

Introduction

IN MY THIRTY YEARS OF MINISTRY, GOD HAS GIVEN me enough success to keep me enthusiastic and enough failure to keep me dependent on him. This book distills many of the lessons I've learned from my experiences, from the sublime to the ridiculous—lessons I'm excited to share with you because I know they can help your ministry thrive.

From my discussions with pastors and church and business leaders, I realize there are two types of people who may pick up a book like this. One type is reflective and wants to understand the *whys* as much as the *whats* and *hows* of any ministry strategy. Another type is the hard-charging, go-getter who says, “Just point the way—I'm ready to go!” In a previous book, *Leveraging Your Leadership Style*,¹ I described these folks as Conductors and Commanders, respectively. *Pastorpreneur* is written for both types.

My term *pastorpreneur* means a pastoral innovator, a creative dreamer willing to take great risks in church ministry with the hope of great gain for Christ and his kingdom. Like any good entrepreneur, this kind of leader isn't wild-eyed and foolish. He or she assesses goals, opportunities, and risks very carefully but willingly attempts great things for God. Those efforts will be met with both successes and defeats, but through the successes a pastorpreneur will touch many more people than if nothing had been risked.

Most church leaders and Christian business people will benefit from the first four chapters' description of our calling to take bold risks for Christ's sake. These chapters provide the biblical foundation for the strategies that follow, and they give depth and meaning to our call to boldness. I recommend you take the time to read these chapters carefully to prepare your mind and heart for the strategic chapters that follow. However, if you are a can-do, action-oriented person, you may want to read the first chapter and then move directly to the five strategies for implementing bold, strategic thinking in your ministry.

I hope you and the leadership team at your church will use this book as a springboard for constructive interaction, and I trust God will use your discussions to propel you to dream big dreams that will honor him. I long for the day when pastors and entrepreneurs will link arms for kingdom impact in communities across America and the world. If every church had entrepreneurial pastors and entrepreneurial leaders growing and learning together, we'd see God-sized dreams becoming realities!

Part One

Vision

God's Call to Bold Action

The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.

—Proverbs 28:1

BUSINESS AS USUAL WON'T CUT IT ANYMORE. THE church has been the foundation of Western society for hundreds of years, but today the church is teetering on the edge of irrelevance. We need a fresh, bold, articulate vision for ministry. Incremental change and small refinements in current ministry practices are of limited value in re-visioning how the church can be a dynamic force for good in our culture.

In his insightful book *Dancing with the Dinosaurs*, William Easum says, “If churches only improve what they have been doing, they will die. Bureaucracies and traditional practices are

the major cause of the decline of most denominations in North America.”²

George Barna goes one step further when he says, “Let’s cut to the chase. After nearly two decades of studying Christian churches in America, I’m convinced that the typical church as we know it today has a rapidly expiring shelf life.”³

Throughout church history, God has called men and women to originate bold new strategies that make a difference at crucial times. On his missionary journeys, the apostle Paul established churches throughout the Roman world. He boldly proclaimed the gospel of Christ to Romans and barbarians. Nothing could stop the revolution he preached—not prison, poverty, or persecution. His passion for Christ energized his generation, and his example of zeal and strategy for the cause of Christ continues to influence leaders today. In a summary of his eagerness to take the gospel to every person in the world, Paul wrote, “Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. . . . To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” (1 Corinthians 9:19–20, 22–23).

Paul didn’t feel bound to do the same things in the same ways. The church was brand new, and God directed Paul’s strategy to meet the complex needs of establishing the church. Paul’s pioneer spirit is not an isolated story. In the great history of missions, people like William Carey, Adoniram Judson, and Hudson Taylor acted boldly and strategically to win the world for Christ. John Mott and the Student Volunteer Movement responded to the world’s needs and reached millions of people who had never heard the name of Jesus. In recent decades,

churches like Willow Creek Community Church, Saddleback Community Church, and a host of other innovative churches have broken the mold of typical church strategies. They began with only God’s clear call, and they have become examples of vision and activism that directly and indirectly touch millions of lives. All of these pioneers remind me of the proverb: “The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion” (Proverbs 28:1).

Seeing the success of others’ bold strategies, we are left with the questions, Are we content with the same comfortable ministry we have always done, ministry with positive but limited results that never make much of a dent in our culture? Or will we take the risk of boldly trusting God for a fresh vision and powerful strategies that can change our churches, communities, and the world? I believe a Spirit-led burst of entrepreneurial activity will lead the church to greater cultural impact than ever before. Even now, God is calling a church-transformation and church-planting movement into being across the country that demonstrates an entrepreneurial passion to reach the lost in our generation.

The Three-Part Vision

God’s call in our lives is shaped by three crucial elements: we are *gripped* by the love of God, we *grasp* the needs of people around us, and we receive the *gifts* God has given us. In other words, we are motivated to serve, we serve where we are needed, and we serve effectively.

These three factors are not necessarily sequential. Loving God, serving others, and understanding ourselves are all ongoing processes. These elements are like strands of a braid, interwoven and enhancing one another. As we see God use us, our

understanding of his grace deepens, and we become even more committed to meeting the needs of those around us.

Motivation isn't automatic. We never outgrow the temptation to be proud, selfish, or lazy. No matter how long we've been believers or how successful we've been, we should never stop asking ourselves, *Am I being faithful to the Father? Am I answering his call, or am I pleasing myself?* This self-examination shouldn't be guilt ridden or destructive; it is the same honesty David exhibited when he prayed, "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23–24).

Go for the Gold

Elisabeth Elliot wrote eloquently of her first husband's preparation for the mission field. Jim and four other missionaries went to share Christ with the Auca Indians in South America. Jim compared his commitment to Christ and the Great Commission to miners who went to the frozen Yukon a century earlier. Both expected great risks and hardships, but the difficulties of the journey paled in comparison to the promise of rich rewards. While the miners sought tangible but temporal gold, Elliot sought the spiritual gold, silver, and precious stones that will not burn up (1 Corinthians 3:12–14). As he steeled himself to face the risks that lay ahead— dangers that proved to be very real indeed— Jim copied part of "The Law of the Yukon," a poem by Robert W. Service, in his journal. Elisabeth Elliot included the passage in her book *The Path of Loneliness*.⁴

Send not your foolish and feeble; send me your
strong and your sane,

Strong for the red-rage of battle, sane for I harry
them sore.

Send me men girt for the combat, men who are grit
to the core. . . .

And I wait for the men who will win me—and I
will not be won in a day,

And I will not be won by weaklings, subtle and
suave and mild,

But by men with the hearts of Vikings and the
simple faith of a child,

Desperate, strong, and resistless, unthrottled by
fear or defeat,

Them will I gild with my treasure, them will I glut
with my meat.

This poem described Jim Elliot's deepest longings to be strong in the cause of Christ, to have the boldness of a lion and the faith of a child in taking the gospel to the world. The expectation and promise of spiritual gold was worth any sacrifice, and the three-part vision—to love God, serve others, and understand himself—instilled Jim with passion, hope, and courage.

As church leaders, what promises and expectations drive us? Sometimes we aren't really *driven* by anything. It is easy for us to be comfortable and reasonably successful doing what we've always done before. Many church leaders are satisfied with incremental change and a little growth. Why sail into the waves when we can stay in the harbor?

But some of us know there's more. Now is the time for a bold, new direction.

God's promise to us is even more compelling than the promise of Yukon gold: *It is the promise of being used by the God of the universe in his holy cause to rescue men and women from*

darkness so they can experience the joy of his kingdom. If we dare to follow God's call, in the end we will hear those wonderful words, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master." That reward will be worth far more than gold because it is what all of us are longing for and because it will endure for all eternity.

Jim Elliot's brave pursuit of unseen treasure and his tenacity in accomplishing God's purpose is the theme of this book. The inspiration he drew from the metaphor of mining gold will inspire us too, as we dig into what it means to innovate for the kingdom of Christ.

Snapshots of Courage

The wonderful thing about God's call to bold action is that many leaders are already daring to follow it. Let's look at some of today's risk-taking entrepreneurial pioneers.

At Westwinds Community Church in Michigan, founding pastor Ron Martoia and his congregation regularly and creatively utilize drama, technology, and strong relational connections to invite previously unchurched people to respond to Christ. They are helping the church speak the language of the culture instead of demanding that the culture speak the language of the church. Martoia described this bold strategy in his book *Morph*.⁵ At a turning point several years ago, he had to choose between following the accepted patterns of ministry that offered incremental growth or risking a new course. He didn't know if the unbelievers in his community would respond positively, and he didn't know if his own people would run him out of town on a rail, but he was willing to trust God for great things. He risked failure, ridicule, and irrelevance in his own church. He risked being labeled as a rebel—and if his experiment didn't

work, a *failed* rebel—and possibly never finding another church that would hire him. Ron was an early pioneer in risking a new course; today hundreds of new and transformed churches are exploring what it means to be innovative and effective in reaching the culture.

When Ed Young Sr. put a fitness center, basketball court, and bowling alleys in Second Baptist Church in Houston, many people criticized him for being worldly. But Young understood his community, and he believed God wanted his church to be a haven for families as well as an outreach to the lost. As a result, the church attracted people who would never have set foot in a sanctuary yet felt completely comfortable coming to work out. Most of them made new friends, and many of them came to trust Christ as their Savior. This strategy is fairly common today, but it was radical thirty years ago when Ed took this bold step.

There are a number of exciting examples of innovative leadership across the country that are connecting churches and communities. Kirbyjon Caldwell became the pastor of Windsor Village United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas, an older church of about sixty people that was beginning to stagnate in a community with subpar housing, education, and vocational skills. After God gave Kirbyjon a fresh vision for ministry, he spent the next two decades growing the church's heart for the community. One result was that over time the church established nine nonprofit corporations to address problems in the community.

Similarly, I have had the privilege of learning the stories of Bishop Vance McLaughlin of Potters House in Fort Lauderdale and Bishop Kenneth Ulmer of Faithful Central Church in Los Angeles. Both men lead churches that reflect their heartbeat for the Great Commission and the Great Commandment in their

local and global contexts. These and a host of other pastors are embracing entrepreneurial strategies to equip their leaders and reach their communities for Christ. (For more information about this, see the Event Checklist at the back of this book.)

Christian leaders must remember the gospel is good news for all people, whether poor or rich. Contemporary evangelicals are increasingly comfortable blending social activism with preaching the gospel, perhaps by volunteering at a homeless shelter or giving groceries to the food bank to provide a platform for the message of Christ. But middle- and upper-class people also have needs that can be creatively addressed through entrepreneurial strategies. Robert Schuller, who established the Crystal Cathedral in largely upscale Orange County, has long been a pioneer in reaching out to people. His simple but powerful philosophy: “Find a need and fill it. Find a hurt and heal it.”

In Granite Bay, California, my friend Ray Johnston established Bayside Church in a community holding the perception that only women and weak men would be interested in Jesus Christ. Spirituality, they believed, was “only for those who can’t cut it in life.” However, two copycat teenage suicides in town threatened to rip the fabric of the community. Ray had ministered to teenagers all across the country. He positioned his new ministry to speak powerfully to the hopes and fears of *up and outers*—high-income men and women, especially those with teenage children. Ray risked speaking of the relevance of Christ to those with long-held negative attitudes toward the message of Christ and the church. Ray is fond of saying that “good deeds create goodwill, which creates an open door for the Good News.”

During my first year at Carson Valley Christian Center (now LifePoint Church in Minden, Nevada), a man came up to me

during one of our training events and said, “I’ve listened to you, and I’ve watched what you’re doing here. It doesn’t look like you have a Plan B if your strategy to reach the community fails.” He was exactly right—we were completely committed to our vision, sink or swim. From the beginning, we determined to trust God for great things. We didn’t *think* small, we didn’t *believe* small, and we didn’t *behave* small. I went to meetings of the Chamber of Commerce and talked about our dream for our church to have a significant impact on the community, risking being laughed out of town after a couple of years if we didn’t grow.

This clear and singular vision for our church wasn’t developed in a vacuum. God brought together a wonderful group of people who sacrificed time, money, and energy to invest their lives in reaching this area of Nevada for Christ. We all risked a lot—and we all had dreams of mining a motherlode of spiritual gold.

From Him, by Him, for Him

The vision of what God can do through us is not one we concoct on our own. God gives it to each believer, we accomplish it by his power, and we do it for his glory. Os Guinness wrote that God’s calling is for every Christian, not just pastors: “Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service.”⁶

Those who are gripped by big goals understand that when God is the source of those goals, he provides the necessary wisdom and strength to fulfill them. Those who are motivated by seeing people’s hearts change realize we have the unspeakable privilege of being God’s partners in transforming lives. Our dream of being used by God comes from him, he purifies and directs our

desire, and its fulfillment honors him because he deserves our glad obedience and praise. Far too often we all—even church leaders—try to squeeze Christ into our busy lives, expecting him to accomplish the goals we have already set for ourselves. Christ is worthy of much more than that! He is sovereign over all creation, the Alpha and the Omega, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. His dreams are immeasurably better than anything we could dream on our own.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus' call to his disciples was simple: "Follow me." That calling was absolute, complete, and compelling to the Twelve. It is no less for us today. As Guinness reminds us, God's calling forms the basis of our identity. Everything we are and everything we do has far deeper meaning when we are called by God because every thought, word, and deed can honor the One who has called us to be his. He deserves our very best, and that very best means we are willing to sacrifice all for him and risk all for him. We can no longer be content to play it safe. Instead, we grow bold and we long for the reputation of his goodness and greatness to spread like wildfire.

A Little Bit of My Story

I was born and raised in a pastor's home. When I was a young boy of nine or ten, some people prayed for me, patted my head, and told me I was going to be a pastor just like my dad. I gritted my teeth and said under my breath, "Not if I can help it!" At the time, my dream and passion was to become a professional baseball player.

In high school, however, I began thinking more deeply about God's calling in my life. I still wanted to play baseball, but even more I wanted to do what God wanted me to do—with two exceptions. I was determined never to become a pastor or a

missionary. I had grown up in a pastor's house, and I didn't want the "fishbowl" pastoral lifestyle or the low prestige. And because missionaries lived in grass huts and brought boring slide shows when they came back to America every ten years or so, I didn't want to be a missionary either.

In spite of my rigid restrictions on God's will, God clearly called me to be a local church pastor. First I was clearly called to follow God, then to go to college, then to attend seminary, and then, I figured, to pastor a little church of twenty-five or so people in the middle of nowhere. I assumed that, like other pastors, my role would be to hatch, match, and dispatch—to shepherd my congregation's members through birth, marriage, and death. I was sure that was God's calling, so I became resigned to a rather mundane lifestyle for the foreseeable future.

My role model, my dad, could talk to a fence post and lead it toward Christ, but planning and coordinating activities were not his leadership strengths. So when I became a youth pastor while in college, I was surprised to discover I had some administrative gifts. By the time I was twenty-five, I had earned a doctorate from a public university in educational administration, with an emphasis in organizational behavior and leadership. At twenty-six, through a series of strange and pain-filled events, I became the senior pastor of an eighty-eight-year-old Baptist church of about four hundred people who had been terribly wounded by betrayal. The previous senior pastor had experienced a series of moral failures that culminated in a split church and broken trust. My pastoral role was to provide healing and hope—and to try to lead the church to thrive.

After I spent a few years at that church (where we began to experience some measure of health and vitality after the pain-filled valley), my denomination asked me to serve in a

leadership role, so at the tender age of thirty-one, I became a denominational executive. I enjoyed using my leadership and administrative gifts, but the work was very political. Playing politics all day every day drained me, but I knew I was part of something significant. By the time I was thirty-five, I could honestly say that God had called me, gifted me, and used me in some important ways.

But I lived with a secret: my life was too safe.

In my heart I knew I had never been willing to lay it all on the line for Jesus Christ, to trust God enough to risk personal failure. I'd been successful at many things, but I'd never been willing to focus on God's bold call to action, on what Paul meant when he wrote to the Philippians, "This one thing I do." I'd been happy to use my God-given abilities at an eight or nine on a ten-point scale. That was usually comfortable—but striving for a ten would demand far more risk than I had ever experienced. For some time, I wrestled with this tension between comfort and risk. Wasn't an eight or nine still pretty good?

At a retreat in the early months of 1996, I read an advance copy of Rick Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Church*. The book contains part of Rick's first sermon at Saddleback Community Church, which described his bold, sweeping vision for what the church would look like in twenty years. When I read it, I laughed out loud. *That's ridiculous!* I thought. *How could anybody have the audacity to stand up in front of two hundred people and tell them that in twenty years the church would have twenty thousand people on fifty acres in upscale Orange County, California? How arrogant!* I knew Saddleback and I knew Orange County—you just don't dream those kinds of dreams in that kind of place!

I went outside at the retreat center and walked in the snow. I felt like God had put a burning ember in my stomach. God

seemed to be asking, "Would you dare to dream big dreams for me?" That question presented a fork in the road. How would I answer this life-defining call from God?

I instantly responded, "No!"

I had a nice salary, a big office, and all the perks that come with being a denominational executive. I wasn't exactly happy in my role, but I assumed that eventually God would direct me back to a local church—presumably a large one with a nice office and a good salary!—where I would be happier and more fulfilled. God's asking me to put my safety, my reputation, and my finances on the line—to take a huge risk and trust him—was more than I had bargained for. Was I willing to leave behind my salary, my comfort, and my influential position and walk into the Yukon to search for a spiritual goldmine?

In the hours after that question penetrated my heart, God began to clarify his direction for me. He was calling me to work with people who had given up on the traditional church but who hadn't given up on him. The more I thought about it, the more I realized this was unmistakably God's clear calling. During the next few months, my wife got excited about this dream. My brother, his wife, and two other couples also expressed their support. When I resigned my position at the denomination, we had very little money in savings and no money set aside for church planting, but God immediately began to confirm we had done the right thing. In fact, some people on our Christmas card list committed fifty thousand dollars, and two organizations gave another two hundred thousand to help us. This was an amazing confirmation of God's working in our hearts, so we moved to Carson Valley, Nevada, to start a church.⁷

Still, I was afraid that we would fail. My thoughts were haunted by images of a handful of people in a boring service five

years after we started the church. Yet God reminded me that his calling is not about achievement as measured by the world; it's about faithfulness. When we hear God's bold call, our job is to respond—it's his job to produce fruit in his way, his timing, and for his glory.

The words *focus* and *discipline* have characterized my life since we began this new ministry. God wanted me to focus on one thing, not fifty. As leaders, there are countless things we *could* be doing, but what *should* we be doing? What would God accomplish if my heart and mind were focused like a laser on the purposes of his bold call? And once I heard that call, could I discipline my heart to pursue God's will and his ways more than the safety and comfort of business as usual?

I believe with my whole heart that we can—and should—do more. Not more of the stuff that churches always do, but more of the risk taking that defines bold followers of God's call. Only when we give away our comfort and follow God do we find the joy and purpose for which we've always been searching.

Calling and Joy

When we think of sacrifice, we often imagine grim-faced resignation and action motivated by our sense of guilt and duty. But when we respond to God's calling, the safety we give up is replaced with the great joy of seeing God work in us and through us. We are directed by the Way, inspired by the Truth, and empowered by the Life, and we discover the unspeakable privilege of representing him, of being his ambassadors to those around us. Peter described this privilege: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

As we learn to use our time, talents, and treasure for his glory and for his purposes, we are genuinely delighted when we see lives changed by our efforts. In perhaps the most memorable moment of the film *Chariots of Fire*, Eric Liddell and his sister Jenny stand on a hill near Edinburgh, Scotland. Jenny can't understand why Eric is so dedicated to running in the Olympics when so many "more important things" need his attention. After she states her case, Eric looks at her and explains, "Jenny, Jenny. God made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure."

When we are gripped by our calling, when we are devoted to God's purposes, and when we are actively using our abilities to serve him, we feel his pleasure. We enjoy the Lord, and we enjoy the role he has entrusted to us in expanding his kingdom. This sense of pleasure and purpose just doesn't happen when we stay in our comfortable offices and conventional thought patterns. Like Olympic runners, we have to stretch to the point of breaking, risking everything, for it is only from that place of total vulnerability that the incomparable strength of God flows into us.

Before we begin to pursue the bold strategies that can transform a life, a church, and a community for Christ, we need to be gripped by God's strong, clear calling. We dare not place anything else before this calling—not even the needs of people around us, and definitely not the desire to win the applause of others for our efforts. God's call summons us to respond to his greatness and grace, to first devote ourselves completely to him and then to his purposes. In the next chapter we will examine how a heart of faith responds to God's clear call.

Reflection Questions

At the end of each chapter, you will find some questions and exercises to help you apply the principles in the chapter. Don't

hurry through these. Your times of reflection may be the most valuable benefit of reading this book. Take time to answer the questions by yourself. Then, if other leaders in your church are also reading this book, use these sections to spark discussions about how you can chart God's best course for your church.

1. Use your own words to paraphrase Os Guinness's definition of calling: "Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service."

2. Proverbs 28:1 says, "The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion." What are some reasons safety is so attractive? How do you distinguish between God-inspired boldness and prideful ambition?

2

Dream the Vision

But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

3. Reread the portion of “Law of the Yukon” quoted in this chapter. Does this poem inspire you? Why or why not?

4. Have you ever sensed that God might be prompting you to dream bigger dreams for him? If so, were you ready and willing to answer God’s call? Explain your answer.