

## Chapter 1

# Biblical Perspectives of Planning

Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.

—Proverbs 16:3

If you are struggling with any of the following problems or questions, this book, *Church and Ministry Strategic Planning*, may be very important to you.

Why is there so much confusion among our associate pastors on what we are trying to accomplish?

Why is there so much dissension and disagreement in this church?

Why is there such a high turnover of people in our church, especially in leadership positions?

Why did we build that building when it is not being used?

As a pastor, why am I working 12 hours a day, and can never keep up?

Why have we failed on a number of projects and missions?

Why did God let us down?

Why is the Devil stopping us?

Why have the elders asked me to resign after everything I have put into this church or ministry?

Why does this church lack enthusiasm?

If you are wrestling with one of these questions, the answer might be that your church or ministry lacks good long-term strategic planning. Part of strategic planning is the team-building approach of developing leaders and involving people in the plan.

### ***PLANNING IS IMPORTANT***

Planning as part of the management process is crucial to the success of any organization. This is especially true for the Church, although little research has been done on the relationship of planning to successful church ministry. Recently, however, an empirical study of the relationship between the use of the planning process and ministry effectiveness was conducted among senior pastors in one denomination. The study found that

- Larger churches (congregations of 250 or more) are more inclined to engage in written long-range planning;
- Most churches had been using long-range planning for less than three years and achieved attendance increases of 100 percent, twice the growth rate experienced by churches not using long-range planning;
- Ministry effectiveness was increased by the presence of written yearly and long-range plans;
- The lack of a written plan (yearly and/or long-range) hindered the ability of the church/pastor to be effective in ministering to the community.

The most important conclusion, according to the author of this research study, is that

pastors and church leaders must be taught the importance of utilizing administration and management skills, especially planning, in the Church. They must also be given the tools necessary to incorporate planning into the ministries of the churches they serve. It is only through prayer and the use of the planning process that the Church, as an organization, can effectively fulfill the Great Commission that it has been given. (Bums 1992)

Of a large number of decisions made by a church or by an individual pastor there are a handful that can significantly impact the future of the church or pastor. These strategic decisions require careful identification and thoughtful consideration. This is the nature of the role of strategic planning.

Perspectives of strategic thinking can be illustrated with this question: Who are the two most important persons responsible for the success of an airplane's flight? Typical responses would be

- the pilot and the navigator,
- the pilot and the maintenance supervisor,
- the pilot and the air traffic controller, or
- the pilot and the flight engineer

All of these responses recognize the day-to-day hands-on importance of the pilot, and they all introduce one of several other important support or auxiliary functionaries to the answer. However, each of these segmented responses ignores the one person who is perhaps the single most important individual to the ultimate success of the airplane—the designer. The pilot and the designer are perhaps the two most important individuals to the success of an airplane: the pilot because of his day-to-day responsibilities in commanding the craft, and the designer because of his ability to create a concept that can be economically constructed, easily operated by any normally competent flight crew, and maintained safely by the ground crew.

Most contemporary pastors perceive themselves as the "pilot" of the church: taking off, landing, conferring with the navigator, and communicating with the air traffic controller. They generally view themselves as the chief hands-on operational manager. However, what has been most lacking in churches and ministries in the past few years has been an appreciation for the strategic viewpoint. There is a need for more emphasis on the "designer's" approach to operating a church or ministry. A well-conceived strategic planning system can facilitate this emphasis.

In a similar analogy, consider the illustration offered in the book, *The Master Builder* (Benjamin, Durkin, and Iverson 1985, 45) in which church strategic planning and flying are compared. The authors note that, before radios and instruments became common in small planes, pilots had to fly by visual flight rules. This meant that after take-off the plane had to be oriented in the right direction by some visual landmarks, perhaps a mountain that could be seen 50 miles out on the horizon. By keeping their eyes fixed on that landmark, the pilots could keep the plane steady and moving straight toward a long-range destination. A plane's magnetic compass

needle would tend to sway, causing the plane to swerve back and forth in a wide zig-zag pattern. It could not provide steady direction because of its short-term gyrations. A pilot who tried to follow it strictly might never reach the destination, especially if fuel was limited.

This analogy clearly illustrates the difference between a short- and long-term perspective: one is choppy, erratic, and wastes fuel; the other guides the plane on a steady, constant, and certain course. A church without a long-term planning perspective faces the same situation. Instead of moving steadily toward God's goals, it will continually swerve off course due to the endless distractions that can prevent a church from pursuing God's purpose and vision. Thus, strategic planning is one of the keys to success of any undertaking and nowhere is it more important than in churches and ministries.

### **WHAT IS PLANNING?**

Planning may be defined as a managerial activity which involves analyzing the environment, setting objectives, deciding on specific actions needed to reach the objectives, and also providing feedback on results. This process should be distinguished from the plan itself, which is a written document containing the results of the planning process; it is a written statement of what is to be done and how it is to be done. Planning is a continuous process which both precedes and follows other functions, in which plans are made and executed, and results are used to make new plans as the process continues.

### **TYPES OF PLANS**

There are many types of plans but most can be categorized as *strategic* or *tactical*. Strategic plans cover a long period of time and may be referred to as a *long-term* plan. They are broad in scope and basically answer the question of how an organization is to commit its resources over the next five to ten years. Strategic plans are altered on an infrequent basis to reflect changes in the environment or overall direction of the ministry.

Tactical plans cover a short time period, usually a year or less. They are often referred to as *short-term* or *operational* plans. They specify what is to be done in a given year to move the organization toward its long-term objectives. In other words, what we do this year (short term) needs to be tied to where we want to be five to ten years in the future (long term).

Most churches and ministries which have been involved in planning have focused on short-term rather than long-term planning. Although this is better than not planning at all, it also means each year's plan is not related to anything long-term in nature and usually fails to move the organization to where it wants to be in the future.

Programs and events require planning. A ministry *program* is a large set of activities involving a whole area of a church's capabilities, such as planning for a church day school program. Planning for programs involves

1. dividing the total set of activities into meaningful parts;
2. assigning planning responsibility for each part to appropriate people;
3. assigning target dates for completion of plans;
4. determining and allocating the resources needed for each part.

Each major program or division within a church or ministry should have a strategic plan in place to provide a blueprint for the program over time.

A ministry *event* is generally of less scope and complexity. It is also not likely to be repeated on a regular basis. An event may be a part of a broader program or it may be self-contained. Even though it is a one-time event, planning is essential to accomplishing the objectives of the project and coordinating the activities which make up the event. A plan to have a "friend day" would be an example of a project plan.

#### ADVANTAGES OF PLANNING FOR CHURCHES AND MINISTRIES

Why should a church or ministry devote time to planning? Consider the following questions:

Do you know where you are going and how you are going to get there?

Does everyone know what you are trying to accomplish?

Do all those involved know what is expected of them?

If the answer to any of these is no, then your church or ministry needs to develop a long-range plan with as many people involved as possible. Alvin J. Lindgren observed that

most churches do not engage in such systematic long-range planning. Perhaps this is one reason why the church has not been able to reach and change society more effectively. Many churches operate on hand-to-mouth planning. They consider the pressing problems of the moment at each board meeting without placing them in proper perspective in relationship to either past or future. (1965, 226)

In many small churches, pastors may object to planning, thinking that it makes no sense for them, since theirs is only a small organization and everyone in the congregation knows what happened in the past year and what is likely to happen in the coming year. Another frequent objection is that there is no time for planning. A third is that there are not enough resources to allow for planning. All of these objections actually point out the necessity for planning even in the small church. Such an organization may actually have a sizeable budget, making it imperative to have a plan of where the church is heading. The observation that there is no time for planning may seem accurate, but this is probably due to the lack of planning in the past, which has left insufficient time for attention to such necessities. Finally, the argument that there are insufficient resources actually justifies the role of planning in order to obtain the maximum benefit from those resources being used in the church or ministry. Thus, planning is a critical element in any church's success.

Planning has many advantages. For example, it helps church or ministry administrators to adapt to changing environments, take advantage of opportunities created by change, reach agreements on major issues, and place responsibility more precisely. It also gives a sense of direction to staff members as well as providing a basis for gaining their commitment. The sense of vision that can be provided

in a well-written plan also instills a sense of loyalty in church or ministry members or constituents.

A church can benefit from the planning process because this systematic, continuing process allows it to

1. assess the church's market position. This involves what is termed a SWOT analysis—examining the church's internal Strengths and Weaknesses and external Opportunities and Threats. Without explicit planning these elements may go unrecognized.
2. establish goals, objectives, priorities, and strategies to be completed within specified time periods. Planning will enable the church to assess accomplishment of the goals that are set and will help motivate staff and members to work together to achieve shared goals.
3. achieve greater staff and member commitment and teamwork aimed at meeting challenges and solving problems presented by changing conditions.
4. muster its resources to meet these changes through anticipation and preparation. "Adapt or die" is a very accurate admonition.

Pastors cannot control the future, but they should attempt to identify and isolate present actions and forecast how results can be expected to influence the future. The primary purpose of planning, then, is to ensure that current programs can be used to increase the chances of achieving future objectives and goals; that is, to increase the chances of making better decisions today that affect tomorrow's performance.

Unless planning leads to improved performance, it is not worthwhile. Thus, to have a church or ministry that looks forward to the future and tries to stay alive and prosper in a changing environment, there must be active, vigorous, continuous, and creative planning. Otherwise, a church will only react to its environment.

There are basically two reasons for planning: (1) protective benefits resulting from reduced chances for error in decision making, and (2) positive benefits, in the form of increased success in reaching ministry objectives.

Often, when pastors and churches plan poorly, they must constantly devote their energies to solving problems that would not have existed, or at least would be much less serious, with planning. They spend their time fighting fires rather than practicing fire prevention.

Long-range planning can become a means of renewal in the life of a congregation if the following points are remembered:

1. A unified purpose can be achieved only when all segments of the life of the church see themselves as part of a larger whole with a single goal;
2. Isolated individual decisions and commitments often influence future plans, even when they are not intended to do so;
3. When careful planning is lacking, groups in the church often become competitive and duplicate one another's work;
4. Without coordinated planning, groups in the church may come to feel they are ends in themselves and lose their sense of perspective in relation to the church;
5. Long-range planning is demanded by the magnitude of each church's task. (Lindgren 1965, 231)

### ***PLANNING'S PLACE IN THE CHURCH OR MINISTRY***

All pastors engage in planning to some degree. As a general rule, the larger the church becomes, the more the primary planning activities become associated with groups of people as opposed to individuals.

Many larger churches develop a planning committee or staff. Organizations set up such a planning group for one or more of the following reasons:

1. *Planning takes time.* A planning group can reduce the workload of individual staff or members.
2. *Planning takes coordination.* A planning group can help integrate and coordinate the planning activities of individual staff.
3. *Planning takes expertise.* A planning group can bring to a particular problem more tools and techniques than any single individual.

4. *Planning takes objectivity.* A planning group can take a broader view than one individual and go beyond specific projects and particular church departments.

A planning group generally has three basic areas of responsibility. First, it assists the pastor in developing goals, policies, and strategies for the church. The group facilitates the planning process by scanning and monitoring the church's environment. A second major responsibility of the group is to coordinate the planning of different levels and units within the church. Finally, the planning group acts as an organizational resource for pastors who lack expertise in planning.

In smaller churches, planning and execution must usually be carried out by the same people. The greatest challenge is to set aside time for planning in the midst of all the other day-to-day activities.

### ***RESISTANCE TO THE PLANNING PROCESS***

There are three main reasons why planning does not get done in churches and ministries today: (1) pastors and members lack training, (2) many perceive it as unscriptural, and (3) problems in implementation.

#### ***Lack of Management Training***

The majority of churches in the United States have fewer than 200 active members, according to the data available from major denominations (Boyce 1984, 96). Most pastors have minimal management education and experience before entering active ministry and want to spend their time performing pastoral functions for which they are trained. Furthermore, few of these churches can or do draw on a pool of lay people with management training or skills. As such, the planning, objective setting, and other management functions are largely neglected.

#### ***Planning Is Thought to Be Unscriptural***

Planning and objective setting of the strategic type have been largely neglected or purposely avoided by churches. This reluctance

to plan stems from the fact that many view the application of strategic planning as inappropriate and unspiritual (Van Auken and Johnson 1984, 85). Some have felt that because churches are not businesses, they must not be managed as such: spiritual management is required for a spiritual organization. According to this view, church leaders are supposed to manage through God's perfect guidance and direction, to wait patiently for God to make things happen rather than "forcing things to happen." Furthermore, churches are admonished to strive for truly spiritual goals, not the numerical or quantifiable goals stressed in business (Myers 1983,34).

Although planning has received more and more recognition for its applicability to churches, there are still some who doubt its worth to a religious organization.

Many people are "Anti-planner," not just passively, but actively! ... But once we begin to see that for the Christian, planning is making statements of faith about what God wants us to do and be, the Anti-planners may become converts. (Buckingham 1982, 1,3)

For example, a pastor may be ridiculed by some for setting numeric goals, as this may not seem to be "religious." Often it is believed that the pastor is taking on the world's standards if he operates using business skills that have been applied to the secular world. But the same pastor may have no second thoughts about using the same type of sound system used by a business or even a rock band. A sound system is not good or bad in itself but rather the issue is how it is used. Planning which moves the church away from God's call is just bad planning; but planning as an activity is not bad in itself. The same can be said of money. The love of money is the root of all evil, not money itself.

A careful study of the Bible demonstrates the appropriateness and necessity for believers to plan their daily affairs. What does the Bible say about planning? We believe the Holy Spirit helps us know God's will and actions that are anointed. We do our best, then ask God for His best. Our spirit confirms when the right plan is in the will of God. Nothing in this book is meant to imply that the Lord is

to be left out. Remember that a church's master plan should be the Master's plan for that church. Consider the following Bible verses:

|                            |                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Luke</i> 14:28          | Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? |
| <i>1 Corinthians</i> 14:40 | But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.                                                                               |
| <i>Proverbs</i> 16:3       | Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.                                                                          |
| <i>Proverbs</i> 16:9       | In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.                                                                   |
| <i>Psalms</i> 20:4         | May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed.                                                                 |
| <i>Colossians</i> 3:23     | Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.                                                    |
| <i>Proverbs</i> 15:22      | Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.                                                                      |
| <i>Proverbs</i> 20:5       | The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.                                                 |
| <i>Proverbs</i> 24:3       | By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established.                                                                  |
| <i>1 Corinthians</i> 14:33 | For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.                                                                                            |

In Appendix A we provide an extensive list of Bible verses related to planning.

### ***Implementation Problems***

Although there is much academic and theoretical support for planning, the actual implementation of it often runs aground on the shores of ministry reality. Even among very progressive churches you find significant resistance to planning. Some of the most common arguments against it are:

1. planning is not action oriented;
2. planning takes too much time, we are too busy to plan;
3. planning is unrealistic because of the rapid change in our environment (demographics, etc.);
4. planning becomes an end, not just a means to an end.

Many of these arguments stem from the same kind of thinking that would rank the pilot as the most important person in the success of an airplane. To be helpful, planning does not depend on complete forecasting accuracy. In fact, a variety of futuristic alternatives or scenarios can be very helpful in establishing planning parameters. Often a best-, most-likely-, and worst-case approach is used. This three-level forecast gives dimension to the process of recognizing, anticipating, and managing change.

The objection that planning is not "hands-on" and related to the important day-to-day operations of the church is frequent. However, this point of view is shortsighted in terms of long-term success. Planning is not just for dreamers, in fact, it lets the church administrative team determine what can be done today to accomplish or avoid some future circumstance.

Planning sometimes becomes an end in the minds of some users. This is particularly true when planning is solely a committee responsibility within a church. A committee staff can facilitate the strategic planning process, but the process will not be a dynamic life-blood activity of the organization without the ongoing involvement of the pastor and staff members. President Eisenhower has been widely quoted as saying, "Plans are nothing, planning is everything." The trust he expressed was that the actual plan itself was not the end, but that the process of planning-developing futuristic scenarios, evaluating the environment and competition, assessing internal strengths and capabilities, revising objectives and tactics-was the organization dialogue that was most important. This church dialogue ideally breaks down barriers to communication, exposes blind spots, tests logic, measures the environment, and determines feasibility. The end result is more effective and efficient implementation of ministry activity.

Yet, the advantages of planning far outweigh any of these and other perceived disadvantages. Planning not only should be done but must be done.

### *THE GREATEST NEEDS OF TODAY'S MINISTRIES AND CHURCHES*

In our own informal surveys both denominational and non-denominational pastors appeared to be unanimous in their beliefs that strategic planning is important. To put matters into perspective, let us try to translate church and ministry success into a formula:

$$X = f(A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I \dots)$$

In this case X is success for the church or ministry, a dependent variable, and is on the left side of the equation. The = sign means a balance, or equal to what is on the other side; the f means "a function of." On the right side are all the independent variables that affect success:

- A. pastor as spiritual leader
- B. pastor as manager
- C. planning system
- D. organization system
- E. control system
- F. needs of people met
- G. denomination's national influence
- H. denomination's local influence
- I. location
- etc.

Only a few independent variables are listed, but the possibilities are endless. Notice that success is not necessarily equated to size. We are defining success in broader terms than church members, budget, and so forth. There seems to be a widespread notion that size is the only barometer, but we do not hold that belief.

God has raised up many spiritual leaders. We believe the greatest problems holding back these leaders-and the churches and minis-

tries they serve-involve some combination of independent variables B,  $\Theta$ , D, and E. Management, planning, organization, and control are some of the greatest needs of churches and ministries today.

We assume that every pastor is to some degree a spiritual leader, or he could not remain in the pulpit. However, his entire ministry and the success of his church are in direct proportion to variables B,  $\Theta$ , D, and E. If you assume all other variables are constant and full effort goes into B,  $\Theta$ , D, and E, then the X factor (success), the dependent variable, has to increase. Without training and knowledge in the area of planning and management, the church and ministry have a ceiling on success. No organization can get any bigger than the capacity of its managers to manage. The hindrance is not the needs of the people, for needs are always there. It is not the denomination or location, it is plainly management, planning, organization, and control.

If pastors and evangelists could improve each of these areas just a little each year, they would be much more successful. They could drastically reduce all the obvious errors in direction, false starts, dissipated efforts, frustrated staff members, and waste. The religious world is ripe for criticism by almost anyone looking for waste and inefficiency.

Christians should not wait until someone comes along and creates a big scandal about waste and inefficiency. We need to put our shoulders to the wheel and pay attention to management, planning, organization, control, and people. If we do not, on the whole, the church will accomplish in the next 50 years about what it did in the last 50 years-it will maintain the status quo.

Our observation is that many people in ministry and church work are reluctant to plan, do not want a plan in writing, and do not ask for advice. The tendency is to be led by "the Spirit," which is sometimes a whim or emotional impulse. This reflects our general American inclination to "hang loose." Probably 75 percent of the profit-making organizations that we have observed or worked with have the same problem. The 25 percent that have the discipline to plan and manage properly far outperform those that do not. Higher profits, better service, and lower turnover are but a few of the

rewards. The same good fortune comes to those ministries and churches that have the discipline to plan and manage properly.

Many times Christians say "The Devil is fighting us" when a plan or project goes sour. We are not discounting a demon force, but in many instances the Devil does not need to fight Christians. Could it be that we hold ourselves back? The Devil can sleep late and rest while we run around in circles. He does not need to work hard. We are our own worst enemies. Many church or ministry failures can be traced to poor planning, lack of getting people involved in the planning, and generally poor management. We often sense a spirit of extreme urgency in church ministry planning. This is used as a "go for it-if it is of the Lord, it will prosper" mentality. What is the rush? Many churches and ministries need to slow down, plan, and pray. Often they have rushed around in circles for the past few years. We do not believe God will give His best until we give our best. Included in doing our best is using the best planning and management philosophies and techniques available.

The need for the performance of managerial functions in churches in order for them to be more effective ministerially has long been recognized. Vast social questions and complex conditions in almost every community emphasize the need for good management in churches (Hale 1984, 30).

Where planning in churches occurs without quantitative goals which are clearly understood and widely supported, vigorous progress is unlikely and probably impossible. The importance of setting goals is to provide direction and unity of purpose, but it must be the congregation's goal, as it is not the planners but the congregation that will ensure the plan's success. However, a balance should be struck and the two mistakes of planning extremes, those of asking the congregation to do either all the thinking or none, must be avoided. Planning is important to bring these objectives to fruition. This is not easy, but the alternative is for the church to be tossed to and fro, buffeted by every unforeseen circumstance, and blown off course (Gray 1983).

We see creative planning as the church's hope for the future. Visionary thinking, solid purpose, or long-range dreams should be first in the basic concern of the church ministry. In a society where many institutions are becoming stagnant, it is imperative that

churches have an expanding vision. Church planning has never been met with much enthusiasm. Even in larger churches, the enthusiasm for a plan seldom extends beyond a year unless it involves a new building. No matter how misunderstood and poorly appreciated planning is, it is a major factor in sharing the hope for the world-the gospel of Christ (McDonough 1975, 5).

Every pastor needs a vision or a dream. Mission statements and dreams are the vessels through which your desires are fulfilled. Without a specific goal, a vision is no vision.

### SUMMARY

We have attempted to establish in this chapter our belief that (1) methods used successfully in industry are applicable to churches and ministries; (2) there is a place for better planning and management; (3) many pastors do believe that there is a need for planning; (4) most of the identifiable failures cannot be blamed on the Devil; and (5) the Bible supports, overall, a growing sense of the planning concept.

The philosophy of this book is that in order for everyone in the church or ministry-the elders, the pastor, the congregation-to be successful, a strategic plan is desperately needed. If you look at the mistakes of the past, it is obvious that many churches and ministries have followed the zig-zag flight pattern described earlier. Over years of consulting with churches and ministries, the authors have observed this exact pattern again and again. If you take the time and effort to study this book, follow up on your people, apply the format prescribed here, and prayerfully keep God in every step of the plan, here is what we believe you can expect.

1. A sense of enthusiasm in your church or ministry
2. A five-year plan in writing to which everyone is committed
3. A sense of commitment by the entire church to its overall direction
4. Clear job duties and responsibilities
5. Time for the leaders to do what they have been called to do
6. Clear and evident improvement in the health and vitality of every member of the church staff

7. Measurable improvement in the personal lives of all those in responsible positions with time for vacations, family, and personal pursuits
8. The ability to measure very specifically the growth and contribution made by senior pastors or evangelists at the close of their careers
9. Guaranteed leadership of the church or ministry because a plan is in place in writing and is understood—even more importantly, a management team and philosophy will be in place to guide the church or ministry into its next era of growth

In the next chapter we present an overview of the entire strategic planning process; in Appendix B we also provide an outline of a strategic plan. Then, in the following chapters, we cover each step of the planning process. We explain the theory behind each step, and give actual examples to help you to understand that step. Make notes on your own situation as you read. Read on with excitement.