

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR
PASTORS AND LEADERSHIP TEAMS

DAYS 1-49

100 DAYS

TO A

HEALTHIER

CHURCH

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

This devotional is a companion to the book *100 Days to a Healthier Church*, by Karl Vaters. Like the book, the principles laid out here are not one-time, quick-fix solutions. They are long-term principles—nudges, not jumps. It's about being the tortoise, not the hare. It is divided into four main steps over 14 weeks. It works best when it starts on a Saturday, so this devotional is designed with that in mind.

HOW TO GET STARTED

This will be the first day of what will be a new experience for many participants—a daily devotional with a specific goal. The idea is to use every one of the 100 Days to build principle upon principle, without overburdening everyone with meetings, but actually using it as a time to slow down, ponder, reflect, and consider where God wants to take His church. The pattern for the daily devotional is as follows:

- **FIND A SPECIFIC TIME AND PLACE TO SET ASIDE 15-30 MINUTES**
- **DO IT AS EARLY IN THE DAY AS POSSIBLE (IF YOU HAVE TO GET UP EARLIER THAN USUAL, IT WILL BE WORTH IT)**
- **TAKE A MOMENT TO QUIET YOURSELF AND ASK GOD TO SPEAK TO YOU**
- **READ TODAY'S BIG IDEA**
- **READ THE KEY VERSE**
- **FIND AND READ THE PASSAGE OF THE DAY IN YOUR BIBLE (IT WILL PUT THE KEY VERSE IN CONTEXT)**
- **READ THE THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER ABOUT THE PASSAGE**
- **USE A JOURNAL TO RECORD YOUR THOUGHTS, FEELING AND PRAYERS**

STEP 1
ASSESS YOUR SITUATION

“I will build my church.”

Matthew 16:18

CHECK IN WITH THE CHURCH'S OWNER

DAY 1 (FIRST BIG SATURDAY): REMEMBER WHOSE CHURCH IT REALLY IS

Every church should start their assessment not by debating how to change the church, or what attendance goals you want to hit, but by considering “What does Jesus want His church to be?”

That will be the entire focus of the first week, but especially of this first day.

Today is not about strategizing new ideas or critiquing old methods. It’s about laying all of that aside to focus on Jesus, His church, and His mission. Today’s passages are organized according to four primary categories of church life and belief: The Church, Worship, Discipleship and Outreach.

THE CHURCH

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” – Matthew 16:13–19

Other passages: Mark 12:28–34 (The Great Commandment), Acts 2:42–47 (The church in Jerusalem), Galatians 6:10 (Caring for the household of believers), James 5:13–16 (Pray for one another), Romans 12:3–8 (Using your gifts for the body), Hebrews 10:24–25 (Don’t neglect meeting together), 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 (We are the body of Christ).

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: In the coming week, we’ll be looking at this passage one piece at a time. For today, just read it, sit with it and prepare your heart to spend the next seven days in it.

WORSHIP

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” – John 4:23–24

OTHER PASSAGES: 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (Pray without ceasing), 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 (Your bodies are God’s temple), Romans 12:1–2 (Living sacrifices), Matthew 4:8–10 (Worship God alone), Hebrews 12:28–29 (Reverence and awe), Psalm 100 (Worship with shouts and songs), Revelation 4:8–11 (Worship in heaven).

DISCIPLESHIP

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” – Matthew 28:18–20

OTHER PASSAGES: Ephesians 4:11–16 (The five-fold ministry gifts), Acts 6:1–7 (Appointing the Seven), Luke 6:40 (The purpose of discipleship), 2 Timothy 2:1–2 (Discipling disciple-makers), Timothy 2:15 (Correctly handle the Word of truth), 2 Timothy 3:14–17 (All Scripture is God-breathed), Matthew 16:24–25 (Take up your cross).

OUTREACH

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” – Acts 1:8

OTHER PASSAGES: Matthew 28:18–20 (The Great Commission), Luke 10:10–20 (Jesus sends the seventy-two), Matthew 5:13–16 (Salt and light), Matthew 5:13–16 (Salt and light), Luke 4:14–19 (Good News to the poor), James 2:14–18 (Faith without works is dead), James 1:27 (Pure religion), Matthew 25:34–40 (“You did it to me”). Luke 10:35–37 (The Good Samaritan).

DAY 2 (THE FIRST SUNDAY)

TODAY’S BIG IDEA: **The church Jesus said He would build.** The church you pastor, serve, or attend doesn’t belong to you. It doesn’t belong to the long-term members, the tithers, the denomination, the pastor, or the lien-holder on the facility. The church—including the local congregation we refer to as “my church”—belongs to Jesus. In fact, every time we use the term my church, we need to realize that we’re saying “my” in the belonging sense, not the owning sense. In the same way a baseball fan might talk about “my team.” It’s about commitment and partnership, not possession.

KEY VERSE: **And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it (Matthew 16:18).**

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Matthew 16:13–20

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: The first time the word church appears in the Bible, it happens as the direct result of a question, not about the mission or vision, but about the identity of Jesus. “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” Jesus asked His disciples. Then, after reporting a few of the rumors that were floating around, Jesus asked the all-important question, “Who do you say I am?”
Note that the order of the conversation in this passage shows us that Christ’s church flows directly out of His character. “Who do you say that I am?” leads very quickly into “I will build my church.”

- WHO IS JESUS TO YOU?
- WHO IS JESUS, AS SEEN IN THE BIBLE?
- HOW DOES YOUR PICTURE OF JESUS COMPARE TO THE BIBLICAL PORTRAYAL OF JESUS?
- WHAT DOES THIS PICTURE OF JESUS TELL YOU ABOUT WHAT HIS CHURCH SHOULD LOOK LIKE?
- WHAT MIGHT YOU NEED TO CHANGE ABOUT YOUR PICTURE OF JESUS AND HIS CHURCH?

DAY 3

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Consider your motives. We live in a fast-paced world. Some people love that, so they jump on every innovation as soon as it happens, occasionally chasing fads and fleeting styles. Others are more change-resistant. They constantly push back against new things, as though stubbornness were a spiritual gift. That's why it's important at this very early stage to take a heart-check to be sure you're not too far to one extreme or the other.

If you're excited about the possibility of change in your church, ponder why you're excited about it. Is it because this is God's will, or because you love new things? On the other hand, if you're resistant and skeptical about possible changes coming to the congregation you love, is it because the changes truly aren't needed or because you don't like new things, even when they're necessary? The answer for both types of people isn't to keep changing or to keep resisting change, but to slow down occasionally and ponder what's happening, why it's happening, and what role God may be calling us to serve in the middle of it. We need to make sure our ideas for the church don't come first, but God's ideas do.

KEY VERSE: Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart (Psalm 24:3–4).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Psalm 24

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Psalm 24 establishes that everything belongs to the Lord—the earth and everything in it. When you own something, you get to say what should happen with it. That's why knowing and doing God's will should be the priority of every church and every Christian. Everything is God's. We're the stewards (caretakers) of His possessions, so knowing His will helps us be and do what we were created to be and do.

In the Key Verse, the “mountain of the Lord” and the “holy place” are references to the temple, where God's presence dwelt in the Old Testament era. Clean hands (right actions) and a pure heart (right motivations) are essential for those who want God's presence to be active in their lives—and in their church.

Today we need to consider our motives. What do we want for our church? Why do we want it? Most importantly, do our desires for the church match Christ's desires for His church?

DAY 4

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Pondering. Before embarking on anything major in our lives, it's a good idea to slow down and

consider what we're doing, why we're doing it, and what the possible results might be. The underlying principle behind this is a seldom-practiced Christian discipline, based on an almost-forgotten word: *pondering*.

KEY VERSE: But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Luke 2

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: *Hey, isn't this a Christmas passage?* Yes, it is. But it's important for us to detach it from the tinsel, garland, and colored lights and try to read it with fresh eyes. What did it mean to a young (probably teenaged) girl who knew that the baby she had just given birth to was God in flesh and that His life would change the world more than any other life ever lived?

What do you think and feel when you ponder this time of new beginnings for your church? Are you excited? Scared? Worried? Joyful? Concerned? Maybe all of the above? We have to imagine Mary experienced all of those feelings too. But, instead of panicking, she took time to ponder them so she could keep moving forward into that frightening, exhilarating, and uncertain future, knowing God's plans were bigger than her deepest fears and greater than her highest hopes.

DAY 5

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Repent of wrong attitudes. Attitude is everything. Henry Ford famously said, "Whether you think you can or you think you can't—you're right."¹ This is true as followers of Jesus, too. If our attitude about the church is not in line with Christ's attitude about His church, everything will go wrong. If our attitude matches Christ's, it will go right. It may not go the way we think it will, but that's okay because God's will for His church matters more than our will for our church. Having the right attitude sets the stage for everything that follows.

KEY VERSE: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near (Matthew 3:2).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Matthew 3:1-2

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Repentance isn't easy. First, we have to see our need for it. Then, we have to state it to the person whose forgiveness we need. Thankfully, we never need to worry about our repentance being accepted by Jesus.

In today's passage, we see that when John the Baptist was preparing the way for Jesus, repentance was at the center of his message—so much so that he was hated by those who didn't see their need to repent. This is why having a humble attitude and a willingness to confess and repent of our sins is so important.

God's will moves forward in repentant hearts. Are there any attitudes about your congregation you need to reconsider and repent of? Perhaps you've been putting your own will ahead of God's will? Maybe you've been looking at the church through the lens of your personal comfort rather than Christ's commands? Perhaps you're longing for the way your

1 <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/978-whether-you-think-you-can-or-you-think-you-can-t--you-re>

church was in the good old days?

DAY 6

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Reconcile, if needed. In your pondering yesterday, did you discover any attitudes that need changing? Maybe some resistance to change? Maybe you've been jealous of a larger or faster-growing church? Don't be too quick to dismiss this possibility. And if you did discover some wrong attitudes, don't beat yourself up over it. We all have them to some degree or another.

KEY VERSE: Leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:24).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Matthew 5:21–26

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: No one is perfect in their thought life. Before this process can move ahead, we need to adjust our attitude. Stop what we're doing (leave our gift at the altar), change our attitude (be reconciled with God and others), then proceed with the process (come and offer our gift.)

FOR THE PASTOR: Today is the day to email the notes from last Saturday to everyone on the team, reminding them that we're going to use them during our devotional times next week.

DAY 7 (SABBATH)

Every week needs a Sabbath. We'll put it at the end of every week since that will likely work best for most people, but it can happen on any day of the week that works for your schedule. On this day, there are no specific devotionals to read, no new Big Ideas to ponder. It's time to let go, relax, and do something fun with family or friends.

We do encourage you to spend time in God's Word on every Sabbath day, as always, but on this day it shouldn't be related to the 100-Day process. Just hear what the Lord is saying to you for your life, your family, and your future.

KEEPING CHRIST'S MISSION AT THE CENTER

DAY 8

To begin today, take a few minutes to review the notes from last Saturday, which were sent or emailed earlier in the week. Reflect on what they mean for you and the church moving forward.

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: The Great Commandment. Remember the three essential elements to a healthy and effective church: The Great Commandment, the Great Commission, and the Pastoral Prime Mandate (“equipping God’s people,” from Ephesians 4:11–12). Today, we’ll look at the Great Commandment, followed by the others over the next two days.

KEY VERSE: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Matthew 22:34–40

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: There is no greater, more important section of scripture for Christians to regularly study, consider, and follow than this passage. In it, Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, and he gave a direct answer to that question. There is one God. We need to love God and love those who are made in God’s image. That’s it.

Then Jesus added an extraordinary statement: “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:40). In other words, if you’re loving God and others, you’re doing what God commands. The rest of the Bible is commentary. It’s important, essential commentary. It helps us avoid the trap of thinking we can decide for ourselves what loving God and loving others means. But the rest of the Bible is a “how to” that elaborates the two-part command.

When considering the Great Commandment, we need to ask some essential questions. How seriously are we taking Jesus’ command to love God and love those who are made in God’s image? Is it seen in the practical, everyday life of our congregation? Are there factions in the church? Do people feel loved and cared for? Are new people greeted and welcomed into the fellowship of the church? If not, why not?

DAY 9 (SUNDAY)

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: The Great Commission. There’s only one command of Jesus that’s mentioned in all four Gospels and the book of Acts. We call it the Great Commission. It’s called that because of how central it is to the life of every believer and any healthy church. Sharing our faith with others isn’t an option, it’s a command and it’s our joyful commission.

Yet it's easy to get trapped looking inward and forget to look outward. In fact, the more a church is following the Great Commandment, the more tempting it can be to stay in that wonderful, comfortable place of loving God and each other, not wanting anyone else to come in who might disturb the peace. Yet the Great Commandment is exactly the reason the Great Commission matters so much. If we truly love others, we'll want to share the greatest part of our lives with them—even if it makes life a little uncomfortable.

KEY VERSE: Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Matthew 28:16–20

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: How well are we doing this in our lives and in our church? Are we really sharing our faith? How much of what we do as a church is outward-focused compared to inward? Do people invite their friends to church? If not, why not? And what can we do to change our focus?

DAY 10

Today is the second Monday of our 100 Days. By now, you've been using these daily devotionals for a week. This is a good time to add one more helpful step to this process. Every Monday, take a few moments to scan through what you've already recorded in your notes. This reminds you of the process you're engaged in, and it sets you up for the devotionals to come.

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Equipping God's People. The word *pastor* only appears once in the New Testament. In that passage, we pastors share the responsibilities of leading the church with those who have four other ministry gifts—apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers. And in that passage, all those church leaders are given one task—not to do the ministry for the church, but to equip the church to do ministry for each other.

KEY VERSE: So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and the teachers to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:11).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Ephesians 4:11–12

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: If equipping God's people for the work of ministry is the primary role of church leaders, it's important to ask ourselves how well we're doing it. Is our congregation consciously and actively engaged in ministry, or is the structure of the church set up so that the pastor and/or staff members are expected to do the ministry for us? Are our church's discipleship programs primarily about attending and learning, or are we engaged in training people to do the ministries of the church.

DAY 11

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: To seek and to save the lost. If the leadership of the church is called to equip God's people to

continue the work of Jesus on earth, what was that work? Thankfully, it's not a mystery we have to dig very deep to figure out. Jesus told us the answer very clearly.

KEY VERSE: For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: : Luke 19:1–10

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: The context of this well-known scripture is very important. It's the last verse in the story of Jesus meeting Zacchaeus. While this is a favorite story to tell kids, the lessons in it are deep and mature.

Jesus and His disciples were traveling toward Jerusalem, where He knew He would be crucified. By the time they made it to Jericho, less than sixteen miles from Jerusalem (less than twenty-six kilometers), the crowds were so big that Zacchaeus had to climb into a tree to see Jesus. But the tree-climbing isn't the point of the story. After spending time with Jesus, Zacchaeus repented of his sins (which were many) and offered restitution beyond what the law required. Still, that wasn't enough for the religious leaders, who were trying to trap Jesus in the act of doing something against their laws, which is what He did here by eating in the home of Zacchaeus.

Jesus regularly spent time with the wrong people. That was a habit the Pharisees could not abide. So Jesus used opportunities like this one to set them straight. There are no wrong people, but there are broken people, lost people, hurting people. And that's who Jesus came to seek and to save. The religious people of Jesus' day were often confused by Him. And as churchgoers ourselves, most of us have more in common with the Pharisees in Jesus' day than we have with Zacchaeus.

How does Jesus' example of seeking, spending time with, and loving sinners affect us today? What about us? Do we spend any time with the kinds of people Jesus came to seek and to save, or do we spend all our time with other believers? How can we be the light of the world if we only hang out with other candles?

DAY 12

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Recommit to the mission. Mission statements are overrated. Most of them remind us of what we plan to do—or want to do. But if we're honest with ourselves, most of us—including most churches—don't know what we're going to do until we've already done it. For instance, most great writers don't know what they're going to write until they've written it. Most great lives are lived in the same way. And that's how most great churches happen. We write it, live it, or do it first, then we look back and give it a title—then act like we knew what we were doing all along.

This is not to say that planning doesn't matter. After all, this entire book is based on the value of planning. But the truth is, mission statements don't make great churches. Doing the mission makes great churches. The mission is already in place. It's Christ's, not ours. Like a general with troops, or a boss with employees, Christ has assigned tasks so the mission can be accomplished. Very few foot soldiers have anywhere close to a full understanding of what the overall aim of the mission is—they just know what they're supposed to do.

Churches do not become healthy because the pastor comes in with an awesome plan. Churches get healthy when we get

in line with God's plan.

KEY VERSE: "You have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first" (Revelation 2:4–5 NASB).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Revelation 2:1–7

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: It can be hard to consider a passage from Revelation without getting caught up in endless arguments about eschatology (the study of the end times). But what if we just looked at this passage for what it meant then and there, to the original readers in the church of Ephesus? Since the apostle Paul spent more time there than with any other church, we know as much or more about the Ephesians as any other New Testament congregation. In addition to the book of Acts and the letter to the Ephesians, it gets a significant mention here, as one of the seven churches John sent his letter to.

Yet, as strong as the foundation of the Ephesian church was, within less than a generation they were already forgetting what they were built on. They'd left their first love. If this can happen so quickly to the church in Ephesus, it can happen to us. We, like them, can easily forget what should be motivating us and become consumed by our own agendas. Because of this, we must constantly remind ourselves of the essential truths of the church, including asking some important questions as we pursue church health:

- "WHAT ARE MY MOTIVES FOR WANTING A HEALTHIER CHURCH?"
- "IS IT JUST ONE STEP TOWARD GETTING BIGGER?"
- "IS MY PRIDE A FACTOR IN THIS?"
- "AM I COMPETING WITH ANOTHER PASTOR, ANOTHER CHURCH, OR MY OWN EXPECTATIONS?"
- "COULD I BE OKAY WITH A HEALTHIER CHURCH, EVEN IF IT DIDN'T RESULT IN NUMERICAL INCREASE FOR OUR CONGREGATION?"
- "IS THIS ABOUT MY EGO OR GOD'S GLORY?"
- NO ONE BUT JESUS HAS COMPLETELY PURE MOTIVES. BUT WE SHOULD AT LEAST ACKNOWLEDGE AS MANY UNHEALTHY MOTIVATIONS AS WE CAN, THEN DO OUR BEST TO REDUCE THEM.

DAY 13

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: What will you sacrifice for the mission? Anything of value will cost us something. The greater the value, the higher the cost. So, while it's one thing to make a commitment, it's something else entirely to make a sacrifice for it.

Church events are worth committing to. In fact, if our faith doesn't at least get us to commit something from our

schedule on a regular basis, we'd have to question the level of our commitment. But sacrifice? Is there a church event or program we'd willingly make a significant sacrifice for?

Probably not.

Hopefully not.

While commitments can be made for important things, sacrifice is reserved for truly essential and eternally valuable things. So today as we study the value of offering ourselves as sacrifices, we need to establish two important principles: First, this is not a sacrifice for salvation. Jesus has done that once and for all. There is nothing we can do and nothing we need to do to earn our salvation. It is a gift from God (so no one can boast). Second, this sacrifice is being offered to Christ and His church, not to your local congregation, pastor, denomination, or theological constructs. Those are important, to be sure. They're worth committing to, and they will be the arena where our sacrifice plays itself out. But only Jesus and His church are worth truly taking up our crosses in sacrifice for.

KEY VERSE: Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship (Romans 12:1).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Romans 12:1–8

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: While many people say they would die for Jesus, this passage is telling us we need to live for Jesus, offering not just our thoughts or spirits to Jesus, but our bodies, too. We don't need to only be willing to die for Jesus (although we should be willing to do so, and many have and are still called to do that), but we should also be willing to live for Him. Commitments cost us something. A sacrifice costs us everything.

What does it mean to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice? How does that relate to Jesus' command to take up your cross? Does it ever seem like it might be harder to live for Jesus than it might be to die for Him? If so, why? If not, why not?

Finally, what would you be willing to sacrifice for Christ and His mission? Be specific. Look especially at ideas, events, comforts and ways of thinking that you have grown accustomed to that you might need to give up or change.

DAY 14 (SABBATH)

THE CULTURE CONVERSATION

According to Max De Pree, “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor.”²

Defining reality must always be our starting place—not casting a vision, not assembling a team, not making a plan. A wise leader begins by making an accurate assessment of what is actually taking place, right here and right now, then sharing that reality with the team.

There’s a reason this reality check is happening in Week 3, not Week 1. By now, your attitude and expectations about the church should be somewhat different from two weeks ago. Instead of relying on our feelings about our church, we’ve spent some serious time considering God’s will for His church.

This week, we’ll take a look at what we’re feeling, thinking, and learning about our church’s current condition bringing those thoughts and feelings under submission to Jesus.

DAY 15 (SECOND BIG SATURDAY CLT MEETING): _____ CONSIDER THE CHURCH’S CULTURE

MORNING: THE CHURCH CULTURE TALK

Every church has a culture—an unwritten, often unrecognized set of rules that governs everything the congregation does; “That’s how we do things here” is a statement about your church’s culture.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of a church’s culture. In his Parable of The Sower (Matthew 13:1–23), Jesus describes four types of culture, or soil, that a Christian or a church body can have. (I owe a big debt to Jim Powell and his book, *Dirt Matters*³, for introducing me to this lens.)

1. THE PATH/HARD SOIL: This represents a church that has grown hard and stubborn. Good ideas don’t penetrate, and new methods are instantly rejected. This stubbornness can be the result of legalism, hurt, anger, habits, or ignorance. It’s tempting to think that all stubborn churches need is to be shaken out of their slumber, but in my experience, the root of most stubborn churches isn’t sinfulness, it’s pain. Many churches have grown hard as a way to protect themselves. In fact, if a church has been hurt by a lack of integrity from leadership, they will often withdraw into themselves for protection, like a turtle pulling into its shell.

² DePree, Max, *The Art of Leadership* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1989), 11

³ Powell, Jim, *Dirt Matters: The Foundation for a Healthy, Vibrant, and Effective Congregation* (Grand Rapids: Westbow Press, 2013).

2. ROCKY, SHALLOW SOIL: This soil represents a church that doesn't reject good ideas outright. They usually smile, nod, and seem to approve easily, but there's no follow-through. They're not deliberately rejecting anything, but they don't have the discipline to prepare or practice, show up on time, or engage fully when they're there. After the event or service is over, they may rush to their cars, or if they stick around, they chat with their friends, ignoring first-time guests and failing to lift a finger to help in clean-up or tear-down.

3. THORNY, BUSY SOIL: This soil indicates a church that, like the second soil, doesn't reject good ideas immediately, but instead of lacking in maturity, they're too busy to give a new idea the attention it deserves. This is especially the case for a church that has lost a lot of members in recent years. If the church used to be bigger, you may still have all the programs from when the church was big enough for them. The membership has shrunk, and the church's ability to support those programs had faded, but the programs are still there, taking up space. Like clutter in a home, clutter can build in a church—and it can wreak havoc on the physical building, our emotional capacity, and our calendars.

4. THE GOOD SOIL: This soil represents a church in which the culture is soft, deep, and cleared of clutter. Church members are ready for change, excited about the future, prepared to get to work, and unencumbered by excess activities.

DAY 16 (SUNDAY)

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: **Is our culture ready for the mission?** If you're using your Sunday sermons to help the congregation walk through this process, I'd suggest a sermon for this Sunday of "Digging through the Dirt" on the Parable of the Sower.

Jesus describes a farmer sowing seed that inexplicably lands on four different types of soil. I say "inexplicably" because every person listening to Jesus that day lived in an agrarian society. Even those who weren't farmers by profession lived close enough to the land that they were aware that no farmer just randomly scattered seed. They all knew to prepare the soil properly and place the seed in holes that had been dug for them.

Because Jesus started His parable with this twist, every listener immediately would've thought, "This isn't about farming. It's about something else entirely." It's the same in our churches. After years of doing things "the way we've always done them," it's easy for a church to stop being about the mission and start becoming about something else entirely.

This Sunday is a great time to remind the church body what we're supposed to be about. A sermon on the truths of the Parable of the Sower is an ideal place to start. Use the text and the lessons learned from the Saturday meeting to prepare the hearts of the people for the changes that are coming. If the church is Stubborn, don't beat them up for it—offer them the chance to start softening their hearts. If the church is Shallow, help them start the move toward maturity by reminding them that church exists to worship Jesus and serve others, not to make ourselves comfortable. If the church is busy, don't attack their beloved programs and events. Give them some what ifs to think about.

What if we focused in on a few things we did well?

What if we stopped scattering seed randomly and started placing it carefully on good soil?

What if we could transfer our valuable time, energy, and resources from things of lesser value to things of greater value?

Today is not the day to berate people for their faults, but to give them hope for the future. After all, your CLT may be coming to church today feeling anywhere from excited about new possibilities to terrified and discouraged about the size of the problems. Yesterday was about assessment. Make today about encouragement.

KEY VERSE: *But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown (Matthew 13:23).*

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Matthew 13:1–23

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: How did our church culture get to where we are now? Have I contributed to that in any way? What will it take for our church to make the necessary changes? How can I contribute to it becoming healthier?

As you consider the current process of change, it's easy to get your eyes on the new things and either be excited by them or angry at them. Instead of focusing on these changes, it's essential to keep our focus on God's will. Are we building on biblical principles? If not, it's time to renew our commitment to God and His Word. If so, say "no" to fear and step out in faith.

DAY 17

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Remember how you felt on Day 1. At this point in the process, it's possible to fall into the trap of assessing the church as though it's something detached from you. It's so easy to think, "The problem with the church is . . ." or "The pastor should be doing more of . . ." or "I hope that person is paying attention to . . ." The big problem with such feelings is that they're pointed in the wrong direction—outwardly not inwardly. The church is not out there, it's in here. It's not them, it's us. It's me. The sooner we can recognize that, the sooner real, healthy change can take place. Today's exercise is to think back a few weeks to how you felt and what you thought about your church before this entire process began. I know, it seems like this should have been done on Day One, or even earlier. But if we had taken too much time to consider our feelings before considering God's will, it would have been hard, if not impossible, for our feelings not to become our priority.

Again.

Instead, now that we've framed everything through the lens of God's will, let's take some time to think back and remember what you felt and thought about the church and your role in it.

Were you:

- **HOPEFUL?**
- **CONFUSED?**
- **ENTHUSED?**

- **DEPRESSED?**
- **CAUTIOUS?**
- **MOTIVATED?**
- **OVERWORKED?**
- **UNINSPIRED?**
- **INSPIRED?**
- **OR SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY?**

In considering your previous thoughts and feelings, don't just select words from this list. It's only there to provide a few examples. Take a few minutes to remember how you felt. To prompt your memory, consider: What did you say in private conversations about the church? What was your understanding about the church's past? Your feelings about its present state? Your expectations for its future? How did you react when you were asked to serve on the Core Leadership Team?

Write those ideas down. Make a list, write in full paragraphs, use bullet points, or whatever works for you. The format doesn't matter. This list is yours. No one else will ever see it unless you choose to show it to them.

KEY VERSE: Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day (Deuteronomy 5:15).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Deuteronomy 5

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: After God brought the Hebrews out of slavery, He met with Moses to give him the Ten Commandments. One of those commandments was to take a Sabbath-day rest. Imagine how that felt to people who had spent four hundred years in slavery when one of God's top ten rules was "Take a day off!" But note that in the explanation for this command God tells them that one of the ways to use that day was to remember where they had come from—specifically, to remember their former slavery. This command is repeated regularly throughout the Old Testament, but this is first time, and it came just a few months after their release from bondage.

God knew they needed to remember where they had been so they could appreciate where they were going. This is why we need to take a few moments doing the same thing right now: remembering where we were. Even if it doesn't feel like we're free yet (the Hebrews were a long way from the Promised Land at this point), it's never too early to remember where we we're coming from.

DAY 18

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Record how your feelings and expectations are changing. Take a look at what you wrote down yesterday about how you felt before this process started. Then look at your notes from the conversation you had about

church culture on Saturday. How different are they?

For most people, there will be at least a few significant differences. Take a few moments to reflect on those differences and what that reveals about how your feelings and expectations about the church are changing.

KEY VERSE: Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Hebrews 10:22–25

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: How have your feelings about your church changed in the last two weeks? How do you expect them to change? How do you hope they'll change? How do you need them to change?

DAY 19

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Consider what you may need to change. Yesterday you reflected on how your feelings about the church are changing. Today you go deeper. In addition to your feelings about the church, it's important to look at how those feelings have resulted in actions and what the consequences of those actions have been. What role have you played in creating the church's current culture? Were you enforcing a bad culture without realizing it? If so, what might you be called to do to help change it?

KEY VERSE: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Luke 18:9–14

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: The story of the Pharisee and the tax collector is a tricky passage. Every time we read it, it feels like one of those "Gotcha!" moments. We want to sit in quiet judgment of the Pharisee, but the moment we do that, we start thinking, "I'm glad I'm not like that Pharisee" and we prove how much of a Pharisee we really are.

So let's pay attention to the tax collector instead. As much as everyone hates paying taxes, the Roman system of taxation and collection was so much worse than we can imagine. Like Zacchaeus from Day 11, this man's job consisted of cheating people, selling out his own countrymen, and enriching himself to support an oppressive regime. But something had happened to him. He had come to an awareness of his sin and arrived at the temple to repent. He knew he needed to change, and his repentance was accepted by God.

What do we need to change? Have we been willing participants in creating an unhealthy culture in our congregation? We need to be careful here because if we think we haven't, we might find ourselves to be more like the Pharisee than we'd like to admit.

DAY 20

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Commit yourself to be open to what Jesus is doing. Right now, you may have an idea about where

you think these 100 Days will take your church. Maybe you have a few possible outcomes in mind. “It will probably be A, but if something else happens, it will be B, and if that goes sideways, we might end up at C.” But any time we give God an A, B or C choice, He always picks D or M or 7 or purple. God often takes us somewhere completely off our scale of possibilities.

We need to be ready, willing, and committed to follow Jesus wherever He takes us—however expected, unexpected, surprising, or seemingly mundane.

KEY VERSE: Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans (Proverbs 16:3).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Proverbs 16:1–8

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Take note that in the Key Verse, God doesn’t follow our plans, he establishes them. They become our plans, but they start as His plans, not ours. Mature believers don’t ask God to follow our plans, we commit to following God’s plans.

DAY 21 (SABBATH)

THE CULTURE SHIFT

DAY 22 (SATURDAY)

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Addressing the Culture Issue. For a week now, we've been considering the culture (the soil) of the church. Now we start the process of asking, *What will it take to change that culture from unhealthy to healthy?* For the next week, in advance of our next Saturday CLT meeting, we will start writing down our thoughts about what needs to be changed, how serious that need is, and what initial steps might lead us there.

Knowing whether your church culture is Stubborn, Shallow, or Busy matters because each problem requires a different approach.

A Stubborn culture (the dirt on the hardened path) is impenetrable. You won't soften the hearts of a stubborn church by beating people up. That will just harden them even more. Instead we need to recognize that dirt gets hard because pressure has been applied to it over a long period of time. In the case of Jesus' parable, the hardened dirt is a pathway. It's not a road, which is a planned hardening for purposes of travel. It's a path. Paths happen when people walk over them constantly. That must be how the most hardened members of your church feel—walked on.

Most Stubborn churches don't get there because people wake up one day and decide to be mean and unmoving. They typically get there from years of abuse or neglect. They used to be an active part of the field, ready for planting and harvest, but after being walked on by one difficult circumstance after another, they've grown hard. They've subconsciously decided they won't let anyone hurt them again. That's what their hardness usually is—a protective layer to keep them from being hurt again. So they don't need to be treated harshly (as much as you may want to react sternly). Gently, softly, like a gentle rain on hard soil, their hearts need to be softened. The number-one way to get there is to earn their trust again.

A Shallow culture is soft on the surface, but only on the surface. There's no depth or maturity. The members of a Shallow culture say yes to great ideas with their mouths, but there's very little follow-through in their actions. The answer for a Shallow culture is depth and maturity. A Shallow church needs to go deeper in understanding what God's Word tells us about how we as a church should behave. The exercise from our first Saturday together when we discussed Bible passage about the purposes of the church is a great place to start.

Be careful here. It's tempting to think that what Shallow churches need is better teaching, but many Shallow churches are led by great preachers. What makes them Shallow, to re-use an old, but appropriate cliché, isn't that they don't know what to do, but they don't *do* what they *know*.

A Busy culture is soft, maybe even deep, but they're ineffective because they're trying to do too much. Usually a handful of leaders are overwhelmed with busyness, while the rest sit, watch, and consume what's being done for them.

The enemy in this scenario (the thorns) isn't the church members—not even the Busy ones. It's the calendar. There are too many events on the schedule.

When you live in a Busy culture, it's easy to think that the way forward is to implement an exciting new event, program, or activity. This must be firmly resisted. The solution for a Busy culture won't be found in what we add, but in what we remove.

Today's verses and thoughts are divided into three buckets. Don't attempt all three (although you Busy folks might be tempted to). Pick the one that's needed for your church's culture.

FOR A STUBBORN CULTURE

KEY VERSE: I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Ezekiel 36:24–28

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: What hurts caused our Stubbornness? How severe are those hurts? What will it take to start softening hearts and earning trust?

FOR A SHALLOW CULTURE

KEY VERSE: I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Ezekiel 36:24–28

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: What hurts caused our Stubbornness? How severe are those hurts? What will it take to start softening hearts and earning trust?

FOR A BUSY CULTURE

KEY VERSE: Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Matthew 11:28–30

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: What caused our church culture to be so Busy? How severe is the division of labor between those who are too Busy and those who are passive? What will it take to reduce activity and work smarter?

DAY 23 (SUNDAY)

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Toward a better culture. After relating the Parable of the Sower, directly explained its meaning. This gives us a great opportunity to revisit the parable after identifying the challenges last Sunday. It's important to teach

about all four types of soil. First, because that's where the passage takes us. Second, because no church faces just one of those issues to the exclusion of the others. Third, because these three culture issues interact with each other—like threads in a fabric, when you pull one, you affect the others. Finally, the focus shouldn't be on the problems, but on the solution: helping the culture become softer, simpler, and deeper.

KEY VERSE: *But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown (Matthew 13:23).*

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Matthew 13:18–23

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: How can we help our church start making the needed shift in culture? Is there anything I need to change in my actions or attitudes that can contribute to a better culture?

DAY 24

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: **Avoiding false answers.** Now that we've identified the soil and considered renewing it, we need to take an important look at misunderstandings that often exist about each soil.

If your church has a Stubbornness problem, many church members might fear that if the church soil becomes soft, it will become compromised. But the solution to Stubbornness isn't compromise, it's adaptability. That's what softness allows for—the ability to receive good seed and adapt to the crop that the seed wants to grow in us. The goal is to transform the soil from hard to healthy. Healthy soil doesn't make us more susceptible to the thorns of false teaching and bad attitudes. Healthy soil recognizes and rejects thorns as it recognizes and receives good seed.

Likewise, the antidote to Shallowness isn't more teaching, it's greater effectiveness. That's true depth. When a farmer softens the soil, it's not to go as deep as possible, it's to make the soil ready to receive the seed and produce a harvest. It's about being active in the harvest. It's not depth for the sake of depth, it's depth for the sake of effectiveness.

Finally, the flipside of Busyness isn't laziness, it's simplicity. In fact, Busyness and laziness often go hand-in-hand. One group in the church gets over-busy, so another group sits back and lets them do all the work. Other times laziness leads to a last-minute frantic rush. However it happens, laziness and busyness are not opposites—they're co-conspirators. The solution is simplicity and efficiency.

KEY VERSE: *Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? (Galatians 3:3)*

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Galatians 3:1–3

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: The churches in the region of Galatia started well, then got sidetracked. So the good news is, the problems in your church are nothing new. The early church had them, too. In Galatia, they started with faith but traded for the false solution of works-based religion (what the apostle Paul called “the flesh”).

What parallels to Galatia might exist in your congregation? Have you been trying to solve faith problems with works-based solutions? Is there a better way to approach this than what you've been doing? How does your personal attitude need adjustment to a better mode of thinking?

DAY 25

There is never a one-size-fits-all solution for real-life problems. The church with a Stubborn culture needs a different solution than the church with a Shallow or Busy culture. And even if two churches have a Shallow culture, their solutions will be different because the Shallowness was caused by different circumstances.

However, there are some universal, underlying principles. As we saw yesterday, a Stubborn church needs to become softer and more adaptable. A Shallow church needs to go deeper and become more effective. A Busy church needs to reduce clutter and simplify. So depending where your church is right now, consider how each of these principles might apply in your situation. Over the next three days, we will look at these solutions one at a time. But don't skip any days just because that day's topic doesn't address your church's main culture issue. Each culture issue affects how we approach the other culture issues.

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Softer and more adaptable. When I arrived at Cornerstone, they'd had five pastors in the previous ten years. Every time I tried to launch something new, the congregation resisted. Not because they were hostile, but because they'd been hurt. Remember how soft soil can become a hardened path after it's been walked on? That's what happened to the good folks in our church.

Since the church members were hurting, we didn't push back against them. Instead we loosened the ground by re-earning their trust. Day after day, week after week, year after year, we spent time in fellowship, discipleship, worship, and hopefulness. We kept our promises. Like parched ground responding to a long, steady rain, it softened their hearts, fed their spirits, and earned their trust.

KEY VERSE: *As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up (Matthew 13:4).*

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Matthew 13:1–23

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: On the Day of Pentecost, God showed up at His physical temple to make us His spiritual temple. From this day forward, God's presence would no longer be restricted to a physical location—not to a single temple or even multiple church buildings. When we're alone and need to know God is there and when we're gathered in His name, He is present in and with us.

What helped our church become softer and more adaptable will be different from what it will take your church to do the same thing. But almost always, the core of the solution is earning back trust, and there's only one way to accomplish that: Do the right thing, every time, for a long time.

Is there anything you've done that has damaged people's trust? Or, as in my situation, are you paying for someone else's mistakes? Either way, what can you do to start earning trust again? Are you willing to stick around long enough to see soft ground return?

DAY 26

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Deeper and more effective. What do you do when everyone in church is in agreement, but no one follows up on anything? I pastored a church like that once. They were great folks—loving, kind, and enthusiastic. But they hadn't been equipped to do the work of ministry, so they had no depth. New ideas were met with eagerness, but the congregation expected it all to be done for them instead of pitching in.

Shallow soil needs to become deeper. This happens through relationship, teaching, and worship, but mostly it happens through equipping. As long as the pastor or a handful of church leaders does everything for everyone, they'll let you. So the leadership needs to start creating an environment in which people are trained, equipped, assigned duties, followed up, and sent out again.

KEY VERSE: Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow (Matthew 13:5).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Matthew 13:1–23

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: : It's easy to mislabel equipping as delegating. But you can't delegate a task to someone who hasn't been equipped. So if you've had previous frustrations trying to get people in the church to step up and help out (maybe even in this 100-Day process), it may be that you've been delegating tasks to people who haven't been equipped to do them. They may not be as unwilling as they are untrained.

Ask yourself what you might have done to contribute to a culture of Shallowness in your church. Are you doing things for people, instead of equipping them to do it? Are you spending more time alone in tasks than with a team? Are you burning out good people because they get as overworked as you are?

If any of this applies to you and your church, consider seriously what steps you need to take to shift the way ministry is done. We'll get into some details about how to do this in Week 12 with an in-depth look at how Jesus mentored seventy-two of his closest followers, but today it's important to honestly assess where you and the church are currently.

DAY 27

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Reduce clutter and simplify. It's easy to think of a busy church as a healthy one. After all, activity means life. But there's a big difference between active and hectic. The most effective people, leaders, and churches are active, but they're never hectic. When you're hectic, someone else is in charge of your life and schedule—and it's not who you want in charge.

Like houses, churches don't have to work at getting cluttered. Clutter just happens—to the facility and the schedule. Meetings get added, but nothing gets dropped. Outdated events keep reappearing on the calendar. No matter how hard you work, there's always more to do.

KEY VERSE: Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants (Matthew 13:7).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Matthew 13:1–23

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Effective churches aren't driven by events, programs, or schedules. They're driven by the mission. And the mission is simple: Love Jesus, love others, share your faith, and disciple believers. There are a couple of simple but essential questions every church must ask on a regular basis if they want to avoid clutter. What do we do well that we'd like to do more of? And what do we do poorly that we'd like to do less of?

As you consider what to write down, don't think about what you want to do, what a church consultant told you to do, or what another church in town might be doing. Look at your current situation. This is not about wanting or wishing; it's about knowing your strengths and weaknesses. (These lists will be used, along with everyone else's lists from today, at your next Saturday CLT meeting. But they're conversation-starters, not demands.)

WHAT DO WE DO WELL?

WHAT DO WE DO POORLY?

DAY 28 (SABBATH)

STEP 2
SELECT A TARGET

“Now strengthen my hands.”

Nehemiah 6:9

CONSIDER YOUR OPTIONS

DAY 29 (THE THIRD BIG SATURDAY)

A church does not become healthier by doing a project. But the right project, at the right time, for the right reasons, can be a wonderful rallying point. Even though a church's concerns must always be focused on the internal and eternal, Thom S. Rainer has noted, "Your church will not be ready for change until it experiences some action steps of an outward focus. This outward focus prepares members for change."⁴ A visible project can narrow your focus, give you a sense of urgency, and create a sense of community.

But projects are not necessarily events. As we'll see in more detail when we get to the Decision Day in two weeks (Day 36), your project can initiate a change in direction, a change in attitude, or a change in methodology.

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Brainstorm Project Ideas

KEY VERSE: Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 1 Corinthians 12:1–11

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: No work of God goes forward on great ideas alone. It requires people—people who are passionate, people who work together, people who love the cause, people who are called by God to make a difference.

Those people have been given gifts from the Holy Spirit—gifts that aren't meant to be kept to themselves. According to today's Key Verse and Passage of the Day, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are clearly meant to be used for the sake of the assembled church ("the common good").

DAY 30 (SUNDAY)

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Love and the spiritual gifts. Now that we've addressed what we do and why we do it, it's time to start looking at the tools available to help us tackle the issues the church faces. Starting with the greatest resource any church has, the human resource, under the guidance and power of God's Spirit.

Today, we're looking at the spiritual gifts. Unfortunately, this topic has often been a huge point of theological contention. Different theological traditions have vastly different understandings about what the gifts are, who is called to operate in specific gifts, which gifts are still in use, even how many gifts there are. Regrettably, these debates have stirred up a lot of anger, dissension, and conflict in the church, which, ironically, but not coincidentally, is exactly the

opposite of what the spiritual gifts are designed to do.

When we spend too much time debating the gifts, we get confused, divided, and neutralized. This is why I say this dissension is ironic, but not coincidental. When a church body operates under the gifts of the Spirit, we're engaging in a spiritual battle, and that battle has an enemy who wants to short-circuit our effectiveness whenever possible. So if our attention can be turned from using the gifts to debating and fighting over them, the enemy wins. But when we're able to stop debating the gifts and start using them, our mission becomes clear, our hearts are united, and our impact is increased exponentially.

This week we will not be engaging in debates. I have no interest in changing or challenging your church's understanding of the spiritual gifts. I just want to see them used for the blessing of the church, so the church can be a blessing to its community and the world.

KEY VERSE: If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 1 Corinthians 12–14

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Wait a minute! I thought we were looking at the spiritual gifts today! Isn't the Key Verse from the Love Chapter? Yes, it is. The Love Chapter happens to be right in the middle of the longest teaching passage about spiritual gifts in the entire Bible. It's there for a reason—not as a step away from the spiritual gifts, but as an essential, central part of them.

In the Key Verse the apostle Paul reminds us that even if we're utilizing the spiritual gifts to such a degree that miracles are occurring as a result, if we're not acting in love, they (and we) are nothing. That is why this chapter is purposefully written right in the middle of some very thorough, even harsh teaching about the spiritual gifts—as a constant reminder for all churches at all times that the gifts must be used in a spirit of love toward one another.

The spiritual gifts are powerful. Because of that, they can bring great blessing or cause great damage. To bring great blessing, they have to be used with proper understanding and the right attitude—and that attitude is love. Love doesn't weaken the gifts, it turbocharges them, coordinates them, and releases them for a torrent of blessing on the church and the community that church ministers to.

DAY 31

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: What are the Spiritual Gifts? There are three New Testament passages where multiple spiritual gifts are mentioned: Ephesians 4, Romans 12, and the passage we'll be looking at today, 1 Corinthians 12–14.

Paul's instructions to the Corinthian church contain the longest, most thorough teaching about the spiritual gifts in the New Testament. In them, we read about their proper functions and value, while also coming to a better understanding of how they can be abused if we're not careful to use them well.

How many spiritual gifts are there? It turns out the answer isn't as simple as the question. Lists of spiritual gifts vary

among faith traditions from as few as seven to as many as twenty-seven. In the sidebar you'll see a list of eighteen spiritual gifts most widely used by Bible scholars⁵, some with an alternative translation next to them. They are listed in no particular order. This is the list we will be working from. If your theological tradition adds or subtracts any from this list, please refer to your church's list as we move forward.⁶

Key Verse: There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work (1 Corinthians 12:6).

THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS (FROM ROMANS 12:6-8; 1 CORINTHIANS 12:8-10 & 28; EPHESIANS 4:11)

- PROPHECY (PREACHING)
- SERVICE (MINISTRY)
- TEACHING
- EXHORTATION
(ENCOURAGEMENT)
- GIVING (GENEROSITY)
- EVANGELISM
- MERCY
- WISDOM
- KNOWLEDGE
- FAITH
- HEALING
- MIRACLES
- TONGUES
- INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES
- DISCERNING OF SPIRITS
- APOSTLE
- SHEPHERDING (PASTOR)
- ADMINISTRATION
(LEADERSHIP)

KEY VERSE: There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work (1 Corinthians 12:6).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 1 Corinthians 12

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: The spiritual gifts point to two truths at the same time—unity and diversity. There are different gifts (diversity), but it is the same God (unity) who utilizes them for his purpose. In fact, as you read the passage, you no doubt noticed how strongly it directed us toward using this great variety of gifts toward a single, God-appointed purpose.

The spiritual gifts are given to us by God to do His work, not ours. As you consider the variety of spiritual gifts, think and pray about what gifts you have seen in operation when a church is functioning at it healthiest and best. Then take some time to pray that God will guide you and the church to reclaim that unity and diversity for God's glory as you move forward together.

⁵ Gilbert, Larry, "How Many Spiritual Gifts Are There?" ChurchGrowth.org. <https://churchgrowth.org/how-many-spiritual-gifts-are-there/>.

⁶ Other gifts that are sometimes listed but are not included here include Celibacy (1 Corinthians 7:7), Voluntary Poverty (1 Corinthians 13:3), Martyrdom (1 Corinthians 13:3), Missionary (Ephesians 3:6-8) and Hospitality (1 Peter 4:9).

DAY 32

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: What are my spiritual gifts? Every follower of Jesus has at least one spiritual gift. That includes you. You may not know what those gifts are yet, you may not even fully believe you have any, but you do.

KEY VERSE: We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us (Romans 12:6).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Romans 12:3–8

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: The opening verse of this passage is quite a bombshell, isn't it? Think of yourself using "sober judgment." This reminds me of one of our starting principles—the first task of a leader is to define reality. That's what the apostle Paul is telling us to do. Use sober judgment to understand who we are in Christ, including what spiritual gifts he has given us and how we might be called to use them.

There is so much to learn about the spiritual gifts in today's passage. Here are just a few points to consider: First, every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. Verse 3 tells us the gifts are "distributed to each of you," not just to some. Second, our gifts serve different functions, as we see in verse 4: "These members do not all have the same function." Third, a person's position in the church should be based on their gifts. Note that in verses 7–8, a person's giftedness (serving, teaching, encouraging) leads to their function (serve, teach, give encouragement). The best way to serve the Lord with real purpose and joy is to find out what God has gifted you with, then do that!

This leads to a very important question that may have been nagging you: "What are my Spiritual gifts and how can I discover them?" There are some helpful spiritual gifts assessments available, but the best a written assessment can do is suggest a direction to consider or affirm what you already know. The most definitive way to discover your gifts is simple: start doing something! We discover our gifts by using them.

"But how do I use them if I don't know what they are?" you may wonder. There's an old saying that goes, "God won't steer a parked car." If you want to be directed, you have to start moving first. Find a need and fill it. Hear a request for help and answer it. Listen to what respected leaders in your life have been telling you. Then experiment. Do what needs to be done, and as you do you'll start to discover what you do well, how you're of greatest blessing, and where you fit in the overall picture of the church. You may never know what to call your "gift mix" (a phrase Christians sometimes use to describe the collection of spiritual gifts a believer has), but it's more important to use them than to know what to call them.

For today, let's conclude our time by asking and answering the following questions as best we can:

WHAT CHURCH ACTIVITIES HAVE I BEEN INVOLVED IN WITH SOME DEGREE OF PASSION AND EFFECTIVENESS?

BASED ON WHAT I'VE ALREADY DONE IN THE CHURCH, WHAT SPIRITUAL GIFTS MIGHT I HAVE?

DAY 33

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: **What are the spiritual gifts of other church members?** Thankfully, you're not the only person who's called to serve God through your local congregation. Every believer is called to do the same. Certainly, there will always be those who are more involved than others, but everyone should be doing something.

According to the Pareto principle, also known as the 80/20 Rule, 80 percent of results will come from just 20 percent of the action.⁷ In business for instance, 80 percent of sales will come from 20 percent of customers, while 80 percent of new customers will be brought in by 20 percent of cold calls. In churches, this typically works itself out as 80 percent of the work of the church will be done by 20 percent of the congregation.

But typical results don't have to be inevitable results. God's principles are higher than the Pareto principle. And He has determined that everyone has a part to play in His body, the church.

KEY VERSE: **Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. (Ephesians 4:2)**

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Ephesians 4:1–8

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Once again, unity is the focus of a passage about the spiritual gifts. When we consider the gifts, our focus is often about who's going to do what—and that's not a wrong way to look at them. In fact, we will spend a good deal of time on that, as the scripture does. But God's primary concern with the operation of the gifts in the church is not about what we do, but how we treat each other.

Today's entire passage, which provides the lead-in context for a list of five leadership gifts⁸, is not about what the gifts will accomplish, but about how to watch out for each other, being patient and cooperative as we minister together. Those who are gifted to lead the church are commanded to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

As you consider how God wants to use spiritual gifts to accomplish His purposes in your congregation, take some time over the next week to consider the people you know in the church. What spiritual gifts have you seen in action? What do you believe they are or might be called to do? And, especially as this process moves forward, who seems especially

⁷ Kruse, Kevin, "The 80/20 Rule and How It Can Change Your Life," *Forbes*, 7 March 2016. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2016/03/07/80-20-rule/#7f3d76753814>.

⁸ Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:12)

gifted to work with this team to tackle the tasks that may be coming?

| CHURCH MEMBER | THEIR POSSIBLE SPIRITUAL GIFT(S) |
|---------------|----------------------------------|
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DAY 34

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: What are some possible projects to consider? We've spent a Big Saturday coming to a clearer understanding of what the church does and all of this week considering the gifts God has deposited within the church body. This puts almost all the necessary ingredients on the table. Yes, almost.

On our next Big Saturday (Day 43) we will be choosing one project to tackle as a way of taking our first big step toward becoming a healthier church. By then, it will be very helpful for every member of the CLT to have a list of possible projects based on all the information we've gathered so far. These are what we'll start assembling, the last of the ingredients to go on the table.

KEY VERSE: Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? (Luke 14:28)

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Luke 14:25–35

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: You doers on the team are probably thinking, "Yes! After all this navel-gazing, we're finally going to do something! Let's pick a project and get to work!" On the other hand, the more introspective folks on the team may be feeling a little apprehensive right now.

"How can we pick a project when we haven't even decided on what issue we're going to tackle first?"

As we've seen in the Key Verse and Passage of the Day, it's important to strike a balance between the extremes of thinkers and doers. Sorry, go-getters, we won't be picking a project today because your introspective friends are right. We don't have enough information to do that yet. But for my pondering friends, this is the time to start looking at

actual forward motion. No, we don't have all the information we need (no project ever starts with all the information, after all), but we have enough to start brainstorming possible projects.

At this point, there's enough information to give most of you an idea of what possible issues the church might tackle as a team. So, as we did last Sunday with the church's current activities and this week regarding spiritual gifts, let's make yet another list, this time of possible issues to tackle and possible project to address them.

| POSSIBLE ISSUES | POSSIBLE PROJECTS |
|-----------------|-------------------|
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| | |

DAY 35 (SABBATH)

NARROW YOUR OPTIONS

DAY 36 (SATURDAY)

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Keep, Give, or Toss? Now we start the process of sorting things out and putting them back in order. To do this in an actual house-cleaning situation, organizational experts will ask the homeowner to divide their items into three stacks: Keep It, Give It, or Toss It.

Since everything in your church has now been hauled out of the cupboards and onto the floor, metaphorically speaking, we're going to use the Keep-Give-Toss filter on them so we can arrive at Decision Day this coming Saturday with clearer minds and hearts. To do that, we'll spend the entire week walking through a single passage from the book of Acts in which the early church faced a problem and used the Keep-Toss-Give filter to simplify and solve it.

KEY VERSE: "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them" (Acts 6:2-3).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 6:1-7

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: The first group of leaders in the early church were known as the Twelve. They were the disciples who had been closest to Jesus when he walked the earth (minus Judas, plus Matthias; Acts 1:23-26). Their primary assignment was to pray and teach the Word. It was a singular, narrowly-defined task that guided everything they did.

Every church needs believers focused on tasks with narrow parameters. We must know what we're called to do, then narrow in on our assignment with a laser-tight focus. Unfortunately, the problems that inevitably come along can cause us to lose that focus. Then, after years of problems, challenges, and the constant drumbeat of everyday life, the mission can get lost in the mess.

This week's passage shows us one of the church's earliest challenges. It came in the form of a problem that threatened to divert the attention of the apostles from their primary assignment. They weren't tempted to do anything wrong or sinful. In fact, it was quite the opposite. The leaders were being called on to fill a need the church was supposed to keep as one of their primary emphases—the care of widows.

The Hellenistic widows (Jewish Christians who spoke Greek and were called from Jerusalem to reach Gentiles) complained that they weren't being treated as well as the Hebraic widows (Jewish Christians who spoke Hebrew and lived in and around Jerusalem) in the daily distribution of food. This problem needed to be solved, so the apostles proposed a solution. Pick seven people "who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom" and assign this important task to them. In this elegant solution, we see the principles of Keep-Give-Toss taking place. The apostles Kept true their mandate to pray, study, and teach God's Word, Tossed the task from their personal to-do list, and Gave this important

assignment to people better suited for the task.

Like the early apostles, your church does something well, or it can. But sometimes it takes solving a problem for that mission to come into clearer focus. That was true for the early church, just as it's true for your congregation. Let's pray today, as the early apostles did, that we will approach this important week wisely so we can make our decisions as well as the early church did.

DAY 37 (SUNDAY)

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: KEEP your attention on Christ's mission. In Weeks 1 and 2, we reaffirmed that Jesus is in charge of His church. Therefore, anything and everything we do should start and end with God's will, not ours.

KEY VERSE: The number of disciples was increasing (Acts 6:1).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 6:1–7

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: “The number of disciples was increasing.” That doesn't sound like a problem, does it? Of course, it's not. However, more people means more complexity, and more complexity means more problems—or at least new problems. That's what happened in the early church. The increased growth meant there were new challenges coming along.

That pattern has repeated itself throughout church history. We follow God, which brings blessings, and then the blessings cause us to lose focus on the God who gave them.

In the first two weeks of this process, we reexamined Christ's mission for his church and our part in it. As we approach Decision Day, there will be other important tasks that will tend to draw our attention away from this. Take some time to consider what we need to do to assure that we keep our attention focused on Christ and His mission.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO TO KEEP CHRIST'S MISSION AS THE FOCUS OF OUR ATTENTION?

DAY 38

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: KEEP meeting needs. The church has always been called to meet needs, especially the needs of the most vulnerable among us. First on that list are orphans and widows

KEY VERSE: *The Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food (Acts 6:1).*

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 6:1–7

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Caring for widows and orphans is one of the central tenets of what James 1:27 calls “pure religion” (NLT). So when a problem developed in the distribution of food to widows, it couldn’t be ignored.

Take some time to think and pray about the needs your church is called to meet. From inside the church to your local community, your region, and around the world. The meeting of needs can seem overwhelming, but every church is called to meet some of them. And if every congregation does their part, no one will be left out. As we see in Acts, the early church was so generous that, astonishingly, it was recorded that “God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them” (Acts 4:33–34). May it be so in our churches today.

WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY NEEDS THE CHURCH MUST KEEP MEETING TO STAY TRUE TO OUR CALL?

DAY 39

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: KEEP focused on your calling. In Weeks 3 and 4, we addressed the culture issue. What are the unwritten set of rules that governs what our church does—perhaps without us even being consciously aware of them? For this, maybe more than any other principle we look at this week, it’s important to apply the Keep-Toss-Give filter.

KEY VERSE: So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables” (Acts 6:2, emphasis mine).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 6:1–7

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Studying and teaching God’s Word was central to the mission and culture of the early church. And the apostles were the ones responsible to keep it in the center. They could not neglect it, even for something as important as feeding widows. As you consider the strengths of your church from Day 29, what stands out? What aspects of church life enforce a positive culture? How can we keep them and strengthen them?

WHAT DOES OUR CHURCH DO WELL THAT MUST WE KEEP DOING?

DAY 40

TODAY’S BIG IDEA: TOSS anything that diverts your attention. It’s exciting to start a new ministry. It’s brutally hard to say goodbye to an old one. But we must. On spring cleaning day, you may rediscover long-lost treasures as you dig deep into shelves, cupboards, and closets. It’s tempting to want to keep all of it. But one of the central principles of spring cleaning is to get rid of the clutter. First to go are items that can’t be fixed or haven’t been used in a long time.

KEY VERSE: So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables” (Acts 6:2, emphasis mine).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 6:1–7

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Feeding widows was an essential ministry, but it wasn’t what the apostles were called to do. So they made the hard, but necessary decision to Toss it from their to-do list. (Don’t worry, as we’ll see tomorrow, the widows weren’t forgotten.) It needed to be done, but not by them.

No church can do everything. We can’t meet every need, function in every ministry, or make everyone happy. When we try to do it all, we fail at what we should and could be doing well. One of the foundational building blocks of a church that is pursuing their calling with excellence is regularly making the hard decision to Toss what they don’t do well.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO TOSS BECAUSE IT ISN'T BEING DONE WELL AND CAN'T BE FIXED—AT LEAST FOR NOW?

DAY 41

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: GIVE the ministry away. As we saw in the verses we studied together way back on Day 1, Ephesians 4:11–12 tells us that the leaders of a the church have a mandate from God, not to do all the ministry for the church but to equip God's people for works of service. We're supposed to give the ministry away.

KEY VERSE: Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:3–4).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 6:1–7

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: “We will turn this responsibility over to them.” Those may be the hardest eight words in the world for some pastors to say, let alone to do. Give the ministry to others, along with responsibility and authority to make the decisions that need to be made.

But look who the apostles turned the ministry over to. It wasn't just anyone. The new recruits were full of the Spirit and wisdom, and they were “known” by the people for it. Their reputations were based on their character. Now they received the call.

Today, spend some time thinking and praying about who we can equip to step up and take over ministry roles in the church, either for the first time or to a greater degree than they've attempted in the past. Consider their character, their spiritual life, and their ability to make wise decisions. Please note: Giving these ministries away doesn't mean we stop doing them. That was dealt with yesterday in what we're tossing. Like the distribution of food to widows, the church will keep doing these ministries. It's just time for others to experience the joy of doing them.

What ministries can we GIVE to others, and who can we GIVE them to?

| MINISTRIES TO GIVE AWAY | PEOPLE TO GIVE THEM TO |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
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DAY 42 (SABBATH)

WEEK 7

PICK A PROJECT

DAY 43 (FOURTH BIG SATURDAY): _____ DECISION DAY

DAY 44 (SUNDAY) _____

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Nehemiah's call to rebuild the temple. There may be no better example of how to pull a team of people together to restore a place of ministry and worship than the story of Nehemiah rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. So we will spend this entire week looking at the details of this important task.

KEY VERSE: "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it" (Nehemiah 2:5).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Nehemiah 2:1-9

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Nehemiah was a Jew, but he was born a captive in the foreign land of Persia (modern-day Iraq). When he heard the news that Jerusalem, the home city of his ancestors, was in ruins, he was saddened. Like Nehemiah, many people in the church will be inspired into action in a similar way. They may not even remember the days when the church was thriving, but it's their home, so when they feel sad that it's not all it could be, that godly sorrow should spur them to action.

Just like the king gave Nehemiah the authority he needed to do the task, so God has done that for us. As you take some time to share your burden for your church, remember to honor its past, sorrow over its current needs, and express hope for its future. Nehemiah felt and expressed all of those, and it set him on the path for a successful enterprise.

There are Nehemiahs in your church. Ask God for the eyes to see who they are and call them into action. If a pagan king can be used by God to recognize the godly sorrow in Nehemiah, he can use you to see the same sorrow and the same call in others.

FOR THE PASTOR Depending on the nature of your project and other factors in your church, today is likely the day you'll announce the project to the church body and start recruiting Project Team members. This will happen either through voluntary signups, specific requests, or a combination of the two.)

DAY 45

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: **Nehemiah inspects the wall.** Starting today, your Project Team leaders will be making phone calls and sending emails to people who signed up to help, and those who they plan to recruit. One of the best recruiting tools is the fact that you have a project and the start of a plan based on weeks of hard work.

KEY VERSE: **The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding (Nehemiah 2:20).**

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Nehemiah 2:10–20

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Instead of jumping right in and acting like he knew it all, Nehemiah quietly and deliberately took the necessary time to inspect the condition of the wall, so he would know the scope and severity of the task that was ahead of him. That's exactly what the CLT has been doing over the past six weeks.

At the end of the inspection, Nehemiah had all the information he needed to start rebuilding, and the confidence that the Lord would give them success in it. That's where your church is right now. The work hasn't begun yet, but you're far more ready to face it wisely than you were six weeks ago. Take some time to reflect back on what you've learned and how far you and the rest of the CLT have already come. Even though you may have already faced some opposition and, like Nehemiah, you will likely face some more, the good news far outweighs the bad. Know that God will give you success as you start rebuilding.

DAY 46

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: **Nehemiah assigns positions on the wall.** Nehemiah was called to rebuild the wall, but he knew he couldn't do it himself. Every great effort needs a team. Yours may not be the team you expect. They may not have the skills you think you need. But when Jesus said He would build His church, He knew who He would need. And He knows what and who you'll need, too.

KEY VERSE: **Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section. Adjoining this, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house (Nehemiah 3:9–10).**

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Nehemiah 3

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: The detailed list of repairs to the wall and the people who did them is a breathtaking lesson in cooperation, sacrifice, and skill. Some repaired the section of the wall closest to their house, while others came from faraway tribes and nations. Those working on the wall were rich and poor, leaders and servants, men and women, priests and laity, builders and merchants.

When considering who should serve on the upcoming Project Teams, don't leave anyone out. In situations like this, it's often the least likely people who do the greatest work.

DAY 47

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Nehemiah faces opposition. No great work goes on without opposition. Sometimes it's external, sometimes it's internal. But it always comes. But remember that the presence of opposition does not mean the absence of God.

KEY VERSE: They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.” But I prayed, “Now strengthen my hands” (Nehemiah 6:9).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Nehemiah 4 and 6

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Nehemiah's enemies didn't attack him or the workers head on. They employed scare tactics, then delay tactics. But Nehemiah wouldn't be diverted from the task God had called him to. Instead of praying that the burden be lifted, Nehemiah prayed that his hands would be strengthened. As this project moves forward, there will be challenges, even outright attacks. The goal of those attacks will be to stop your work from reaching its goal. But remember this—if God called you, He will strengthen you.

DAY 48

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Nehemiah demonstrates character and maintains his priorities. When you engage in a big project, it can be easy to lose sight of the big picture. Needs that are immediate and urgent seem more important than a mission that's long-term and hard to see. In today's passage, Nehemiah faced such a temptation and showed us how to face it with our priorities and character intact.

KEY VERSE: I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people (Nehemiah 5:18).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Nehemiah 5

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: This passage shows us one of the reasons God chose Nehemiah for this great task. It wasn't just because Nehemiah had great leadership skills—although he did—but because he had such strong character. While the people were building the wall and preparing to defend themselves from outside attackers, there was a great evil being perpetrated from within. Because many of the workers were giving up their regular employment to work on the wall, they were mortgaging their land to borrow money to pay their daily bills. A group of their fellow countrymen were taking advantage of this by charging high interest rates and foreclosing on them, even enslaving their children when they couldn't pay on time.

When Nehemiah heard about this, he was understandably incensed. He demanded that their families, land, and property be returned, and that the moneylenders stop charging interest on their loans. They agreed, and the work went forward. Then, Nehemiah made sure to let everyone know that he never behaved that way. In fact, he even gave up the extravagant food that was rightfully his so those in greater need could have it instead.

There will be times during this process when it will be tempting to ignore the needs of the people in order to complete the project. But we church leaders must always remember this: Our church people aren't the raw material we use to complete the project. The people are the point of the project—people loving Jesus, loving each other, and sharing the good news. No wall, no church building, and no project is more important than that.

DAY 49 (SABBATH)

FOR DAYS 50-100, GO TO KARLVATERS.COM/100DAYS

DAY 99 (BIG SATURDAY): ALL-TEAM ASSESSMENT AND PREP

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Finishing the work. There's nothing like finishing well.

KEY VERSE: He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Philippians 1:3–11

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: If Jesus is in it, nothing can stop it. But we're not the only ones Christ can do His work through. If we refuse, He'll use someone else. How sad it would be to miss out on what God wants to do through your church because you weren't ready to step up. But you are ready! You've done your part. Now leave it in Jesus' hands. He'll complete it. And what an end it will be!

DAY 100 (SUNDAY): ALL-CHURCH CELEBRATION AND THANKSGIVING

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Gratefulness. On Day 17, we looked at a well-known quote from Max De Pree: “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor.” The first half of this process was about defining reality. The hard work in the second half was servanthood. Now we get to celebrate and say, “Thank You!”

KEY VERSE: You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God (2 Corinthians 9:11).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 2 Corinthians 9:6–15

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: This passage is not about giving. It's not about seed-faith. And it's certainly not about getting rich. It's about generosity. Take a look at the Key Verse again. "You will be enriched in every way." Woohoo! Sounds good to me! But take note of why we're being enriched. It's not so we can keep the treasures to ourselves, but "so that you can be generous on every occasion." The goal is not to accumulate wealth or blessings, but to nurture a spirit of generosity.

The most joyous, effective, and life-giving Christians and churches ooze generosity. They're not about getting—they're about giving. That should always be the result of receiving God's blessings. We're not supposed to be the bucket where the flow of God's blessings stops. We're meant to be a pipeline through which God's blessings flow.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO TO KEEP CHRIST'S MISSION AS THE FOCUS OF OUR ATTENTION?

WHAT DOES OUR CHURCH DO WELL THAT WE MUST KEEP DOING?

WHAT DO WE NEED TO TOSS BECAUSE IT ISN'T BEING DONE WELL AND CAN'T BE FIXED—AT LEAST FOR NOW?

MINISTRIES TO GIVE AWAY

PEOPLE TO GIVE THEM TO

WEEK 7

PICK A PROJECT

