

Leadership Letter #13

(Note: this is the 13th in a series of "Leadership Letters" that have been written in the last few months. You can read previous letters at our web-site. Go to www.GraceGlobalNetwork.org and look under the "encouragement" section.)

Some Thoughts on Values

Dear friends,

There is nothing more important in leading than understanding your vision and values. Whether you are leading a church, a missions organization, or a business enterprise, you must know where you are going, what you want to accomplish – and how you are going to get there.

In the last two years, we've done a lot of work in creating synergistic partnerships among churches and church planting movements. In the midst of that, certain values have begun to emerge and gain clarity. I would like to highlight a few of those for you, with the hope that in describing some of our values, it might help you identify some of your own.

1. Shoot Elephants, Not Squirrels

There isn't a lot of meat on the bones of a squirrel. And one accurately placed bullet will not only kill a squirrel, it will probably obliterate it. But an elephant, now that's another story! They're massively huge animals, not easily felled by a single bullet.

When I think about setting goals, I want to go after *huge* goals, not minor and insignificant ones. One example of a big, hairy, audacious goal is "*planting 5,000 missional, reproducing churches to spread the gospel to every man, woman and child with the gospel of Jesus Christ to reach a country for Christ.*" That one will keep you awake at nights!

A corollary to the idea of shooting elephants instead of squirrels is the idea that we must fight the big fights and leave minor skirmishes alone. Christians are famous for "going to war" over every little issue. Learn the art of majoring on the majors and minoring on the minors. There are some issues that we *must* fight for. There are others that are best left alone. It takes wisdom and insight to know the difference.

God is calling churches to radically rethink their passion and strategies for harvesting the unchurched – for penetrating lostness. There is a movement to use improved multiple methods, equipment, and increased number of laborers to work the fields for high-yield church planting results. Churches are being challenged to move from being gardeners to farmers – from church builders to kingdom engineers.

There is no one model for church planting. There are multiple means for starting churches. We are seeing house church movements, intentional multiple starts processes that instill Church planting DNA into the new churches, reclaiming declining churches for new church beginnings, and still some traditional church plants. The style of worship varies as well depending on the context. There are churches for the boomers and busters, the X'ers, the cowboys, the bikers, the

skaters, the hip-hop, and the homeless. Excitement is building in the churches that are starting new churches. With these new starts often comes a revival within the "mother churches.

Don't waste your life on the insignificant. Don't settle for mediocrity. Leave a mark that is hard to erase. And watch God smile.

2. Put Your Best Foot Forward

Every believer has at least one spiritual gift. I believe we all have quite a few gifts, though some may be latent and undeveloped. Spiritual gifts are divine enablements for fruitful ministry. When I function in areas of giftedness, there is a freedom and fruitfulness that comes through. Every person is unique and has a God-given SHAPE that allows him to minister uniquely and effectively (see Leadership Letter #9).

The same is true about churches and ministries. My friend Jim Abrahamson from Chapel Hill, NC, has written a book entitled "*Put Your Best Foot Forward: How to Minister from Your Strength*" (Abingdon Press, 1994). It is an intriguing book that details the strengths and concerns of six different types of churches. His thesis is that every church has at least one strength area and we should build on that. It's the same idea that is put forth by business consultants who say we should maximize and focus on our strengths and minimize and not become pre-occupied with our weaknesses. See if you can identify with the six types of churches that Abrahamson describes:

- The reaching-up (worship-centered) church is challenged to experience the presence of God without being too sensually oriented.
- The reaching-down (Bible teaching) church is praised for interpreting the Bible faithfully and yet must not love and worship the truths of Scripture more than Christ Himself.
- The reaching-in (relationally and fellowship) church is challenged to care for people with grace and love without compromising truth and discipline.
- The reaching-out (market-driven, evangelistic) church must be contextual without looking and smelling like the world.
- The reaching-back (historical, traditional) church must preserve and appreciate its heritage without killing its freshness and power.
- The reaching-forward (social action) church has the task of impacting our culture as wise ambassadors and not as angry fools.

When partnerships are formed between various ministries, there must be cooperation with other church leaders and a sincere appreciation for their strengths and what they bring to the table. Abrahamson, the former teaching-pastor at Chapel Hill Bible Church, saw his congregation help other denominations start new congregations. Putting your best foot forward is a better course of action than losing your balance and kicking your neighbors who are not ministering in the same way.

3. Build on Islands of Strength and Health

When we seek to introduce ministries to each other, we want to maximize impact. We want ministry partners to conclude, *"We can do something together that is stronger and better than anything we could ever do separately."*

The North American church is remarkably diverse. And everyone believes they are in the center of God's will, doing things *His* way. The implication, often, is that others that are different are somehow less biblical, less worthy of God's blessing, and less likely to be used by God in the harvest.

Allow me to shatter your misconceptions with this statement: *there are no perfect churches – including yours!* Your church probably has some great things going for it ... but it also has some incredible weaknesses. And God raises up every one of those churches that seek to honor His name for a particular purpose.

I was talking with Todd Milby recently. Todd is the director of *The Infinity Alliance* in SouthWest Florida, a cooperative movement of church planting efforts attempting to reach every man, woman and child in America with the gospel. He was talking about the relationship between his church, Summit Church, in Bonita Springs, and another local church of a different denomination and quite different in its style and DNA make-up. Describing this other church, Todd said, *"We've got to do everything we can to help them succeed, because they will reach a type of person that we never will at Summit. And if they fail, we're going to have to go back and plant another church just like theirs to reach those types of people."*

Todd understands a great principle: it takes all types of churches to reach all types of people. In forming cooperative partnerships, we must value the strengths and health of ministries that may be quite different from ours.

4. Be the Platform, Not the Show

I was recently with a group of church planting movement leaders from all over North America. These people represented "the best of the best" when it came to innovation, progressive thinking and impact for Jesus Christ. In one session, I was presenting the idea that our goal is not "church planting," but the fulfillment of the Great Commission, giving every man, woman and child the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some of them just didn't get it. They were so caught up doing *their thing* that they forgot the real reason they existed. Church planting is the platform, not the show.

You may find it interesting to note that God never told the world to go to church, but many times He commanded the church to go to the world. The goal of a local church is not to offer the best of programming to its constituency so that they will feel better about themselves. The message of the Church is not so much "come and see" as it is "come and be sent." Yes, the church must focus on growing disciples ... but not for the sake of having a bunch of mature believers, but so that the church might make an impact in the world around it. The church is the platform, not the show.

I remember speaking at *Family Life Marriage Conferences* around the country. Those "Weekends to Remember" were wonderful times ... but the conference itself was not

the goal. Life and marriage transformation was. "The show" was what would take place in homes, small groups and community impact as a result of the conference.

Some of you are involved in ministries where you bring together resources from many different sources. Maybe you train leaders. Perhaps you facilitate organizational development and growth. Remember, you are the platform, not the show.

We must never forget what we're all about.

Till next time,

Henry Oursler