

SGI

STRENGTHEN · GROW · INCREASE

No
23



November-December 2024

REDEEMING CULTURE

THE SGI
JOURNAL
OF LEADERSHIP

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FROM THE SGI COMMITTEE CHAIR

Redeeming Culture

Darrell Johns

FROM THE GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT

It's Time to Act

David K. Bernard

Guiding Through Uncertainty: Five Crucial Traits for Effective Ministry

Tom Trimble

Apostolic Ministry in a Pagan Nation

David McGovern

Leading Amid Political, Social, and Cultural Tensions

Chad Williams

ISSUE 24 TOOLBOX

Apostolic SGI Resources



MISSION STATEMENT

Leading the United Pentecostal Church International to think strategically about future growth.

THE STRATEGIC GROWTH INITIATIVE STEERING COMMITTEE

Darrell Johns, Chair
Bryan Parkey, Vice Chair
Nathan Scoggins, Secretary

GENERAL EDITING

Sylvia Clemons
Seth Simmons

GRAPHIC DESIGN & LAYOUT

Seth Simmons

DISTRIBUTION

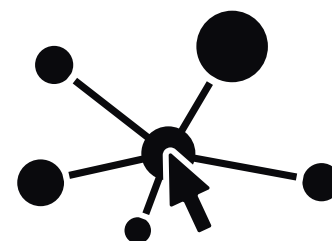
Nathan Scoggins
Seth Simmons

SPANISH TRANSLATION EDITORS

Trinidad Ramos
Rene Moreno

FRENCH TRANSLATION EDITOR

Liane R. Grant, *Certified Translator*
(Nonprofit Translation Solutions)



This resource is interactive. Click the items in the Table of Contents to move around and explore each issue.

FIND HELP TO GROW
ON MINISTRY CENTRAL!
CLICK BELOW
TO FIND OUT MORE.



SGI Church Growth Resources

Unlisted



United Pentecostal C...
38.6K subscribers

Subscribed



Like



Strategic Growth Initiative

The mission of SGI is to create a culture of health that produces spiritual and numerical growth in ministers, churches, and districts in the UPCI.

Church Health Check-Up

Welcome to the *Church Health Check-Up*. This evaluation is designed to give you a more clearly defined understanding of your church's overall health. With a better understanding, you, as a pastor, can move forward to make the proper changes necessary to either continue the growth process, begin to grow again after a period of non-growth, or restructure for growth after a period of decline. Click below to access the Church Health Check-Up.

[Click Here](#)

A Church Growth Track

Now available for ALL! View this tremendous resource for pastors, districts, church leadership teams and those involved in the local church. This Church Growth Track will consist of eleven lessons, each taught by Apostolic leaders on the front lines of revival and growth. Please click VIEW COURSE for this free resource.

[View Course](#)



SGI RESOURCES! CLICK THIS PAGE TO VISIT PENTECOSTAL PUBLISHING HOUSE



Search for books, bibles and more

Search

Hello, Log In Create an Account



Curriculum Books Bibles Bible Studies For Churches Media Sales Blog

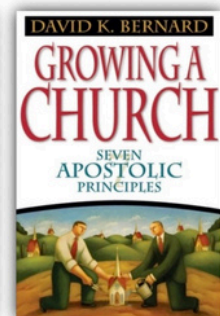
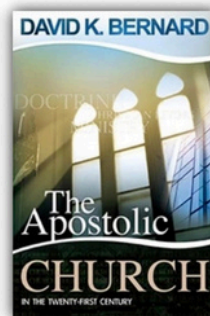
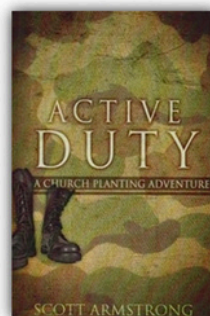
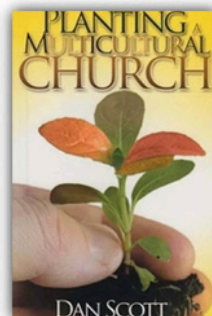
Strategic Growth Initiative (SGI) Resources



The Strategic Growth Initiative (SGI) was born in the heart of General Superintendent David K. Bernard as God gave him a vision for growing the North American church. The General Board of the UPCI approved the forming of SGI for the purpose of highlighting growth in the areas of the number of churches and ministers in North America. The four focus points of SGI are outlined below along with resources available through the Pentecostal Resources Group.

Multiply the number of churches

SGI will assist districts by providing promotion, planning, and training with the goal of enabling every district to at least double the number of churches (including preaching points, daughter works, autonomous church plants, multicultural church plants, integrate independent Apostolic churches, etc.) in one decade.





REDEEMING CULTURE

Darrell Johns

IDEA IN BRIEF

OBSERVE THE CULTURE

LET CURIOSITY LEAD THE
CONVERSATION

ACKNOWLEDGE BUT DO
NOT AFFIRM THE CULTURE

BEGIN WITH THE KNOWN

CONNECT WITH THE
CULTURE

PRESENT THE GOSPEL

BE REALISTIC ABOUT
RESPONSES

We live in an exceptionally polarized culture. Decades of humanistic philosophy promoted through the public and private educational systems and by the entertainment industry, as well as other forces, have unraveled our society's moral fabric. The political climate is emotionally charged, and polls show many people suffer distress as a result. Much like the first century, the world has descended into spiritual darkness. Nonetheless, the world is our mission field, and we cannot write it off. We are called to shine the light of truth into the darkness. We are ministers of reconciliation, not alienation.

When I was in Bible college, the late Rev. Billy Cole taught us about missionary work in foreign countries with very different cultures. He said,

“He who ignores culture is a fool.”

It was a stunning statement. He explained that the message of the Bible is unchanging, but we must be wise about what is biblical and what is cultural. The goal, Bro. Cole said, is not to make everyone Americans; the goal is to make them Christians. It is wise to understand the context in which we minister, and it is foolish to ignore it.

We live in an increasingly “foreign” culture where there is more ignorance than understanding of biblical principles. We need wisdom to connect to, and convert, people who increasingly embrace and adopt paganistic thinking and lifestyles. The apostle Paul welcomed the challenge of approaching unchurched people with the gospel. He preferred to minister in places where Christ was not known (Romans 15:20).

In Acts 17, when the apostle Paul traveled to Athens he initially did not intend to preach there. He was waiting for Silas and Timothy so they could proceed on their journey together. However, Paul's spirit was stirred when he saw that the city was wholly given to idolatry (Acts 17:15-16).

This passage is wonderful and insightful. Paul's approach to the Athenians is so unique that some commentators question if it was an authentic Pauline sermon. Paul obviously is wise and adapts his approach to his audience. He does not ignore culture. Notice how Paul interacted with the Athenians. We can gain insights from this story and Paul's wise approach.

Observe the culture. Paul walked the streets of Athens and saw that the city was given over to the worship of idols (Acts 17:16). It was said of those times that it was easier to find a god in Athens than it was to find a man. There were public and private idols throughout the city. Athens did not have truth, but they had spiritual curiosity and were given to philosophy. It is instructive to realize that a sophisticated society can be spiritually minded, yet spiritually blind. Paul thoughtfully observed the culture.

Let curiosity lead to conversation. As Paul interacted with people in the synagogue and in the marketplace, some philosophers engaged him with questions (Acts 17:18-20). This gave Paul the opportunity to address them convincingly with wisdom. Do not take questions as criticism or rejection. Use them as an opportunity to share the gospel.

Acknowledge, but do not affirm, the culture. In his opening remarks, Paul noted that the Athenians were religious. Some translations say "superstitious." Paul was too wise to alienate his audience in his introductory remarks. He engaged them by noting that the Athenians had a curiosity of spiritual matters (Acts 17:22). The hillside leading from the Agora to the Acropolis was filled with idols. The Athenians did not want to miss honoring any supposed deity, so they worshiped them all.

Begin with the known. Paul preached Jesus starting with God as the Creator. We should not assume any level of biblical understanding of people we encounter. Today, people often know very little about the Bible. Discern and learn where people are and start there.

We cannot lead people to holy ground until we meet them on common ground.

Connect with the culture. Paul quoted two Grecian philosophers in his sermon, showing interest and respect for some of the thinking of the day. He then used those insights to reveal the nature of God (Acts 17:24-29). Paul led the Athenians from the known to the unknown.

Present the gospel. Ultimately, there comes a time when people must be confronted with truth. Paul told the people at Mars Hill that God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). Like the biblical revelation itself, his argument begins with God as the creator of all and ends with God as the judge of all. [1]

[1] F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 335.

Be realistic about responses. Paul received mixed responses. Some mocked. Some wanted to hear more. Others believed and responded to the gospel, including some of the philosophers that Paul met at Mars Hill. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them (Acts 17:32-34 NKJV).

The gospel has the power to shine light in any darkness. If we are turned off by our culture, we are unlikely to turn people enmeshed in the culture to God. In the face of political, social, and cultural tensions, God can give us wisdom to be ministers of reconciliation to redeem our culture.

Darrell Johns



Darrell Johns serves as pastor of Atlanta West Pentecostal Church, assistant general superintendent of the Eastern Zone, UPCI, and chair of the Strategic Growth Initiative Committee of the General Board.



It's Time to Act

Dr. David K. Bernard, General Superintendent

We are a first-century church in the twenty-first century. Are we simply going to maintain, or will we have revival and growth? We should stop preaching that in the last days there will be a revival. We should start preaching that these are the last days and these are the days of revival. "In the last days," says God, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." (See Acts 2:17.) We are seeing that message come to pass in our lifetime in our churches.

At our national conference in El Salvador in November 2015, 35,000 people gathered in a soccer stadium, and 3,842 received the Holy Ghost in one day. That is more than on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. A lame man was healed, rose out of his wheelchair, and walked away. That's like Acts 3.

At our national conference in Bangladesh in February 2016, 1,500 received healings and miracles, while 3,500 received the Holy Ghost. At our national conference in Thailand in the same month, another lame man was healed. Also in February 2016, at our national conference in Manila, Philippines, 35,000 people attended, and an estimated 5,000 received the Holy Ghost. That's like Acts 4, where 5,000 were added to the church.

It is time to step out by faith. It is time to put into motion what we've been preaching. We've been praying, preaching, believing, and receiving, but now we must act!

Preparation

Take heed now for the LORD hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it. (1 Chronicles 28:10)

The people who built the Temple established a way of worship that lasted for four hundred years. Let's see how they accomplished this great work, for we can follow the same principles today. According to 1 Chronicles 28:5-7, they were called and chosen for this task. Likewise, we have been called by God and chosen for this hour. We are no better than anyone else, except we are called by His name. As people of the Name and people of the Spirit, we can claim the promise of end-time revival.

In verses 8-9, King David admonished his son and heir, Solomon: "Now therefore in the sight of all Israel the congregation of the LORD, and in the audience of our God, keep and seek for all the commandments of the LORD your God: that ye may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance for your children after you for ever. And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever."

A perfect heart means "wholeheartedly; with nothing held back." It doesn't mean the person has never done wrong or failed. It means "with all of your heart." Everything must be based, not upon hype or emotionalism, but upon a relationship with God. We must follow the Lord. We must be dedicated to Him. We must be willing to obey Him in all things. We need the message of righteousness and holiness. We must treat all of God's Word as important. We must accept the teachings of the New Testament for us today, from sexual morality to modesty of dress. When we are wholly committed to God, He will honor our dedication and sacrifice.

This type of consecration sets the stage for what God wants to do. Our text, verse 10, begins, "Take heed now." Once we've established our relationship with God, then we need to listen to His commands.

Then David admonished, "Be strong." This command reveals that there will be obstacles. If there were no trials, problems, opposition, or spiritual attack, we wouldn't have to be strong. Sometimes we think, *God, I'm just trying to do Your will. Why are things so hard?* I hear God answer, "When I told you to be strong, it was a positive way of preparing you for trials and opposition. Be strong, be courageous, and do the work!"

The New American Standard Bible says, "Consider now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be courageous and act."

The New Living Translation says, "So take this seriously. The LORD has chosen you to build a Temple as his sanctuary. Be strong, and do the work."

The message is simple: Be strong, and do the work! Be strong, and act! Let's start a Bible study, a preaching point, or a daughter work. Tell your pastor, "I am ready to work. What do you have for me to do?" Preaching, praying, and worshiping are all vitally important, but at some point we must step out by faith and act. It's time to act!

Of course, we must act strategically. We must plan, count the cost, and prepare the way. As an organization, we have spent some years strengthening our base, our finances, every division, and every department.

Strategic planning is scriptural, as we see from the rest of chapter 28. David made detailed plans for the Temple, including plans for every room and piece of furniture. He explained that these plans came from God, including "all the details" (verse 19, NASB). Chapter 29 discloses that David set aside all the money and material needed to construct the Temple, including the silver and the gold. He weighed out the proper amount of gold for each item of furniture.

To do God's work, there must be spiritual preparation as well. Chapter 29 also records the prayer of David. He asked for God's blessing upon the work, and the people responded to his prayer with worship. Then they offered sacrifices. Afterward they had a great feast where they had fellowship together. In summary, detailed planning and preparation preceded the building of the Temple. Prayer, worship, sacrifice, and unity all prepared the people for action.

The parallel to Acts 2 is striking. As the original Christians began to build the spiritual temple of the New Testament church, "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). The rest of Acts 2 records that they gave sacrificially and that they worshiped in the Temple and from house to house. The only significant difference was that the New Testament church had signs and wonders as part of their regular operation. In short, much like I Chronicles 28, they had prayer, worship, sacrifice, and unity; and in addition they had the gifts of the Spirit.

What about us? Our people are catching a fresh burden and vision for prayer. The World Network of Prayer is expanding. Everywhere I go, I'm finding a genuine spirit of worship, in churches large and small, with worship methods and choruses old and new. Our people are giving sacrificially. We are breaking records in every aspect of our giving and finances.

What about unity? We all want the same outcomes, although we may have different views on how to accomplish our goals. We are discussing plans and methods without contention, strife, bitterness, jealousy, or hatred. We're not perfect, and sometimes we have to deal with these elements, but we are overcoming them. We aren't letting such attitudes hinder our fellowship or stop our revival. Our districts, divisions, departments, and ministries are moving forward as never before. There is a deep, underlying sense of unity and purpose, just as in I Chronicles 28–29 and Acts 2.

Acting in Faith

What's next? It's time to act. We must seize our opportunity lest it slip from our grasp. There is a window of opportunity in these last days, and it is wide open for the United Pentecostal Church International.

Taking action involves risk. It should be a calculated risk, but it is a real risk. It requires a step of faith. It's not blind faith, but faith that sees the problems, dangers, and potential for failure but stills says, "It's time to act!" Over the years and under many great leaders, we've had outstanding preparation, planning, prayer, worship, and sacrifice, but it's time for our generation to act. As David told Solomon, in essence, "I've spent my whole life bringing our nation to this point. Now it's up to you. You must act."

I was raised by missionary parents in a developing country. I grew up in an environment of faith in action. I have lived the stories you read about. My parents were lay members in a local church when they received a specific call to Korea. To gain experience they started a church in Louisiana, and after several years they were appointed to Korea.

Before we went, we were in a car wreck that almost killed us and delayed us for one year. I have a scar on my head from that wreck. My mother was in the hospital for six weeks with a broken neck and a concussion; she went in and out of consciousness the whole time. My father's nose and both arms were broken, and the nerve in his right hand was severed. The hand was unusable for six months until God miraculously healed him. While he was in the hospital he won a nurse to the Lord, and her entire family is in church today.

We traveled by a freighter that took forty days to reach Korea. The ship caught on fire in the Caribbean Sea. We lined up on deck to get into the lifeboats, but the cables were so corroded they wouldn't work. We raced to the Panama Canal Zone where the fire was put out. The US firefighters estimated that if there had been 10 percent more heat, the whole thing would have blown up.

Once in Korea my mom preached a revival where she was poisoned by carbon monoxide due to a faulty heating system. When she didn't show up for morning prayer, the church people found her in her room unconscious. They worked all day to revive her. Toward evening she regained consciousness and insisted on preaching that night. She waited until everyone was praying and slipped up to the platform by holding on to the wall. She grabbed the pulpit with both hands to hold herself up. As she preached, the anointing fell, she was healed, and many people received the Holy Ghost.

When we first went to Korea we didn't return for five years. My mom left her mother dying of cancer. My grandmother insisted that we go to fulfill the call of God to reach the lost. When we arrived, we were the only United Pentecostal family in the whole country. We didn't see our family and friends for five years. There was no internet or email; phone calls were very costly and rare. During that time, we had only three visits from North American preachers. After I became a parent, I realized how difficult it must have been for my parents to send me back to the US at age seventeen for college in a strange city that was seven thousand miles from home, and later do the same with my sister.

After the church was established in Korea and my parents felt their work was done, in their late fifties they started a home mission church in Cajun country. They worked secular jobs to support themselves. In their midsixties they started the first Spanish church in their area, which led to their organizing Spanish Ministries in Louisiana. It is a strong church today, with a building that seats seven hundred.

In their late seventies, after the Spanish church was established with one of their converts as pastor, they rented a small building in an African American neighborhood because that demographic wasn't being reached effectively. They weren't able to fulfill their plans, however, because my dad had a stroke and my mom developed Alzheimer's. I tried to follow their example of faith in action. When God called me to preach, I was in my last year of law school. I canceled all interviews with law firms because I felt God was going to open a door for full-time ministry. I was scheduled to graduate on May 13 and get married on June 6. I finally received a confirmed offer of a full-time job in ministry on April 30.

Two weeks after the wedding, we moved to Jackson, Mississippi, to teach in Bible college. I was twenty-four, and my wife was twenty. That first year I was the dean of students, the academic dean, and the main doctrinal teacher with a class load of sixteen credit hours. Due to circumstances of the previous administration, the majority of upperclassmen no longer believed the basic doctrines of the Apostolic Pentecostal faith. Many didn't have a strong commitment to holiness, which in turn influenced their behavior and dorm life. It was an exciting way to begin ministry.

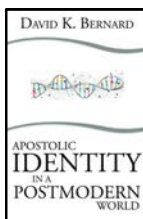
I know what it's like to move from a full-time job at headquarters to start a church in my home with just my family. I know what it's like to start a new district when there was quite a lot of opposition including verbal abuse and threats of lawsuit. I know what it's like to start a seminary at the request of the organization even though some were opposed and sometimes there was little financial support. I know what it's like as school president to face a large payroll with no money in the bank and then to raise money from board members, our local church, and even a personal credit line. I know what it's like to juggle church and school bills using cash advances from new credit cards. I don't advise it, but sometimes you do what you have to do. You must hear from God and you must plan well, but there is still a risk in ministry.

It is a great honor being general superintendent. People treat me very well. I have a nice home, car, income, and everything I could want. But it was difficult to walk away from our lifetime dream of ministry, to leave the church we started in our home and pastored for eighteen years until it had finally grown to the point of impacting a metro area of 1.8 million people. There was a risk of leaving our established life and ministry for the uncertainty of organizational finances, needed restructuring, and potential opposition.

I'm sharing these stories not to draw attention to myself but to say honestly from experience that there is a real risk associated with action. It should be a calculated risk. We should pray, plan, and structure our finances. If we don't have a plan, we're headed for disaster. But I've found that if we do have a plan, it's not going to work—at least not the way we think. Nevertheless, when we come to a crisis we can pray in faith, "Lord, I made plans in all sincerity, trying to fulfill Your will. I've tried my best, so I'm asking You to make up the difference. I wasn't negligent, but I need help. I stepped out by faith at Your command, and now I need a miracle." And I have found God will help.



Dr. David K. Bernard is the general superintendent of the United Pentecostal Church International.



Recommended Resource
Article adapted from *Apostolic Identity in a Postmodern World* by David K. Bernard (Word of Fire Press, 2019).



Recommended Resource
[Click here to access Apostolic Life in the 21st Century Podcast.](#)

```
2 // heap[0] / (1 + 2 * x) * (1 + 2 * x)
real Zbuffer::setz(int x, int y) {
return Z[x+y*sizeX];
}
```



Guiding Through Uncertainty: Five Crucial Traits for Effective Ministry —

Dr. Thomas Trimble

The sound was deafening. The chaos made truth difficult to decipher. For ten years we had been intentional about growing a multicultural church in the St. Louis area. Then Michael Brown was shot, and soon after that Ferguson, Missouri, was ablaze. The tension was palpable when I walked into the sanctuary the day after the shooting. I prayed and studied more for my keynote addressing the tragedy than I did for my sermon for the day.

Years later, when the threat of COVID was emerging, I received communication that if we were required to wear masks, this family would not be coming. Within minutes, I received communication from another family that if we were not required to wear masks, their family would not attend. Leaders get caught in the middle of cultural shifts, breaking news, and societal landmines. How can we effectively lead in such a volatile atmosphere?

When we slow down to assess the landscape of North America, we realize cultural shifts and significant changes are happening almost daily. How can we effectively navigate these uncharted waters and safely lead the people of God into the future? Assuming you already know the highest and most vital spiritual priorities, this discussion will lean toward the practical.

Five Crucial Traits for Effective Ministry in Tumultuous Times

1) CLARITY

Navigating change requires a consistent and unclouded understanding of those things that never change. In the fourth chapter of Mark, the storm on the sea did not affect the peaceful rest Jesus enjoyed. The desperate disciples had to go and shake the Savior to make Him aware of the danger. Jesus was unshaken by the change in the weather because He both held and was the unchangeable Truth. Our response to tumultuous times should not be hand-wringing and capitulation. As when Simon Peter walked on water, our challenge is to keep our eyes on Jesus and not on the waves.

Mission and Core Values

Our core values and mission act as a compass when we feel disoriented. They help us know our true north, to which we constantly reorient. It can be tempting to be led by the headlines, every emerging issue, or the chatter on social media; but our God-given mission must transcend the moment. Focusing on God's purpose, codified through our mission statement and core values, keeps us from being distracted and following every rabbit trail we encounter.

When chaos becomes the norm, the importance of core values and a clear mission is paramount.

We are called to be agents of change for Jesus Christ, and we must not let our direction shift away from Him.

2) HUMILITY

We are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14). While light can be seen from afar, salt must be close to have an impact. A conversation over a cappuccino is often more effective than a picket sign. We should approach those with differing beliefs with kindness and humility, without compromising our values or appearing condescending.

3) AWARENESS

We must “read” both the culture and Scripture, actively studying the practices, values, beliefs, and behaviors of the society we lead. This cultural exegesis helps us understand underlying motivations and prepares us to communicate the gospel effectively. For instance, Paul used contemporary poets at Mars Hill to engage unbelievers. In a post-modern, post-Christian context, sharing our deliverance story before presenting Scripture might be more impactful.

4) AGILITY

Along with awareness, we must develop the agility to minister across diverse settings. Jesus approached Jewish disciples, scribes, Pharisees, and the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well with different strategies, showcasing the ability to adapt. This adaptability enables effective ministry in complex cultural landscapes.

Churches can enhance this cultural agility as ministry becomes more focused on specific needs. Each week, a church may serve the deaf community along with groups dealing with recovery, divorce, grief, and homelessness. The Great Commission includes all people. While we can't specialize in every area, we can strive to be as effective as possible with our available resources.

5) ANTICIPATION

As churches faced the challenges of COVID-19, it became clear that traditional, strategic foresight models—focused on three to five-year projections—were inadequate. Rapid changes necessitated a shift in approach, prioritizing immediate media needs over nearly everything else (when we could not meet in person). Instead of more traditional planning, we adopted a scenario planning method, guided by our mission and core values, to navigate this uncertainty.

Here’s how we executed scenario planning:

- **Identify Key Uncertainties:** We established axes to create four quadrants, focusing on virus levels and attendance.
- **Develop Multiple Scenarios:** We crafted both positive and negative scenarios, evaluating them against our mission and community needs. For instance, high virus and attendance levels required protocols for social distancing, while low virus and low attendance levels necessitated different communication and engagement strategies.
- **Encourage Team Involvement:** Engaging the team in scenario development enriched insights and fostered group ownership.

- Review and Update Scenarios: Regular updates were essential to adapt to the rapidly changing landscape.
- Create Action Plans: Preparing for various futures equipped our church with clear steps for unforeseen developments, enhanced safety, and facilitated quick decision-making.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8 NKJV). We are secure in our apostolic identity, founded on God's Word, and led by His Spirit. Therefore, regardless of the unpredictability of the world, we can lead from a place of clarity, humility, awareness, agility, and anticipation. God is opening so many doors, and we want to walk through them, both practically and spiritually.

Thomas Trimble

Dr. Tom Trimble has devoted over 40 years to vocational ministry and has served as the senior pastor of Restoration Church in St. Charles, Missouri, for the last two decades. He holds both undergraduate and graduate degrees from Urshan University and earned a doctorate in Strategic Leadership from Regent University. His book, *Digital Dominion: Smartphones, Social Media, and Jesus*, offers a thoughtful Christian perspective on navigating the challenges of digital communication. Dr. Trimble is married to his college sweetheart, Debra, and together they have raised three adult children, all actively involved in ministry alongside their families. When he's not leading, preaching or teaching, he is committed to fulfilling his New Year's resolution: drinking more coffee.



Apostolic Ministry in a Pagan Nation

David McGovern

**“Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter.”
Charles Spurgeon**

According to a 2021 Gallop poll, religious membership in the United States has fallen to just 47 percent among those surveyed. That represents less than half of the adult population for the first time since Gallup began asking the question more than eighty years ago. In her article, *How the Pandemic Paved the Way for Millennial Mysticism*, author Kristin Wong writes that millennials are leading the growing cohort of Americans who describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious.” She points to a study by Pew Research Center which reported that six in ten American millennials now believe in a New Age concept, like reincarnation, astrology, and psychics. And post-pandemic, astrologers and tarot card readers have seen a massive increase in business.

New York Times columnist Ross Douthat recently wrote an article titled, “The Return of Paganism” with a subheading that said, Maybe there actually is a post-Christian future for America. He lays out some eye-opening data in his article. Roughly 1.5 million people now say they practice Wicca or paganism, which is a rise from an estimated 8,000 Wiccans in 1990, and 340,000 in 2008.

There are now more Wiccans and pagans than United Pentecostals in America.

The disconcerting reality is that we are no longer doing ministry in a Christian nation, nor a post-Christian nation. We are now doing ministry in a fully pagan nation. However, the good news is that the events of the New Testament—all the miracles, signs, wonders, outpourings, church plantings—transpired largely in pagan cities. While the challenges in this are obvious, the advantage is that pagan and non-religious people are far more receptive to a truly transformational spiritual experience than are traditionally religious people.

In fact, Professor Clay Routledge wrote about this recently in an article for the New York Times where he said, “Nearly one third of Americans report having felt in contact with someone who has died, feel that they have been in the presence of a ghost, and believe ghosts can interact with and harm humans. These numbers are going up, not down,” he says, “as more people seek something to fill the religion-shaped hole in their lives. By no coincidence, infrequent church attendees are roughly twice as likely to believe in ghosts as regular churchgoers.”

So, if the pagans and the non-religious people in my city are twice as interested in the supernatural as the traditional religious people in my city, then I believe this bodes well for Apostolic leaders in 21st century cities. What an incredible opportunity for the Apostolic church in these times! We are uniquely positioned in front of an open door for end-time harvest. But in order to accomplish effective apostolic ministry in a post-Christian context in our cities and villages, we must become missionaries to our cities.

Every Apostolic pastor, preacher, minister, and leader in North America—whether in an urban or rural context—must now hasten to accept that we are missionaries in a hostile culture. And much like our brothers and sisters who embark on a global mission’s appointment, we must accept that we are no longer living and laboring in a Christian nation, but in a pagan one.

The political and social climate in a pagan nation will not always be friendly to a Christian missionary. But when we accept the anointing of a missionary, we can go with boldness into any city and any village in a nation, and the “gates of hell shall not prevail.” This is not something to fear and lament, but rather to embrace with apostolic fervor. Legendary missionary C. T. Studd wrote,

“Some want to live within the sound of church bells; but I want to run a rescue shop, within a yard of hell.”

There are several hallmarks of a missionary mindset, but there exists perhaps no clearer framework for missional ministry than what can be extracted from Matthew 9:35, when Jesus went into all the cities and villages teaching and preaching the gospel of the kingdom...

The missional framework of Christ:

- He went to all the cities and villages.
- He taught and preached the gospel of the Kingdom.
- He saw the multitudes.
- He had insight to their condition.
- He was moved with compassion.
- He introduced a burden for the field.
- He prayed that laborers would be sent.

Pagan society is identified by biblical illiteracy and pluralistic culture. As such there is a real temptation for those in the pulpit to relate to culture by preaching a populist message comprised of religious double-speak. Such preaching may be culturally approved and may not risk offense; but it is filtered through psychology, is void of any real prophecy, and is ultimately of no effect. Though such vague preaching is a fixture throughout the American evangelical homiletic, it means little beyond some self-help principles. And it certainly does not transform lives and populate Heaven.

By contrast, the gospel of Jesus Christ is either the power of God unto salvation, or it is nothing at all. That is why Paul preached the way he did in Acts 17 at the Areopagus in Athens, the home of Pericles and Plato and the hub of pagan culture. And it is here that Paul preaches one of the greatest sermons in history on Mars Hill. It was so masterful because it was so mission-full. And like a good missionary, Paul speaks to the Athenians in a language they can understand. He appeals to their background and their culture, but he never minces words about the gospel. Paul preached the death, burial, resurrection, Heaven and hell, and the judgment to come.

Traditionally, the success of a sermon is gauged by the immediate response and how many handclaps or amens you receive. But a missionary preaching to pagan cities understands that success means establishing a place where the gospel is faithfully preached. And this is how the pagans of Athens responded to Paul: some mocked (Acts 17:32), others believed (Acts 17:34). If we are willing to preach the gospel faithfully in our increasingly pagan nation, there will be enough others who will believe, and by reaching the others we can build an Apostolic church in any city in this world.

David McGovern

David McGovern is a church planter to Los Angeles. In 2013, he followed the call of God to plant Acts Church in one of the world's largest and most diverse cities. He resides in the city of Los Angeles with his wife Monique and their four daughters. In 2018, the McGoverns became Metro Missionaries to Los Angeles, and are working to plant more churches in the vast harvest field of the Greater Los Angeles Metro.

```
2 // heap mem 1/(1+(1+2ex)+1+(1+2ex))
real Zbuffer::getz(int x, int y) {
return Z[x+y*sizeX];
}
```



Leading Amid Political, Social, and Cultural Tensions

Chad Williams

The apostle Paul led in an environment full of political, social, and cultural conflicts, all while recognizing the deeper spiritual forces at play. Paul's ministry was set against the backdrop of the Roman Empire, where he navigated a complex environment marked by oppressive political systems, deeply entrenched social divisions, and diverse religious and cultural norms. His leadership is an encouragement to me as I lead in Portland and offers timeless insights for ministers today who must navigate similarly complex environments.

Let us explore how Paul's approach can guide today's leaders.

1. Recognize Spiritual Warfare

Paul emphasized that behind many physical tensions were spiritual forces. In Ephesians 6:12, he wrote, *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* This understanding shaped his entire approach to leadership.

Today's leaders must recognize that most challenges are part of a larger spiritual conflict. By equipping our congregations with prayer, fasting, spiritual gifts, and Scripture, we can help people navigate these deeper forces.

Key Insight for Ministers: Equip people with spiritual tools to fight against the real forces behind political, social, and cultural tensions.

2. Focus on the Kingdom of God

Paul's recognition of spiritual warfare led him to prioritize God's eternal Kingdom over earthly systems. He urged believers to seek those things which are above (Colossians 3:1-2) and to avoid conforming to the world (Romans 12:2). His focus on the Kingdom provided a sharp vision for his mission, even in politically, socially, and culturally tense times.

For today's ministers, keeping the focus on God's Kingdom helps people avoid disorientation in the noise of political, social, or cultural unrest.

Key Insight for Ministers: Help people keep an eternal perspective by focusing on Christ's Kingdom.

3. Spiritual Unity Across Social Divides

Paul preached a radical message of unity in Christ that transcended ethnic, social, and gender divides. Galatians 3:28 captures this perfectly, *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.* Paul's ability to transcend cultural and social divisions was crucial in creating apostolic communities that centered on Christ's redemptive work.

This spiritual unity was a powerful response to social divisions of his time. Today our communities are weakened by deep divisions, but spiritual unity in Christ offers a path to healing and reconciliation.

Key Insight for Ministers: Teach the importance of spiritual unity, helping people overcome social divisions by finding their shared identity in Christ.

4. Persevering Through Spiritual Opposition

Paul faced tremendous opposition throughout his ministry, from imprisonment to beatings. In II Corinthians 11:23-28, he recounts the trials he endured. Yet in Philippians 1:12-14, he speaks of how his imprisonment advanced the gospel, inspiring others to be bold.

Paul's ability to be steadfast in hardship inspired early apostolic communities to persevere. He understood that these trials were part of the spiritual battle and trusted that God would use them for good. We must also persevere through challenges, knowing they serve a higher purpose of advancing the gospel.

Key Insight for Ministers: Encourage perseverance in the face of political, social, and cultural tensions, using hardships to inspire growth and gospel advancement.

5. Contextual Ministry in a Hostile Environment

Paul proved that part of spiritual warfare is presenting the gospel in culturally relevant ways. In I Corinthians 9:22, he says he became all things to all men to win as many as possible. Paul's ministry to the Gentiles required him to engage with their cultures without compromising his beliefs, an important balance in leadership. His speech in Athens (Acts 17:16-34) is a prime example, where he engaged the cultural and philosophical context of the intellectual elite.

This flexibility made the gospel accessible without compromising its core truths. We must discern the spiritual and cultural barriers in our communities.

Key Insight for Ministers: Discern the spiritual needs of your community, adapting your ministry to meet people where they are without compromising the message.

6. Resolving Conflict Through Spiritual Wisdom

Paul's handling of conflicts within the early church was marked by spiritual wisdom. During the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), Paul showed how to cooperate on non-essential matters while staying firm on core truths. His approach is echoed in James 3:17-18, which describes spiritual wisdom as pure...peaceable, gentle... full of mercy.

We can learn from this as we resolve conflicts by seeking wisdom from above, which leads to peace and unity.

Key Insight for Ministers: Navigate conflicts with heavenly wisdom, seeking peace and unity over division.

7. Engaging Cultural and Intellectual Powers

Paul regularly engaged with the intellectual minds of his day, particularly in Athens (Acts 17). He did not shy away from challenging the spiritual emptiness of secular philosophies, using cultural references to build bridges to the gospel. He used familiar cultural references and philosophical ideas to connect with his audience, bridging the gap between the gospel and the secular world. Today's leaders can learn from this as they engage with different worldviews and intellectual traditions in guiding people toward Christ.

We must be willing and equipped to engage the secular world by showing how the gospel fulfills the deeper spiritual needs that worldly ideologies cannot address.

Key Insight for Ministers: Engage with secular culture by exposing the spiritual void behind worldly philosophies, presenting the gospel's relevance.

Key Takeaways for Ministers Today:

- Recognize spiritual warfare as the true battle behind political, social, and cultural tension.
- Focus on God's Kingdom, not on earthly systems.
- Foster spiritual unity, helping people see their identity in Christ as more fundamental than any earthly categories.
- Persevere through opposition, seeing the tension and even hostility as a vehicle to advance the gospel.
- Adapt your ministry by meeting people where they are while staying faithful to the message of the gospel.
- Resolve conflicts with spiritual wisdom, seeking peace and unity.
- Engage with culture and intellect, exposing spiritual emptiness and bringing gospel truth through the relevance of the gospel in every area of life.

By following Paul's example, we can guide people with spiritual discernment, wisdom, and perseverance, recognizing the spiritual realities behind the world's struggles.

Chad Williams

Chad Williams has twenty-four years of experience in ministry, leadership, and development. As a church planter in Portland, Oregon, he leads a growing congregation. Chad has also served as a missionary, launched Ministry Central with UPCI, and helped establish Project7 with UPCI Youth Ministries. He runs a small business focused on development solutions and holds degrees in Psychology and Building Codes Administration, with project management training from the University of Oregon. Chad and his wife, Tasia, and their three sons enjoy exploring the Pacific Northwest.





ISSUE 24 TOOLBOX

PRACTICAL TOOLS YOU CAN USE



Apostolic Resources

Click the links and images below to discover more apostolic resources to help your church experience strategic growth.



Strategic Growth Initiative

The mission of SGI is to create a culture of health that produces spiritual and numerical growth in ministers, churches, and districts in the UPCI.

Church Health Check-Up

Welcome to the *Church Health Check-Up*. This evaluation is designed to give you a more clearly defined understanding of your church's overall health. With a better understanding, you, as a pastor, can move forward to make the proper changes necessary to either continue the growth process, begin to grow again after a period of non-growth, or restructure for growth after a period of decline. Click below to access the Church Health Check-Up.

[Click Here](#)

A Church Growth Track

Now available for ALL! View this tremendous resource for pastors, districts, church leadership teams and those involved in the local church. This Church Growth Track will consist of eleven lessons, each taught by Apostolic leaders on the front lines of revival and growth. Please click [VIEW COURSE](#) for this free resource.

[View Course](#)