

A stylized landscape illustration featuring a brown hillside on the left, a teal sky, and a light blue body of water. A prominent yellow line, resembling a guardrail, curves across the foreground from the bottom right towards the center. The overall style is minimalist and graphic.

six principles for
a multiplying
church

FOREWORD BY DAVE FERGUSON

GUARDRAILS

ALAN BRIGGS

It's easy to get caught up in the “stuff” of church and forget our primary call to be disciple-makers. This book is a foundational and profound reminder that the effectiveness of the gospel in our time hinges on our capacity to disciple the nations.

ALAN HIRSCH

Award-winning author on missional Christianity and founder of Forge Mission Training Network

Central to movement is the grassroots work of making disciples. In *Guardrails*, Alan Briggs calls believers to move from being couch potatoes who accumulate information to being movement makers who intentionally focus on multiplying Kingdom-oriented apprentices of Jesus in the local church. The strength of the book is that he gives us a sticky and SHARRP (Simple, Holistic, Adaptable, Regular, Reproducible, and Positive) way to do this. The most beautiful thing about this book is that Alan embodies the message he shares.

J. R. WOODWARD

National Director of V3 Church Planting Movement and coauthor of *The Church as Movement*

Maybe you, like me, can feel stuck and tired at times (on the ministry treadmill, as Alan calls it), and yet there is a longing, a desire, to be part of a *movement*, a movement of the Kingdom of God. I was hungry and eager for a book like this. I needed to read this book, as it met me in all those places of longing and called me into more.

KATIE FOWLER

Associate pastor for Missional Strategies, First Presbyterian Church, Colorado Springs

Missionaries and church planters do not simply appear. They are discovered, developed, and deployed. Within the pages of *Guardrails* you will uncover not only the foundations for a multiplying church but also the practical application of being a church who raises up and sends out a generation of gospel-centered world changers. Alan Briggs is a leader with a proven

track record of making disciples who make disciples. This book is dangerous because it will change the fabric of church, but it's a journey worth taking.

DUSTIN WILLIS

Director of the SEND Network, author of *Life in Community*, and coauthor of *Life on Mission*

I'm a big fan of Alan Briggs. He is not only a thinker. He is also a practitioner and coach. And when you put those realities together, you have something special. Add in Alan's infectious passion and intense creativity, and you get something magical. That's exactly what *Guardrails* is. Magical. This is a much-needed book, coming at the right time to spark multiplication among God's people.

DANIEL FUSCO

Lead pastor of Crossroads Community Church, Vancouver, Washington, and author of *Honestly: Getting Real about Jesus and Our Messy Lives*

Clear. Concise. Thorough. Engaging. Practical. Powerful! Alan Briggs brings it all together in this book. The best part is that, with everything you'll read here, Alan has lived it out in real time with real people. He is relentless in his love for people outside the Kingdom of God and is equally invested in making and developing Kingdom disciples and leaders. Add to that his extensive interaction with some of the best thought-leaders and practitioners out there, and you have this amazing work that will absolutely, no doubt, help you take your next steps as a disciple, a disciple-maker, and a disciple leader. Yeah, it's that good!

KEVIN COLÓN

Pastor of Neighboring Way of Life at LifeBridge Christian Church, Longmont, Colorado

Alan Briggs isn't simply a writer sharing ideas; he's the real deal. In one of the most gospel-hostile environments in the country, Alan lives out the six multiplication principles he outlines in *Guardrails*. The structure he outlines is born out of years of one-on-one discipleship with leaders at every level. If you are serious

about creating a multiplying discipleship culture in your church or ministry, I highly recommend this book.

GEOFF SURRATT

Pastor, leadership coach, and author of *Ten Stupid Things That Keep Churches from Growing*

Alan Briggs has produced a book that is eminently practical. You will read his heart in this book. Briggs cares deeply about seeing Christians understand the call to discipleship. The genius of this book is in its simplicity. Briggs intentionally outlines principles designed to be implemented. They're clear, straightforward, and ready for use. Embrace these principles and experience fresh discipleship.

CHRIS HORST

Director of Development at HOPE International and coauthor of *Mission Drift*

This is a great resource that will inspire, strengthen, and equip a wide variety of leaders. Alan writes with the eye of a practitioner who has also reflected well on what he does and why. Whether you're a planter or a leader in an established church, you will benefit from this book!

ALEX ABSALOM

Leader of Missional Innovation, Grace Church, Long Beach, California

Alan Briggs brings passion, creativity, and timeless Kingdom principles to the adventure of church planting. Over the past few years I've had the privilege of watching Alan live out the great commission lifestyle. In *Guardrails* he shares his adventure and the lessons he's learning. A great book! Don't miss it.

DAVID GARRISON

International missionary strategist and author of *Church Planting Movements* and *A Wind in the House of Islam*

Guardrails is a book for in-the-trenches leaders that is chock-full of great insights on the importance and practice of the discipleship process. Alan is the real thing, and this new book

will be a great help to anyone seeking to use his or her one and only life for the King and his Kingdom.

TOM HUGHES

Co-lead Pastor, Christian Assembly Church, Los Angeles, California, and author of *Curious*

For those of us who are tired of rigid, simplistic, and lifeless formulas for discipleship, Alan's book is a refreshing well. He casts a vision of becoming apprentices of Jesus in a profound, accessible, and winsome manner. His six guardrails provide enough direction for healthy movement, yet enough freedom to embody apprenticeship in our own communal contexts.

DR. DREW MOSER

Dean of Experiential Learning, Taylor University

The secret to a multiplying church is multiplying people. For all the time that people have sat under faithful ministries, they've not been taught to be the multipliers that Jesus intended. How could we have gotten so far off course? Alan Briggs puts the guardrails up to keep ministry, church, and people back on the road to multiplication.

PEYTON JONES

West Region Director of Multiply Training, NAMB; founder of New Breed Church Planting; author of *Church Zero*

In its stripped-down and simplest form, church planting is about multiplication—multiplying disciples. As person after person responds to the gospel, each of them needs to be nurtured, challenged, and led into a deeper and more robust walk with Christ. Alan Briggs shows us practically how not only to disciple people but also to multiply disciples. He gives us the tools needed to move from addition to multiplication, which is essential for a church-planting movement.

SEAN BENESH

Author of *Exegeting the City* and *Blueprints for a Just City*

GUARDRAILS

six principles for a multiplying church

ALAN BRIGGS

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FOREWORD

WHEN I FINISHED READING *Guardrails: Six Principles for a Multiplying Church*, my first reaction was to shake my head and say, “Wow, I wish I’d had this book when I was planting Community Christian Church!”

It was more than two decades ago that a group of friends from college sat in a breakfast restaurant dreaming about how God might use us by starting a new church. We had a vague vision of the church as a movement; we knew we wanted to plant churches, but there was so much we didn’t know! And it took us a very, very long time to figure it out!

Community Christian Church eventually went on to have a dozen (and counting!) sites across Chicagoland and launch a network of hundreds of reproducing churches called NewThing. But we could have done so much more! It took us nine years before we ever started a new campus! And it took us twelve years before we ever planted a new church! I sometimes wonder what we were doing for the first decade.

And then I remember what we were doing: We were figuring out on our own how to be a multiplying church. As I said: “Wow, I wish I’d had this book when I was planting!”

What I needed then, and what most leaders need, is the kind of theologically grounded and practical ministry wisdom found in *Guardrails*. If we’d had the guidance and clear instruction that you are about to access through this book, we could have started thinking and behaving like a movement from the very beginning. Consequently, we would have planted more churches, apprenticed and released more leaders, and done so much more for the mission of Jesus!

Alan Briggs’s *Guardrails* would have helped us. I believe it will help you in two very significant ways.

First, *Guardrails* offers a *simple understanding of movement thinking*. Before that first breakfast meeting to start Community Christian Church was over, we had scratched out the following three-phase vision for this new church:

- Phase 1: Impact Church
- Phase 2: Reproducing Church
- Phase 3: Movement

As we talked about being an impact church, we dreamed of a church that would grow to a certain size and would impact the neighborhood and community in such a powerful way that everyone in that community would see the positive impact we were making. When we described being a reproducing church, we thought about how one day we would plant churches both locally and globally. The third phase was

a dream: If God would bless our efforts in phases one and two, we would eventually catalyze a movement of reproducing and impact-making churches. We had the vision and the holy ambition to be an Acts 1:8 church, but we did not understand how to do it!

In chapter 1 Briggs borrows Dee Hock’s term *chaordic* to help us better understand that movement-making will always have enough *order* to give it a common purpose and direction, and enough *chaos* to give it permission and innovation. While movement-making was a part of our vision from the beginning, we didn’t understand even the simplest ideas like this one. Chapter 11 of *Guardrails* is worth the price of the book as Alan holds our hands and explains how to apply movement-making principles. Read every word of this book and you will come to a clearer understanding of what movement is and how movement works.

Second, *Guardrails* offers *six simple principles for being a multiplying church*. Through my role as president of the Exponential Conference, I have the opportunity to influence thousands of church leaders and church planters. I take that responsibility very seriously, and we are currently challenging every church to become a “Level 5 Multiplying Church.” The nomenclature of “Level 5 Multiplying Church” comes from the following labeling based on research of churches in North America:

- Level 1: Decline
- Level 2: Plateau (80 percent are in decline or plateaued)

- Level 3: Addition (16 percent are growing by addition)
- Level 4: Reproduce (4 percent have reproduced a new site or church)
- Level 5: Multiply (no churches currently are multiplying into movements)

Community Christian Church is still a Level 4 church with aspirations for becoming a Level 5. Alan Briggs offers us simple principles for becoming such a multiplying church. I wish we had had those six principles twenty years ago to build upon. I wish I had known then what Alan writes about in one of those six principles: that discipleship needs to be holistic. Maybe then I would not have burnt out so many artists, leaders, and volunteers. If you want to become a Level 5 multiplying church, put these six principles to work and do not waver.

I have only one critique of *Guardrails: Six Principles for a Multiplying Church*. Alan, you should have written this sooner. *Wow, I wish I'd had this book when I was planting Community Christian Church!*

Dave Ferguson
COMMUNITY—Lead Pastor
NewThing—Visionary Leader

INTRODUCTION

HOW WE STAYED AFLOAT

IT WAS GETTING CLOSE to spring during my junior year of college. A few buddies and I decided to plan an epic spring-break adventure. To qualify as “epic,” it needed to involve a challenge that we weren’t sure we could actually pull off—a challenge that would blur the line between risky and just plain stupid.

After about half an hour of scheming and consulting a map, we decided we would spend several nights on a wilderness island in the Gulf of Mexico. We would get there by canoe.

Yep, that’s right—canoe.

After a long drive from the Midwest, we opened the door to our van and smelled the salt water. We unloaded our canoes, packed our gear, revved ourselves up for the ordeal, and set off directly into the waves.

At first the waves weren’t bad, but as we got out farther from shore, they got more choppy. In a few minutes they were pounding against our canoes, rocking us from side to side. We

realized the island was farther away than we first imagined. The current was pushing us back, even as we paddled forward. Our little canoes began filling with water from the pounding waves, making every paddle stroke even more exhausting.

Suddenly things got urgent. And when that happened, something changed.

Our minds shifted from thinking about how hard the paddling was to working together as a team. We just needed to crest around the island, and then the waves would shift, pushing us onto the beach. We yelled instructions to each other. We played the roles that we played best. No fancy business—it was all-hands-on-deck and full-speed-ahead, with the laser focus of getting to the other side of the island.

Finally we dragged ourselves onto the beach, exhausted and drenched in sweat and seawater. For a few days we lived like Tom Hanks in the movie *Cast Away*.

When I think about our epic adventure, I wonder: *How did we make it?* We weren't the strongest paddlers in the world, and none of us had ever canoed in the ocean. What made the difference for us?

- First of all, we were crazy enough to believe we could paddle the ocean.
- Second, the risk forced us to function as a team.
- Finally, we understood a few key principles of boating, and we applied them.

In many ways the great commission is like a canoe trip on the ocean. You have some equipment designed to help you

make disciples. Your equipment may seem meager to you, but Jesus assures you it's enough to get the job done. We are not great, but we have most certainly been commissioned.

The equipment and the will are only part of the equation, however. Who will stay afloat in the epic quest to make disciples? It won't be the biggest churches or brightest leaders who effectively make disciples in the way of Jesus, but the ones who have identified a few key principles and committed to live by them. The great commission is an epic movement, but like any movement, its impact is enhanced or inhibited by decisions and commitments we make in advance.

The North American church is going through a wake-up call. God seems to be reawakening the collective heart of the church back to discipleship. Some of us have been jolted into action as our boats have been rocked. Others never stopped coasting and have woken up to find themselves adrift. In his grace, our Father uses many methods to wake his people up.

I talk with pastors, leaders, and “regular folks” everywhere who are no longer content simply listening to sermons and handing out bulletins. We're realizing healthy ministry always centers around making disciples. This is a huge and exciting realization for the church. It's a new move back to our original call.

We might recognize this call back to discipleship, but without properly defining *what* we are pursuing, we will continue to miss how to effectively pursue it. We have some unlearning and relearning to do. This is not something we can afford to miss.

In the midst of much frustration and limited capacity,

God gave me six movement principles—I call them *guardrails*—to keep me on track. For me and those I have disciplined, the six guardrails outlined in this book have been a breath of fresh air. I have taught and reviewed them in small and mid-sized groups in coffee shops, greasy breakfast joints, classrooms, and living rooms. They aren't brilliant and radical. They are simple and usable. They have literally changed everything.

These principles brought me hope of fruitfulness in my own disciple-making ministry when I was overwhelmed. The leaders I've trained as apprentices, neighborhood missionaries, aspiring pastors, and church planters through Frontline Church Planting report that these six movement principles have structured their discipleship forever.

Educational training for ministry will always fall short. Even Jesus trained sparingly before releasing his band of followers onto a waiting world. No training process can teach every skill, every response, every piece of knowledge, or every biblical truth needed in church leadership. Our world changes too quickly for that.

But there is beauty found in guiding principles. They inform our simple obedience to Christ, empower us to trust the leadership of the Spirit, and give structure to our ever-adapting ministry. My prayer is that every read, every download, and every discussion on these guardrails for a multiplying church will advance the great commission from the ends of the earth to the heart of your parish. If you believe the church is the primary vehicle God will use to change the world, get ready. There's urgent work to be done.

PART ONE

FOUNDATIONS

CHAOS IN SEARCH OF ORDER

Style and structure are the essence of a book; great ideas are hogwash.

VLADIMIR NABOKOV

We cannot create movements; only the Spirit of God can. But we can align ourselves, raising the sails of kingdom-oriented ministry, so that when the Spirit does blow, we are ready to move forward.

STEVE SMITH

Discipleship and disciple-making is foundational to any movement. No matter which movement you observe you will find that they are obsessed with discipleship and disciple-making.

ALAN HIRSCH

IT WAS AN ORDINARY Tuesday afternoon. I was meeting with a church planter at a local coffee shop. For some reason, church planters and coffee go together like Portland and weird. After catching up a bit I asked a familiar question: “What is the next hump your church is facing?”

His response was simple. “If we just get over the one-hundred-person mark, we are going to be fine.”

At the time their church was wrangling about forty folks into a Sunday worship gathering. He was wishing to more than double the size of his church. So my next question was, “If God brought you sixty people tomorrow, what would you do with them?”

It was obvious he had no idea.

I have had this exact thing happen at least three other times! Unfortunately, most churches have no idea what they would or should do with the people God brings them.

We often see people as solutions to our problems: Add sixty people and our church plant is out of the woods. God sees people differently—sixty people he created in his image; sixty people harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. God knows the plans he has for those sixty people; why would he trust us with them if we don't?

Just a few months later, this conversation would come back to haunt me. My heart cry is to influence leaders who are hungry to live like Jesus and multiply disciples. I meet with as many hungry leaders as I can. I create as many equipping venues as I have the influence to put together, which can lead people into a sustainable life of mission. Each day at 10:02 a.m., I pray as Jesus commanded in Luke 10:2: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

The problem with asking God for something is that once he gives us what we've asked for, it becomes our responsibility. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak and the calendar is already full. At a certain point I started feeling completely swamped, maxed out with no solutions on how to ease the load of administration and equipping leaders. My list was long, and the margin for error was minuscule. We had just adopted two kids from Ethiopia who didn't know our language, I was working an extra job on top of full-time

ministry, and my wife was getting her master's degree in the evenings. We slept occasionally.

In the midst of this frantic season, God put two new men on my mind. I was convinced I didn't have time to insert these two new guys into my life: I was already discipling people in the early mornings, over lunches, even at my house after my kids went to bed. But I also knew that saying no to God wasn't acceptable. How can I turn down God's answers to my prayers because I'm "too busy"?

I sensed God echoing a similar question back to me that I had asked the church planter just a few months before: "If I sent you ten hungry leaders tomorrow, what would you do with them?" I had no good answer.

My realization: I was the bottleneck to my own prayers. My desire to disciple others, to equip everyday folks to join God's work, was clouded by unsustainability. My systems were maxed out. I either needed to change my systems or change my prayers.

When our paradigms shift or even bust, God goes to work on us. People who have lost fifty pounds will tell you about the moment they looked in the mirror and had a wake-up call. When my friend almost died in a motorcycle accident, he realized how selfishly he had been living. Billionaires hit a moment where they have no idea what to do with all the money they have been sprinting after. Such points of holy frustration and deep wrestling beckon us to reexamine our lives. They leave us utterly humbled. They remind us that we have limits even as they provide fuel for the fire of the Divine.

Perhaps you are experiencing one of these moments right now or sense that you are heading toward one. These moments leave us feeling helpless, but they ripen us for change.

My crisis moment forced me to find a framework to lean back on. It wasn't out of my own brilliance; it didn't come to me in my favorite coffee shop, on a spiritual retreat, or on a 14,000-foot Colorado peak. God forced my hand, and then he pointed me toward the most freedom I have ever experienced as a minister of the gospel. I found a process where I could work smarter, not harder, to help unleash God's people around me. I have never experienced this kind of fruit before with so little weight on me and such immediate reproducibility. These principles formed a simple grid to engage hungry leaders, and it has made all the difference.

LIVING IN THE TENSION

In Acts 6 we are given a front-row seat into a crisis moment in the early church. The viral, grassroots movement of “the Way” was thriving. The church seemed to be capable of taking over the world as it expanded—until now. Now there was conflict, and as church leaders rubbed up against it, they realized more of the same was not going to work.

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples

and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.”

ACTS 6:1-2

What was the issue here?

- They needed to preach the Word.
- They needed to meet tangible needs.
- Their existing systems could no longer serve both.

So they came up with a great plan in the tension of this moment.

“Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

ACTS 6:3-6

In the midst of great momentum, beautiful chaos had been building. To sustain their momentum, the apostles created a new structure. The result was explosive: “And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the

disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). Many more people came to faith, and they reached a new, strategic subgroup of people: Jewish priests who came to faith in Christ, validating their message to the broader community.

Thanks to the introduction of *structure*, the church in Jerusalem continued to grow, and the gospel continued to multiply into other hubs, eventually spreading all over the world! What Christian leader doesn’t want to be part of something like that?

Most church leaders I interact with aren’t good buddies with structure. In fact, for some, *structure* feels like a four-letter word. It sounds foreign, crusty, even unspiritual. Forming systems feels like wrestling a muddy pig to the ground—neither fun nor easy. I have never met one person who got into full-time ministry because they dreamed of creating new structures. It’s about the people.

But structure is vital to loving people. When we are faithful to obey God, we bear fruit, and when that fruit exceeds our systems, we must expand—and our expansion itself must be faithful.

Too many people naively think that structure is the enemy of movement, when really structure can be the missing link. Sometimes our avoidance of structure is simply a convenient excuse to do things ourselves or avoid hard work.

KINGDOM MOVEMENT

Dee Hock, the founder of the Visa credit card association, coined the term *chaordic* to describe the mixing of chaos

and order. As it happens, chaos and order often coexist in nature. Their combination in the world is typically strikingly beautiful.¹ Hock suggests this can be applied to human organizations—which would include the church.

For most people, movement = chaos. Think about the fear that social movements and radicalism strike into governments. And yet it seems as though followers of Jesus everywhere are praying and laboring more and more toward a movement. They see the chaos of change as evidence of a movement brewing. There is a holy urgency in the air.

I am lucky enough to intersect with people living with this holy urgency. I prayer-walk with church planters who feel a deep call to reclaim the forgotten ground beneath their feet and take spiritual responsibility for their parishes. A friend of mine owns a café and intentionally uses it as a place to connect with people far from God and create places where people can be known. An aging church gave their building away to a church plant that was only half a year old so the neighborhood could be reached again. A couple heading toward retirement paved the way for a church in their community by asking, “What does God want to do in this town?” Every other month I gather for a roundtable with a group of Kingdom-hearted leaders who want nothing more than to see God’s Kingdom advancing from Colorado’s Front Range to the ends of the earth.

What actualizes this holy urgency? In his book *Movements That Change the World*, Steve Addison highlights the life of John Wesley as an example of how great movements happen.

His goal was to establish a movement of people who were learning to obey Christ and to walk as he did. . . .

Wesley was not interested in just attracting crowds. What set Wesley apart was not the gospel he preached but his ability to gather converts into a disciplined movement. . . . As a brilliant strategist and innovator, he created and adapted structures that strengthened and united his followers, while facilitating the movement's rapid expansion.²

Most people think *disciplined* and *movement* don't go together any more than *structured* and *chaos*. But while it's easy to picture John Wesley as a blazing visionary drawing crowds to himself by sheer charisma, it was the discipline of creating structure that turned converts into movement makers.

Living in Colorado, I drive on a lot of mountain roads. Many of them are downright scary. I rarely notice guardrails on level ground, but they are pretty comforting on those high mountain roads. Guardrails aren't just for icy roads and emergencies. They give you a frame of reference and allow you to relax a bit, knowing that you won't take a cliff dive. Guardrails are rarely used, but when you brush them you are really thankful they're there.

Movements are birthed in the heart of God, but guardrails are constructed by wise leaders. The best guardrails are informed by biblical principles and take the shape of an adaptable ministry model: We set up appropriate structures,

as we saw in Acts 6, so as many people as possible can participate fully in the family and mission of God.

We must not confuse guardrails with roadblocks. Roadblocks stop forward momentum. Guardrails are different: They exist to help forward movement happen safely and efficiently. Perhaps you have accidentally contributed to a culture of blocking roads toward gospel expansion.

People used to refer to Colorado's Front Range as a "church planters' graveyard." Loads of church planters had parachuted into our region, only to close up shop after a short time. I have heard similar names thrown out all over the country. I kept hearing this phrase, and I couldn't shake it. Eventually, I was tasked with modifying how our church supported church planters. After praying for a few months, devouring a few church-planting books, and having a few too many late-night conversations with church planters, I thought God might be calling us out of the graveyard to another city, more convenient and exciting than my own. After praying over my "desired" place to plant, however, my wife and I recognized it as a figment of my own desire. Turns out it was more about escape than calling. It also turns out my wife is more in tune with the Holy Spirit than I am. I was more confused than ever. In the drive back to my city in our shaky Saturn, I knew it was time to transition from living in my city to making it our home. (I write more about fighting escapism and "the grass is greener in another place" ideology in my book *Staying Is the New Going*.)

After prayer, wise counsel, and confirmation from others, I realized we needed a different process for church planting in

our area. While success in the eyes of others does not necessarily equate to faithfulness, I knew we could find different ways to help church start-ups be more effective. My wife and I sensed the call to stay put and “plant” a church-planting hub right in the church planters’ graveyard.

There is a desperate need for new churches to “live the gospel into” the places they are planting among the people God has placed them around. God does unique things in every place, and we must learn to respect our own place by taking into account the events, traditions, rhythms, food, celebrations, and language of those who reside there.

Today, when the people we train through Frontline Church Planting leave us at the end of their apprenticeships and residencies for their next season of life and ministry, they do so armed with these lasting principles. The principle of *contextualizing the gospel* has become a guardrail for their ministries, informing their model of ministry wherever they go, so that they discover God’s work in a place rather than imposing a church on it. One of our church-planting residents had come from Puerto Rico. When he realized the barriers to launching a church gathering among traditionally Catholic Hispanics, he began making adjustments to his strategy. His commitment to a place and its people became a guardrail for his ministry.

We all need to develop a ministry model, but we cannot rely on it. We are far too skilled at planting churches in our heads and reaching people we’ve never actually met. A model generally works for a limited time in a limited environment. What began as good contextualization can easily become a

crutch to lean on. Models become cemented and regulated like roadblocks. But principles can be applied across contexts. No program can teach every skill, every response, every nugget of wisdom or every biblical truth needed in church leadership. The best preparation for ministry is a simple framework, clear principles, and a learned ability to trust the leading of the Spirit.

PRAY, OBEY, SAY, GET OUT OF THE WAY

It certainly is possible to overstructure and kill momentum before it starts. Many denominations started as thriving, viral movements; over time they added levels of bureaucracy, and their momentum slowed. Some churches are experiencing the same thing. Nearly every denomination with which I have come in contact in the last few years is rapidly recalibrating to address this drag and recover their momentum. Some of the shifts are incredibly exciting!

But most of the church and ministry leaders I know don't struggle with overstructuring. They're entrepreneurial and apostolic; they revel in the pregnant possibility that attends chaos. In the same way that overstructured organizations need to free up room for new ideas that will allow expansion and new movement, understructured leaders need to prepare themselves to keep their momentum from degenerating into chaos.

The following mantra has been a good organizing tool for me: If we are going to multiply our impact and keep in step with God's Kingdom movement, we must *pray, obey, say, and get out of the way*.

Pray for a movement. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). This sets our eyes on a bigger story than our little lives. Prayer paves the way for a movement by readying our hearts and aligning with God. Whether you are pursuing the great commission in your suburban neighborhood, within medical clinics in Ghana, or among your friends who don’t know Jesus, prayer comes first.

I find it helpful, as I pray the Lord’s Prayer, to replace the word *earth* with the name of my region, state, city, neighborhood, or local gathering spot. I pray for God’s Kingdom to come in the Northglenn neighborhood as I picture Rick, Ray, Gina, and Eric, who live just steps from my front door. As I pray over my neighborhood in this way, I begin to see the cracks in the spiritual foundations, and God challenges me and my family to fill those cracks with the mortar of the gospel. When we pray for his Kingdom, God will open our eyes to the brokenness that exists around us, and the opportunities for heaven to come to earth.

A life of prayer doesn’t happen accidentally. Open up your calendar and schedule a time to actively pray. Perhaps you can find a high point in your city where you can look over the sprawl of your place and pray for gospel movement there. I’m a little squirmy, so I love prayer-walking a neighborhood or campus to pray for God’s Kingdom to rule in the beauty and brokenness of that place.

Perhaps coffee shop prayers are more your style. A friend of mine is in the habit of waiting fifteen minutes after sitting down with his cup of coffee to pull out his phone or

computer so he can take that time to pray for those in the shop. In any case, perhaps it's time to take your prayer time out of your prayer closet.

Obey Kingdom impulses. I've never met anyone who claimed the kingdom of this earth isn't busted. I've also never met anyone who didn't want to be part of righting wrongs and changing the world. When we obey the prodding of the Holy Spirit and sense God's Kingdom impulses, others will follow. In the same way that microbusinesses participate in a broader economy, each and every follower of Jesus functions as a priest with authority in God's upside-down Kingdom (Revelation 1:5-6). God's people, working in different spheres of a place, form a Kingdom ecosystem.

When we commit ourselves in advance to obey God's Kingdom impulses, we ready ourselves to be used by God. Words are cheap, but action will cost you. People are skeptical and noncommittal today. We live in a "maybe" culture where we ironically struggle to commit to the right things while chronically battling overcommitment. As your family, your small group, or your church takes new risks to obey God, others will get the courage to follow God in ways that seemed crazy in the past. Maybe the ideas *are* crazy, but people will be emboldened when they see others crazy enough to obey God. The Kingdom ecosystem flourishes when God's people obey Kingdom impulses.

Recall a time you felt led or directed by the Holy Spirit to do something uncomfortable. What was the experience like? What would make you more receptive to similar impulses in the future?

Say what God is up to. I believe every human is tuned in to the rhythm of God's Kingdom. People are trying to make sense of these God impulses, even if they don't know it. Don't try to generate Kingdom work; try to uncover it.

One of the major roles of every spiritual leader is telling what God is doing in our lives and the lives of others. This kind of storytelling is deeply powerful. It validates small victories, assigns meaning to challenges and losses, and inspires people to dream. Story unlocks our heart, shocks our imagination, and activates our faith. Unearthing and celebrating God's work in those around us is one of the greatest investments spiritual leaders can make.

Each Kingdom story births more stories. By celebrating the Kingdom obedience of others, the stories we tell give people permission to participate in God's larger narrative. We must become winsome storytellers of the Kingdom coming around us.

If you want your church to be more mission-minded, evangelistic, or welcoming, don't just preach it from the front. Take some time to reflect on others who are practicing simple obedience. Think through the appropriate venues where you can tell these stories and celebrate the work that God is doing through them. Flank your preaching with stories of ordinary heroes among you who are taking Jesus seriously.

Get out of the way. This is the hardest one for me. Sometimes we, as leaders, are the bottleneck—at times, even the roadblock. God seems to be developing amazing things in front of us, and our flesh pushes us to take credit. At some point the people you lead need to move beyond you and take

responsibility for their own ministry. God, not you, is the master networker and connector.

While our souls long for a movement, our flesh grabs for control, power, and validation. Every follower of Jesus has great possibility—God-given genius—but we also have the capacity to get in the way. If we are living in the way of Jesus, we are servants. As we humbly recognize our role, we must be ready to get out of the way at the right time.

While it can be painful to get out of the way, it's even more fulfilling to hear the stories that come out of people's unique pursuit of Kingdom movement. Kingdom leaders must recognize when their presence in a relationship or ministry is a hindrance. We need to practice what we preach about the priesthood of all believers.

Spend some time thinking through a few areas where you need to get out of the way. Write down the names of a few leaders who might need you to get out of the way in order for them to rise to their full potential.

In order to see a sustained multiplication of disciples, we need a mix of structure and chaos, of method and madness. We need the disciplines of praying, obeying, and saying, along with the humility of getting out of the way. When I was seeking to multiply disciples and leaders with no guardrails, I felt out of control and exhausted. When God met me that day in my helplessness, he gave me the gift of structure. This has helped me to organize the chaos that comes with momentum, so I can better see and respond to what God is doing without limiting the creativity of God's people. Jesus has already launched his movement; his Spirit is continually propelling it

forward. We are invited to join in, commanded against stifling or squelching it, but privileged to do our part to sustain it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Recall a time you obeyed the Holy Spirit and did something uncomfortable. What was the result?

What unique expression of prayer will you make a habit in your life?

What recent stories come to mind of others you know living in obedience to God? How can you tell those stories?

Which areas of leadership or ministry do you need to step away from? Whom might God want to raise up in your place?