almost no plans. They're just *going with the flow*, hoping everything will work out okay.
6. Reactive; not proactive! Unfortunately it is the way of too many men of God, men who ought to be leading the way, not following.

II. SPECIFIC AREAS WHERE VISION AND PLANNING WILL GREATLY ENHANCE THE GOSPEL MINISTRY AND GOSPEL MINISTERS.

I will preface this section with an old saying: *"he who aims at nothing generally hits it."* When applied to the gospel ministry, that couldn't be truer. At this point, I also want to say that there is strong opposition to what I'm about to present. The argument is that by planning and preparing in advance, especially sermons, dependence upon and leadership by the Holy Spirit is removed. The idea seems to be that you should not prepare in advance; you should simply step into the pulpit and expect the spirit of God to fill your mouth on the spot. Having given a lifetime of study to the Holy Scriptures, it is obvious to me that the Holy Spirit knows the end from the beginning. He is not a hip shot, knee-jerk, last-minute operator. From eternity past, he has known who would show up in church on any given Sunday. Furthermore, He can direct and enable you a month or year ahead just as easily as he can at the last minute on a Sunday morning. I do not subscribe to the idea that you are limiting the Spirit of God by preparing in advance.

Here now are three practical and needed ways to implement vision, planning and pastoral leadership.

A. Preaching and the preparation of sermons.

1. Preaching is the number one business of a man of God. Many pastors routinely preach 4 times a week: Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night and a Sunday school lesson. Often there are funerals and other speaking engagements.
2. Especially for pastors, the preparation of sermons is an ever present reality. A pastor cannot step into the pulpit and say, *"Sorry church. There will be no sermon this morning. I was really busy all week, and I'm not prepared. One day I had a migraine headache. We also had a funeral and several people in the hospital. I had a deacons meeting and two committee meetings. Three people needed emergency counseling. I was on the phone with several of you for long periods of time. I had to take care of a guest missionary on Wednesday night. One of my children got hurt at school, and I was in the emergency room with him for half a day. Sorry folks, I'm just not ready."*
3. One effort of that sort would probably be the last. Ready or not, a pastor has to preach. Too often the church gets a *half-baked* sermon, one that is shallow and not well prepared. Or delivered! This can become a habit. People begin to grumble. More and more you hear, *"I'm not being fed."* People become apathetic and unfaithful. Some *go down the road*.
4. Never forget that the #1 responsibility of a pastor is to *"feed the flock."*

- 5.** Here is an approach that I recommend, and one which I have practiced for many years.
- a)** Plan to prepare sermons in advance.
 - (1)** Do not plan to prepare your sermons for this Sunday this week.
 - (2)** Prepare them several weeks or months in advance.
 - (3)** The Spirit of God who knows the end from the beginning can direct you today in the preparation of a sermon that you will not preach until three months later.
 - b)** Build a reserve of sermons. I recommend that you always have at least a three month reserve of sermons. It is better to have six months.
 - c)** This week as you prepare for Sunday's preaching, work hard to prepare one extra sermon. This will be your first sermon in reserve.
 - d)** Next week, prepare another sermon for your reserves. Now you have two sermons in reserve.
 - e)** Continuing this approach until you have a reserve of several weeks.
 - f)** When you have a guest missionary or other speaker, use that week to strengthen your reserves.
 - g)** Consider using sermons prepared and delivered by a competent and trusted preacher.
 - (1)** Do not parrot his sermons. Make them your own. Study them carefully. Look up all of his Scripture references. Substitute your own illustrations, use the Scriptures with which you are more comfortable. To some degree, you will be able to shift and realign his sermon to your own personality and style.
 - (2)** That preacher has already done lots of research and study. He has done the exegete work for the text, and organized it correctly. He has prepared the sermon for clear delivery. His work likely took him 10 to 20 hours. In 2 or 3 hours you can make his sermon your own, and be ready to preach it. This will save you lots of time, enable you to do a quality job and help you get ahead.
 - (3)** He may have a set of many, possibly 10 or 15 sermons that will take you through a book in the Bible. This set will help you get ahead quickly.
 - (4)** Do not let this become a habit or crutch. Let it be a jumpstart or grubstake to help you build a reserve.
 - h)** This approach will take off enormous stress, and enable you to be a much better preacher by being properly prepared.

B. A preaching calendar.

- 1.** Project the occasions when you will be preaching over the next several months. Ideally you should project the sermon locations when you will be preaching for the coming year.
- 2.** It is easy to set up the preaching occasions in your church on an Excel or similar spreadsheet. Include a column for each (1) date and time, (2) sermon title, (3) text and (4) the speaker whether you or another. The *date and time* column can allow a row for the a.m. service, the PM service and for Wednesday night.
- 3.** Study the calendar and plan to preach appropriate sermons for such occasions as Christmas, Easter, church anniversary, Independence Day and other special occasions. This will serve as a guide as you prepare sermons and strengthen your reserves.
- 4.** Consider preaching through books of the Bible, on special themes and on special issues such as the home.
- 5.** This will also help you as you schedule missionaries, revivals and other guest speakers.
- 6.** A *Preaching Calendar* is a proactive, pastoral leadership approach to the ministry. It will also take lots of stress out of your life.

C. A church calendar.

- 1.** Spend time studying a 12-month calendar. Most calendars will include the dates for special days such as Christmas, Easter, Daylight Savings Time and other dates that would impact the life of most churches.
- 2.** Prayerfully start preparing your own *Church Calendar*. The objective is to, in an orderly, structured way, schedule events which would honor God and strengthen the church.
- 3.** It is best to first write on the calendar your main overall church events such as big holidays, church anniversary, Missions Conference, Youth Camp, revivals and seminars.
- 4.** Follow with other corporate church events such as Vision Night, Sunday night fellowships, special days such as a Friend Day or an Independence Day picnic.
- 5.** Follow with Sunday school class events, youth functions and other church related activities.
- 6.** As a year develops, there will be weddings, 50th anniversaries and other activities that impact the church.
- 7.** There are many advantages to a well-planned church calendar.
 - a)** It establishes clear direction and embeds structure in the life of the church.
 - b)** It allows the right things to be put on the calendar first.

- c)** In a systematic way, it allows access to the calendar by the whole church under the supervision of the pastor.
 - d)** It minimizes conflict over different parties wanting the same date.
 - e)** It is a clear manifestation of pastoral leadership.
- 8.** A church calendar is obviously a proactive step.

I have been talking about clear-cut pastoral leadership. No man of God is offering true pastoral leadership because he has a smart mouth or because he is heavy-handed and domineering. Some pastors seem to think they are offering great leadership because they intimidate and bully a church. Talk is cheap and often empty. Leaders are not leaders because they *say* they are; true leaders are the ones who practice vision, planning and the initiative to get things done because people choose to follow without being bullied into submission.

True pastoral leadership earns respect and trust. Men of God who are too blind and slothful to pay attention and lead are reproaches to the ministry. It is not surprising that most of them languish and struggle the entire trip.