How to build a Gospel Advancing Ministry!

Ongoing Programs Reflect It

Values #7: On-going programs reflect it!

Tell story of my meltdown with my wife in Bible study (check to see if I’ve used)

We must program our priorities…where I failed with my wife early on in our marriage is where most youth groups and churches fail. We have values that often don’t get programmed like they should.

And what should these priorities be?

That missing priority is tucked away in the book of Acts 6. So, if you have your Bibles (or iPads) open them to Acts 5:42-6:7.

*“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah. In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 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. 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.’ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”* Acts 5:42-6:7

Look at that last phrase, *“the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”*

Isn’t that what every youth leader worth of his or her salt secretly wants? We want…spiritual momentum (*the word of God spread*)….rapid numeric growth (*the number of disciples increased rapidly*) and, last but not least, down deep inside we want increased ministry influence (*a large number of priests became obedient to the faith*.)

I believe that the keys to all of these things are in the six verses preceding verse 7.

So here’s the big idea from this passage that I’m presenting to you this afternoon…

*“The only way to create unstoppable supernatural momentum, experience rapid numeric growth and increased ministry influence is by relentlessly prioritizing prayer and the ministry of the Word, ruthlessly programming them into our schedules and regularly delegating everything else.”*

1. Relentlessly prioritize prayer and the ministry of the Word.

Prayer, the ministry of the Word, including evangelism should be a spiritual leader’s first priority. The times we schedule for these must take priority over anything and everything else.

Look at verse 4, *“we…will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.”*

The Greek Word for *“give our attention to*” in the NIV is translated as *“devote ourselves to”* in the NAS, *“give ourselves continually to”* in the KJV

* 1. Prayer

*“we…will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.”* Acts 6:4

Prayer was the priority of the apostles…

* The early church kicked off with a 10 day prayer meeting.
* Prayer is a constant theme in the epistles.

The priority of prayer in the ministry of Jesus….

According to Dr. Dann Spader, *“Over 45 sections of Scripture covering 30 events record how Jesus would often slip away to pray.”* He prayed for wisdom. He prayed for his disciples. He prayed for the lost. In Acts 17 he even prayed for us!

Jesus was always escaping ministry opportunities to pray! Why? Because Jesus knew that the key to effective ministry started, continued, culminated and concluded with his connection with the Father!

The Power of the All access pass (use Winter Jam)…when it comes to prayer!

Prayer was the priority of the Apostles and of Jesus himself. Is it your priority?

That’s why I love this quote by Leonard Ravenhill, *“No man is greater than his prayer life. The pastor who is not praying is playing; the people who are not praying are straying. We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and…few pray-ers; many singers, few clingers; lots of pastors, few wrestlers; many fears, few tears; much fashion, little passion; many interferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere.”*Leonard Ravenhill

Prayer is the oil in our ministry engines. It’s the air in our ministry lungs. It’s the oasis in our ministry desert. Prayer shouldn’t be our last resort but our first response!

But it’s not just prayer that is a priority. It’s the ministry of the Word. And this goes two ways…first to the believer and then to the unbeliever. Let’s talk about the ministry of the Word to the believer.

* 1. The Ministry of the Word
		1. The Ministry of the Word to the Believer
			1. It energizes new believers to grow quickly.

*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation….”* 1 Peter 2:2

* + - 1. It equips growing believers to discern God’s will.

***“****Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”* Romans 12:2 NRSV

* + - 1. It enables any believer to make disciples.

*“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”* Colossians 3:16

* + 1. The Ministry of the Word to the unbeliever

The last verse before Acts 6:1-7 is Acts 5:42 and it sets the context for the ministry of the Word to include evangelism. Here’s what it says, “*“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.”* Acts 5:42

So when Luke, the writer of Acts, referred to “the ministry of the Word” in Acts 6:1-7 he was assuming that included evangelism. Evangelism includes the declaration of the core message of Scripture to the lost. And the core message is Jesus and his message of redemption through faith in his blood!

This is always a game of tug of war (picture) and I sincerely believe we should balance these. We want to mature and equip believers and we want to reach and disciple the lost.

 *“The only way to create unstoppable supernatural momentum, experience rapid numeric growth and increased ministry influence is by relentlessly prioritizing prayer and the ministry of the Word and, secondly….”*

1. Ruthlessly program these priorities into your schedule.
	1. Be realistic about it!

Problems will arise.

*“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, 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

This was a problem, not of food, but of favoritism within the early church. The Hebraic Jews didn’t like the Hellenistic Jews because they had given into Greek culture and had lost a bit of their Jewish identity in the process. They looked at them as cultural sellouts and this attitude showed itself in the food closet. Their widows were getting passed by when it came to receiving food from the church.

On a separate note, isn’t it kind of nice to know that the early church suffered from some of the same kinds of struggles that our churches suffer from? There was still favoritism, gossip and passive aggressive behavior. These early believers struggled and they looked to the church leaders to bring the solution.

Focusing on fixing these kinds of problems can crowd out our God-given priorities. For you it may be a staffing problem or dealing with a struggling ministry, or funding a building project or dealing with disgruntled members who are frustrated over (fill in the blank.)

These types of very real problems can very easily distract us from our God-given priorities. So we must relentlessly focus on two main priorities. First of all we must...

* 1. Be ruthless about it!

In Acts 6:2 the apostles say, *“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

Notice that *“it is not right*” to forsake these apostolic priorities for anything else! You have to be ruthless about it….because if you are not then everything and everyone will claw for your time and your schedule.

In the words of my friend Propaganda, *“Be a jerk about it.”*

Your mission statement is either a priority or a platitude depending on whether or not it gets programmed.

* + 1. Personally

**Your personal schedule** (time for prayer, study of the Word and personal evangelism)

* Are you programming time for prayer in your personal schedule?

Look at this like part of your job description…because it is! As Samuel said to the Israelites, *“far be it from me that I should sin against God by failing to pray for you!”*

How many of us are sinning against God by failing to pray for the people he has put under our care?

How I do it…a simple prayer app called “*PrayerMate*” and prayer walks.

* Are you programming enough time for sermon prep?

Too many preachers preach like Texas Steers, a point here, a point there and a lot of bull in between! No! We must dive deep into the Scriptures and prepare a sermon that fits the needs of the audience at a heart level!

I love the definition of Biblical preaching from Dr. Tony Evans, *“The proper exegesis of the text delivered to the needs of the audience in the power of the Spirit through the personality of the preacher.”* Dr. Tony Evans

This takes time. It takes time to exegete the text, exegete your audience and to deliver that sermon in such a way that makes a maximum impact. Enough of the Saturday night specials gentlemen! Program time to prepare your sermons!

* Are you programming time for personal evangelism?

I have to ask you this…are you actively sharing your faith? I think this is the core of the problem in many ways. If pastors aren’t actively sharing their faith then how can they expect their people to? If you have no stories of evangelism then they won’t either. And you don’t have to be good at it. You just have to go for it.

For many of you it’s a problem of proximity….Why I do a lot of my sermon prep at Starbucks!

**Program these supernatural priorities into your personal schedule and into your Sunday morning rundown**

I’ve always wondered why we don’t spend more time in our Sunday morning services actually praying as a congregation? The average church spends more time in announcements than intercessory prayer on Sunday morning!

But when Paul writes to his younger protégé Timothy and instructs him how to program his church services he writes,

*“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—**for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”*

Look at that phrase, “first of all…” For many pastors a quick prayer at the beginning and end serves as Holy Water that we sprinkle on the service to sanctify it. But we are not spending time interceding collectively on behalf of our communities, our country, our lost friends and the church worldwide.”

Even 5 minutes of collective prayer would do infinitely more than what the average church has now. Why not let the worship leader lead a time of prayer every week while music is padding underneath and God’s people pray with each other as different requests across the screen?

**And what about programming evangelism?**

Remember that it’s what we program that reflects our true priorities. Everything else is a platitude. The third key to creating unstoppable ministry momentum is…

1. Rigorously delegate everything else.

In Acts 6:2 the apostles gathered everyone together to say*, ‘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 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.’ This proposal pleased the whole group.”*

Sometimes in our quest to prove we are servants we take responsibilities that someone else should do. But we must realize that the best way we can serve our people is by praying for them, prepare great sermons for them and equip them to share the Gospel. Any time taken from that is robbing your people of your best and someone else of the opportunity to use their spiritual gifts to serve!

What will the result be? Remember our big idea, *“The only way to create unstoppable supernatural momentum, experience rapid numeric growth and increased ministry influence is by relentlessly prioritizing prayer and the ministry of the Word, ruthlessly programming them into our schedules and rigorously delegating everything else.”*

Now, when you choose to do this, the road may actually get harder at first. Not only will you have the force of ministry gravity working against you but Satan himself will do everything he can to distract you from these priorities. So sometimes God allows tragedy to get our attention and remind us to pray…to remind us that apart from him we can do nothing!

We need the right medication (tell story of my sickness and multiple days off)…prayer and the ministry of the Word (both evangelism and discipleship) are the right medication

What do you need to dump or delegate to make these priorities in your life? Just a month ago a pastor in Florida named Ron…began to weep after he heard me train on these principles…”I’m 64 years old and I’ve failed to pray. I’ve let everything else crowd it out. I have failed.”

… you ain’t dead yet…

While we still have air in our lungs we can pray and God will hear those prayers.

Now I’m going to pray for you. I’m going to pray that God will allow these supernatural priorities of prayer and the ministry of the Word to dominate your personal schedule and ministry programs. And I’m going to do something extremely awkward, I’m going to have you keep your eyes open as I pray for you and your ministry.

Pray for them with my eyes (and their eyes) open!