

# **LEADING CHANGE**

**WHEN NOBODY  
WANTS IT**



**PREPARING YOURSELF &  
YOUR CHURCH FOR MOVEMENT**

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 **CHURCH ANSWERS**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **INTRODUCTION**

We've Never Done It That Way Before!

## **CHAPTER ONE**

Four Hurdles to Change

## **CHAPTER TWO**

Why Your Church Resists the Concept of Change

## **CHAPTER THREE**

Why Your Church Resists the Implementation of Change

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

Why the Status Quo is So Tempting (and Dangerous)

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

Twelve Foundational Principles for Change  
When Nobody Wants It

## **CHAPTER SIX**

Balancing the Tensions of Leading Change

## **CONCLUSION**

The Blessing of God Himself

# INTRODUCTION

## WE'VE NEVER DONE IT THAT WAY BEFORE!

You have probably heard about this church. Its story has been in print for quite a while. The church was new, assembling together after the departure of their leader. From a human perspective, their future was bleak. No one outside the church expected them to succeed. Probably some of the church members themselves were wavering in their faith as well, but they tenaciously held to their conviction that something great was about to happen. Well, something did happen. Something almost unbelievable happened.

This church exploded. From a faithful few, three thousand became followers of Christ and were baptized *in one day!* And the growth and conversions continued daily. The church, of course, was the first church. The town was Jerusalem. And the story of the explosive growth is detailed in Acts 1-7.

Now you might expect that such a church would not have to deal with some of the same issues as those in the established church. Such unparalleled evangelistic growth may seem to have little in common with the many struggling established churches today. But all churches, to different degrees, are confronted with the not-always-so-pleasant constant called change.

I suspect that the first church handled the initial change well. After all, the words of Jesus' promise had been fulfilled at Pentecost. The power of the Holy Spirit was on the church. Thousands were following Christ. The people of Jerusalem were in awe of the church. Excitement



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abounded. Hope was fulfilled. The rag-tag followers of Christ were making an obvious difference in the Kingdom. This type of change was obviously well received.

But another major change impacted the church later. Jesus had commissioned the church to be witnesses not only in Jerusalem, but “in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” as well (Acts 1:8). The church responded obediently to the first part of the command; the followers were definitely witnesses in Jerusalem. But what happened to the obedience to the other parts of the command—to extend the witness to all of Judea, Samaria, even to the ends of the earth? Is it possible that the church was satisfied with its work? Was there resistance in

responding to leave Jerusalem? Did the change associated with leaving their homes just seem too painful?

Whatever their motives for remaining in Jerusalem, the church did not initially fulfill all of Christ’s command. God eventually allowed persecution of the church so that the people would scatter (Acts 8:4). Men, women, and children left their homes and moved to other locations to escape persecution. The gospel was proclaimed wherever these believers traveled. Is it possible that such fierce persecution was necessary to initiate change in the early church? Was this action necessary to break the holy huddles in Jerusalem?

While some of the points are speculative, the central theme is the same: Churches have been dealing with change since Pentecost. One of the most important factors in the health of a church is the manner in which its leaders initiate and handle change. It is especially critical in the established church.



That tattered hymnal, that lumpy pew cushion, that dusty electric organ—people can hang on to them like an old pair of underwear. It doesn't make much sense, other than change is difficult, even small change.

I should have remembered this principle when I tried to lead a previous church to switch worship times. The traditional service would move to the 8:30 a.m. slot, and the contemporary service would take the 11:00 a.m. time. It was a simple change, nothing fundamental. Everyone could still have their service just the way they liked, albeit at a different time. The resistance and opposition were fierce. The pain was real. The tension was palpable. I received hate mail. Two deacons bordered on needing an exorcism. I promise I saw their heads spin around.

I backed down.

When we lead established churches to change, we must respect and understand the feelings of those who resist change. Yet at the same time, if the issue is truly one of eternal importance, we must press on. “We’ve never done it that way before” is often cited as the seven last words of a dying church. A close relative to that statement is “We’ve tried it before, but it didn’t work.” These statements alone are not the true obstacles to change, but they do point to four hurdles.



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# CHAPTER ONE

## FOUR HURDLES TO CHANGE

Does the established nature of some churches hinder innovation? Is an established structure antithetical to quick, nimble changes? For most established churches, yes, but it does not mean established churches cannot innovate or change.

A church plant is an innovation. I define innovation as the process of successfully establishing something new. To introduce something new—and to get it to work longer than a month—is innovation. Perhaps some luck into the right change at the right time. Perhaps some churches land on the right demographic with the right leadership. Not all innovations are intentional or well-planned. But an effective church plant should be noted as innovation.

As churches become more established, they tend to be less prone to change. By its nature, an established church has a system in place that pushes against change. To establish is to create firm stability. Churches need stability.

For example, a discipleship process that is not rooted into the culture of the church (or established) is not likely to last long. And it's only a matter of time before the innovative church plant begins to feel the pull of becoming established. Everything is new only once, after all.

While stability is necessary, every church should also innovate. Established churches, in particular, can take comfort in the establishment. Traditions and history can easily become a guise for complacency. Change can take a back seat to the entrenched processes that help



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create the stability. So what hurdles to change exist in the established church? Here are four examples.

1

**The first hurdle is a lack of intentionality.** Generally, established churches have more resources than new churches. When resources are limited, churches must be more intentional about innovation. Failure—especially one that is expensive—can quickly derail a church with limited resources. When resources are plentiful, the temptation is to be less intentional. Established churches can generally absorb more failures. But a practice of spaghetti-against-the-wall-and-see-what-sticks is not true innovation. It's haphazard chaos. Give it a month and see how many people get annoyed.

2

**The second hurdle is a lack of originality.** Established churches should build on their foundations, but please don't slap a new logo on an existing program and call it innovation. Innovation is introducing something new, not introducing something with the façade of newness.

3

**The third hurdle is the wrong metrics.** What gets measured gets done, and what you measure is typically an indicator of what you value. A mature church will measure different things than a new church. Most church plants are not attempting to track down meeting minutes from a dozen committees for next week's business meeting. And established churches don't have to worry about the retention ratio of people from a launch service. However, an overemphasis on the metrics sustaining the establishment will inevitably deemphasize innovation and dissuade team members from attempting change.

4

**The fourth hurdle is the ease of appeasement.** In an established church, some leaders prefer the ease of appeasing members rather than changing to reach new people. Obviously, a long-term member may not desire to be

appeased, but rather challenged. However, most churches have a segment of people who would rather rest in the stability of the establishment. It's not necessarily a sin issue, and leaders should care about all members whatever their spiritual maturity. Appeasing existing members, however, is much easier than challenging a church to change and reach new people. Even in a healthy established church—one ready to reach outwardly—change is a challenge.

The typical established church has several groups of people who joined during different seasons of the church for different reasons. Even when people agree to reach outwardly, getting them to agree on timing, direction, budgeting, and pace is a challenge. It's easier to appease. But appeasement never leads to positive change.

Though established churches are not new, they can still introduce new things. They can innovate. They can change. Hurdles exist. These hurdles, however, are surmountable. Later in this book, I'll share some principles to help guide you through the change process. Before I get to *what* churches must do to change, let's examine *why* people resist change.

## CHAPTER TWO

### WHY YOUR CHURCH RESISTS THE CONCEPT OF CHANGE

"It's my first week, what should I change here?" Perhaps new pastors don't vocalize the question, but I know they think it. The default setting to change something is only natural for a good leader. Having a vision means being dissatisfied with the status quo.

"The search committee said they were bringing me on to make needed changes. Why is the church resisting the obvious?!" Why have so many pastors' honeymoons ended after the first month? Resistance to change is one of the largest hurdles in leadership. Every church leader



has been there. We've all met the resistance. Understanding why your congregation resists change will help you guide them through change.

Let's begin with pastors who are new to a church. The first thing to realize is that you are the change. Even if you change nothing—and I mean absolutely nothing—in your first year as a pastor, the people will still experience a huge change: you. You are not new to yourself, but you certainly are new to the people of the church. Any change efforts you introduce in your first few months are only magnified by the fact that people are still trying to get to know who you are.

A second reason churches resist change has to do with leaders who do not properly recognize the type of change they are recommending.

There are *technical* changes and *cultural* changes, and these two types of change are entirely different. When people say they want change, they often mean technical changes. Technical problems require a specific expertise. For many, pastors are seen as the hired expert on hand to work through technical problems. People desiring technical changes ask these types of questions: Can you make sure my curriculum is in my room? Can you see that the church is not so hot in the summer? Why haven't I received the newsletter? These questions involve small technical changes, but often people desire large technical changes too, like a new building.

Technical changes are important. If you pastor a church of any size, then you must manage the organization of people. Few people, however, understand that lasting change is cultural, not technical. Cultural problems are not solved by just a technical expert, but rather these changes involve a general acceptance of everyone. If you are a leader, then you're most likely gravitating towards the cultural changes you believe



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need to be made. That's what leaders do. They challenge the status quo. But you must realize that very few people in your church default to cultural changes. There's a reason why some things get embedded in the culture of a church. Most people find them acceptable.

Let me give you an example of technical and cultural changes. Perhaps this example will hit close to home. At a previous church, the worship pastor and I made an easy technical change. It took about an hour. We set up drums. Then we used the drums in the worship service. Easy change, right? Nope. The post-service conversations still echo today.



Every part of me wanted to argue. I wanted to push back. I wanted to show how electricity had not been invented at the time of John the Baptist, so an electric organ could in no way be "biblical." Their attitudes stunk. But my motivation was wrong.

I wanted them to change, but rather than doing the hard work of dealing with the culture in the church, I decided to force-feed technical changes. Most technical changes are relatively easy compared with the harder work of leading cultural change.

The reason some in the church pushed back against drums is not because they opposed the instrument *technically*. We used CD tracks with the choir that contained drums. For my detractors, putting them in



the church was a symbol to them that went against the *culture* of the congregation. They associated drums with the rebellion of the rock music movement in the 1960s. And they did not want rebellion represented in the church. Rather than methodically teaching people about the importance of contextualizing the music in worship, I simply made a technical change. And of course, the change did not stick within the culture.

A third reason churches resist change has to do with the one proposing the change (which is most likely you). Just because people like you and send you nice cards doesn't necessarily mean they fully trust you. Even when people respect the office of pastor, not knowing the person who fills that spot often leads to a cautious acceptance from the congregation. Respect and trust are two different mindsets. People may respect you while not fully trusting you. Earn their trust by honoring their respect before making big moves.

A fourth reason churches resist change is the belief that change is not necessary. It's a key question: Do the people I'm leading even recognize the need for change? If the current way appears successful, then the evidence of a problem is hidden from the plain sight of the people. As the leader, you may have the advantage of inside organizational knowledge. A knowledge to which the average churchgoer may have zero exposure. Before you implement a change effort, you have to show people the hidden problem.

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A fifth reason churches resist change is the belief that change is not feasible. Even if everyone agrees that change would be good, not everyone may agree that change is feasible. It's easier to show people

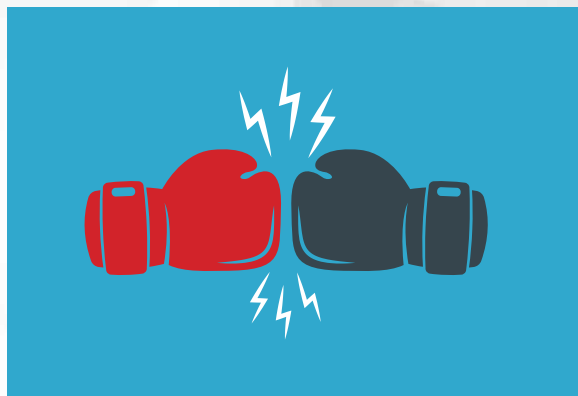
the problem than it is to demonstrate the feasibility of fixing the problem. Getting people to agree on a common problem is not enough. To enact lasting change, you must also show them how the solution is feasible.

Lastly, people will resist a change effort if it reshuffles the power alignment. Rare is the breed of person who willingly gives up position, status, or power without some resistance. This resistance makes sense. If someone challenged your position, then you would likely resist that effort as well. Though most people are rightly repulsed by the idea of the church being a political organization, forming political allies is a necessity in every organization.

Before you challenge the current power structure of a church, serve and befriend the power brokers. If you can win them over, then you will have their help in enacting long-term cultural changes.

Remember, people react emotionally when you challenge their values and ideals. When change is viewed as an assault on a current set of ideals and values, you can expect widespread resistance. These values may not be what's formally published in the constitution and bylaws. The only way to uncover these values and ideals is to spend time with different people. Detached pastors will never know the unspoken—yet well understood—values of their congregants.

Change is likely to occur when the people within an organization believe the benefits of making the change outweigh the costs of making the change. And this attitudinal shift doesn't come easily or quickly!



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# CHAPTER THREE

## WHY YOUR CHURCH RESISTS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHANGE

If you lead well, then resistance to change will eventually shift to an acceptance of the necessity of change. Even when people accept the concept of change, however, the actual implementation of the change effort can be painful. For example, most Americans agree something needs to change at the IRS. I doubt we'll see many lawmakers defend the current state of the agency on cable news stations. Does this general acceptance mean enduring change will now happen quickly? I have my doubts.

Church leaders often encounter a contingent within their congregations who accept the need for change, even the enduring cultural change I mentioned in the previous chapter. The size of this group depends upon the church, but they are inevitably there. As your tenure lengthens, this group should grow as more people begin to trust your discernment. Conversely, if this group is shrinking, then stop reading and start building better relationships. Leading change while your reputation diminishes is a suicide mission. Assuming you have done the legwork to help most people accept the need for change, why might this change effort still meet resistance as you implement it?

1

**First, most organizations are too complex for one person to lead a change effort.** The median church size is approximately 75 people. Any organization of 75—church or not—is a complex system of relationships, opinions, maturity (or immaturity), and attitudes. Is it feasible that one person can lead a change effort at the IRS? No way. And it's just as unfeasible that you alone are going to be the cause and effect at your church. Lone rangers are just that—they work alone. And you don't wear a mask. Your church knows where you live. Enduring cultural change only happens if it is *led*

(not just accepted) by a coalition of those with positional power, expertise, experience, and credibility. In short, if key members are not on board, then it's unlikely your change effort lasts in the culture of the church.

2

**Second, change efforts come with a cost.** While we often refer to the cliché synergy of change efforts, the reality is many changes are zero-sum: You must sacrifice one area to gain in another area. For example, if you change a church to be more flexible, then it often leads to a decrease in efficiency. Flexibility adds options, and more options mean more decisions, which reduces efficiency. For instance, if you allow for multiple types of small groups in your church (i.e. open and closed), then you are more flexible. However, managing multiple types of small groups takes more time and is less efficient. Enduring cultural change occurs when a coalition of leaders agree on what is to be sacrificed in order to enact the change.

3

**Third, the pace of change is just as important as the change itself.** Do you create a crisis to ramrod sudden change? If so, then you must be willing to intimidate and act forcibly. Do you allow for gradualism? Some changes can happen over time, but these changes may also slowly evolve in a way unintended. Let me give you a few examples to help answer these questions.

## MOVE QUICKLY THROUGH CHANGE WITH DOCTRINE AND DISCIPLINE ISSUES.

These issues have little middle ground. A person either believes in a specific doctrine or not. A person is either repentant or not. For example, you should not slowly remove a group leader if she outright denies a primary tenet of the church. Such change must happen quickly.

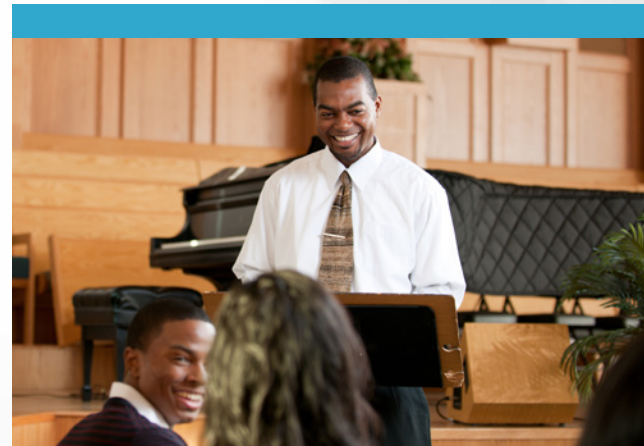
## **MOVE SLOWLY AND IN STAGES THROUGH CHANGE WITH STRUCTURAL, STAFF, AND NON-BIBLICAL ISSUES.**

It's unwise (if not sheer stupidity) to restructure the staff in your first month before you even have a grasp of everyone's job descriptions and callings. Learn the current system—and more importantly the people within the system—before radicalizing it.

## **MOVE SLOWLY THROUGH CHANGE IF IT'S YOUR FIRST CHURCH.**

You may be right about many things that need to change, but you are likely wrong about how to change them. If you don't think you need leadership experience to change a church, then you need more experience. Don't learn the hard way.

Change is not the most important role for church leaders. Don't attempt change if you haven't learned to love the people of the church *and* the community. If you haven't had supper with a dozen members, you're not ready to lead change. If you don't know the name of the deacon chairman's spouse, you're not ready to lead change. If you can't succinctly describe your group structure, you're not ready to lead change. You cannot lead a church forward unless you love your church where it is now, not where you hope it will be in the future. Change is important. But true change does not happen without love.



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# CHAPTER FOUR

## WHY THE STATUS QUO IS SO TEMPTING (AND DANGEROUS)

Ronald Reagan once stated, “Status quo, you know, that is Latin for the mess we’re in.” Most churches (and church leaders) that clamor for the status quo are messes. You don’t often hear of a healthy church championing the status quo. Visionary leaders don’t compel others to stay the same.

Of course, not everything in a church—even an unhealthy one—needs to change. The status quo is not necessarily the enemy. The status quo simply refers to the existing state of affairs. Sometimes the status quo is healthy. If daily exercise is status quo for you, then you’re disciplined. Healthy habits don’t need to be changed. More times than not, however, the status quo is negative.

The problem with the status quo in the church is that many are not healthy, and every church could be healthier. Satisfaction with the status quo is the same as believing you’ve arrived. Nobody reaches glorification on this earth, and the last time I checked billions still need to hear the gospel. Status quo churches will never reach the nations. Here’s why the status quo is so tempting . . . and dangerous.

**The status quo opposes more.** Every church should seek to reach more people and go to more places. The temptation of the status quo is that you can be satisfied with the current mission footprint of a church. The danger is that people do not hear the gospel because you were sup-



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posed to go and reach them. Most people that push for the status quo are wanting to stay put, and I'm not aware of the biblical mandate "just stay put."

**The status quo is highly contagious.** Have you ever been part of a meeting in which a lot of effort was exerted for nothing? Then someone speaks up and says, "Let's wrap this up and reconvene later." And everyone quickly agrees. It's easy to convince people to stay the same. It's harder to get them to change. And that's why too many church meetings end with few, if any, action items.

**The status quo discourages risk.** One of the great temptations of leadership is to build a culture of maintaining the status quo. When people don't expect big things, then even little things seem like grand accomplishments. Church leaders can feel quite good about themselves when everyone congratulates the little accomplishments. It's easy to neglect big things when you're receiving a steady stream of praise for the little things. The danger is status quo churches will miss the grand rewards of great risks for the kingdom.

**The status quo encourages complacency.** If everyone is happy with the way things are, then why go and upset people? The danger is God doesn't call people to happiness. The status quo is completely inward. It focuses on people already in the body without considering those who need to be reached.

**The status quo leaves people unprepared for disruption.** The struggle between good and evil will play out in your congregation—somehow, some way, and at some point. It's inevitable—there will be a disruption.



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tion, even if you work hard to prevent it. Status quo leaders leave their people unprepared for what will inevitably occur. You might as well go ahead and build a culture that expects disruptions because they happen.



Those statements don't make for a compelling vision. But the status quo would not make such bold declarations. It's more subtle. Don't be lured by the temptation of the status quo. Its hook is dangerous and sneaky.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TWELVE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR CHANGE WHEN NOBODY WANTS IT

There has been much written about change, but there is still much to learn. And many of the so-called experts of change management don't really help when we apply their principles to our situations in the church. Despite the challenges, though, we can influence change. We can be proactive. Indeed, it is possible for us to be successful.

If understanding change is important for all leaders, it is critically important for leaders of established churches. I would imagine that

most American churches today fit the descriptions of the “more resistant” categories. In other words, change can be difficult in an established church. Understanding some of the basic tenets about change will help the established church pastor over many potential hurdles.



## 1. BEGIN WITH PRAYER

A consistent facet of my prayer life is the prayer for wisdom. “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). God-given discernment for a change agent is a requisite. Tough decisions must be made. The promise from God’s Word is that He will give us the wisdom in all decisions. The value of all the leadership books and courses in the world pales in comparison to the value of this one promise. A **praying pastor** is obvious to church members. The pastor is dependent on God and demonstrates a humility that comes with that dependence. His desire for change is not that he will have his way, but that God’s will be done. Resistant people can become receptive people through the power of prayer. If mountains can be moved through faith and prayer, then established churches can become open to change through prayer.

“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him”  
–James 1:5



## 2. LOVE THE PEOPLE

The higher the level of trust of the pastor by the people, the more receptive church members will be to change. While several factors influence the level of trust, none is greater than the pastor’s love of the people. Such love cannot be

contrived; it must be genuine. A commitment must be made by the pastor that he will love the members of his church unconditionally. It does not take long for that love to be tested. Cantankerous and **critical** members will try the patience of the most loving of pastors. How he responds to these people will be both a test of love and of credibility. While he may disagree strongly with a member, his response can be couched in prayerful love.



### 3. CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES

I recently read an analysis of a politician's rapid decline in support and popularity. His reelection chances were slim because of his unwillingness to compromise. He insisted on having his way on almost every issue.

Leaders of established churches must realize that many issues are simply not worth fighting over. If our church members see in us a flexibility and willingness to compromise on minor and non-essential issues, they are more likely to support us on major issues. Of course, any issue that threatens doctrinal integrity cannot be compromised, but the great majority of battles in established churches are not theological in nature.



### 4. REALIZE YOUR OWN IMPERFECTIONS

My father told the story to my brothers and me about what he called one of his dumb mistakes in ministry. At a monthly church business meeting, the church staff presented a proposal to increase the budget by \$30,000 for

some unplanned equipment needs. The questions and suggestions continued for almost an hour until our dad stood up and said, “Folks, you called me to be the leader of this church. I wish you would end this discussion and trust us to make the right decision.”

The problem was that the proposed purchase was not the best price, and many astute businesspersons in the meeting knew better. He had consulted no one. My father told me that his credibility took a nosedive that evening. Several months passed before many key leaders began to trust him again.

One of his biggest steps to regaining credibility was to apologize publicly to the church and to admit his mistakes and imperfections. It was a tough lesson for him. I guess that’s why he wanted to remind his sons.

A strong leader seeks the wisdom of others. A change agent realizes that his way may not be the best way. He admits his mistakes and misjudgments. He is willing to compromise on non-essential issues. His personality is truly transparent. His confidence is based on strength in God; his transparency is the result of his willingness to admit his imperfections.



## 5. AFFIRM TRADITIONS

Everyone is a traditionalist to some degree. I take the same route home almost every day. I look forward to seeing my wife and kids, and even my dog, at about the same time each day. *Tradition* is not bad. *Traditionalism*, the worship of tradition, is a violation of the first of the Ten Commandments.

We can know that we are practicing traditionalism if our traditions interfere with our obedience to God. Sometimes traditions must be broken to reach people for Christ or to be more effective in ministry, but many **traditions** can be affirmed and celebrated.

Find those traditions in your church that you can affirm. I served as a pastor of a church that began the missions offering for my denomination. I was able to affirm that century-old tradition again and again. It was a reminder to the members that I was not anti-tradition. Change leadership will go much more smoothly if past, present, and future are seen as an ongoing statement to what God has purposed.



## 6. BUILD ON SUCCESSES

I know a pastor of an established church who made a decision after several years of ministry to begin giving credit to the members of his church for any and all of the church's successes. He further decided that any blame for the lack of victories would be his own. Church members would not be blamed; their perceived inadequacies would be the result of inadequate leadership.

The pastor told me that this decision was life-transforming for him. A whole new realm of accountability was created because "the buck stopped" with him. The elders, deacons, naysayers, or apathetic members would not be blamed. Responsibility would be his and his alone. He would do everything in God's power to achieve God's victories in the church. The pastor was directly accountable to God for the church's failures and successes.

By accepting full leadership responsibility for the church, the pastor soon discovered more effective leadership skills. He learned that often the best timing for a change is soon after a victory or series of victories in the church. Change is often accepted after a leader has demonstrated his ability to lead a church successfully.



## 7. ALLOW FOR OPEN DISCUSSION

An established church typically has been doing many things the same way for several years. Change can take place, but the pace must be slower than that of a newer church. The members need the opportunity to discuss the proposed change in both formal and informal settings. And the discussions in the Monday morning coffee shop may be more important than those in a formal church gathering.

Not only is open communication important, it is also essential that no information be withheld. Every church member should feel that he or she has all the information pertinent to the change. An abundance of relevant information engenders a spirit of openness and trust.



## 8. DEMONSTRATE WISDOM IN TIMING

Unlike a church planting situation where everything is new, the established church typically is not equipped emotionally to handle rapid change. The timing of each change is critical. Often there should be spaces or buffers between changes to allow the congregation to adjust. Leaders in an established church often must have a long-term view. Change just cannot come at the pace most leaders would prefer.



## 9. KEEP THE FOCUS

Up to this point, I have been describing several precautions that the established church pastor should observe in the process of initiating change. It should be understood

clearly, however, that these precautions are not to be points of distraction. The leader must keep the focus on moving the church toward greater health. While the pace and the frequency of change may be slower and more methodical than the pace in a newer church, the established church must nevertheless make consistent progress in reaching more people for Christ with the gospel, and becoming more effective in ministry.



## 10. ALLOW FOR A TRIAL PERIOD

Some changes may be made on a trial basis. (Obviously a building program would be an exception). Change-resistant members can be comforted by knowing that the intrusion into their comfort zone may not be permanent. At the end of the trial period, one of three decisions can be made: (1) extend the trial period to allow for further evaluation; (2) reverse the change; or (3) make the change permanent. If the latter choice is made, the benefits of the change will have become obvious to most people. Some members, however, will resist and resent the change regardless of the obvious benefit. Perhaps you heard the story of the 100-year-old man who was interviewed by a local newspaper reporter. The reporter commented that the old man must have seen a lot of changes in his century of life. The man responded: “Yep, and I didn’t like none of ‘em!” Some church members will notice the changes and they “won’t like none of ‘em.” That observation brings us to the next point.





## 11. EXPECT OPPOSITION

Criticism and opposition can drain a pastor emotionally and spiritually. After a while, the leader may be tempted to refrain from initiating any significant change because of the potential criticism the change may engender. Such an attitude will result in lost opportunities for growth and ministry. The pastor must seek God's wisdom to discern the proper balance between the extremes of being like a bulldozer or a pet rock in initiating change.

Receiving criticism is a fact of life for leaders and especially for pastors who are making genuine efforts to lead established churches to greater health. Expect some level of opposition with any significant decision but **love your critics**, even the unlovable ones. Show respect for and to them, even though they may treat you disrespectfully. Pray for them. And keep your eyes on Jesus as you stay focused on leading His bride, the church, to greater health.



## 12. EVALUATE CHANGE

Not every change is good. Not every change will work. Evaluate decisions on a regular and systematic basis. Be willing to admit that a particular change did not work. But give a new ministry, program, or idea time to work. Do not concede easily if the change is a deep conviction of yours. The God who gave you the vision will see you through the most difficult of times.

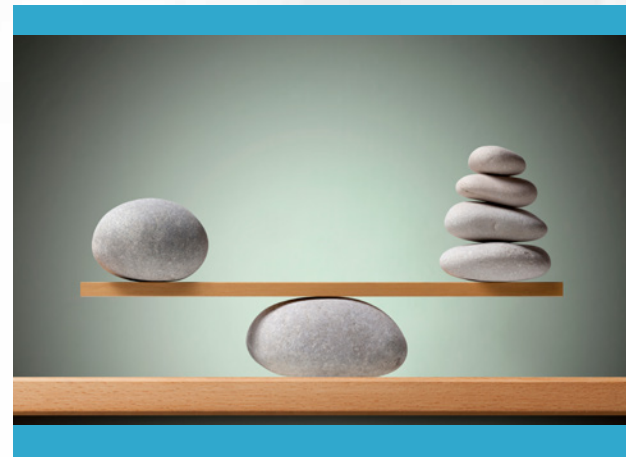
# CHAPTER SIX

## BALANCING THE TENSIONS OF LEADING CHANGE

As you lead an established church to greater health, you will have to demonstrate a great deal of balance. Being an established church pastor is an exercise in paradox. Look at a few of the tensions you must keep in balance.

### *Spiritual and Pragmatic.*

You must give priority to prayer. You must be open to new methodologies that will help your church become healthier. You will need to be a consumer of the latest practical writings on church health, but you must also be aware that only a sovereign God can send real revival. You must depend totally on God, but not take lightly the counsel of godly men and women. You must ask: “What works?” but you must realize that tools are only for a season.



### *Tenacious and Flexible.*

Because you are the pastor of an established church, longer tenure is very important. Unless God clearly calls you to another ministry, you will need to be tenacious about your calling, even in the most difficult of times. Satan would love to see you so discouraged that you are ready to give up.

Yet while you must be unswerving in your commitment to your church, you must demonstrate an abundance of flexibility in dealing with your members. The roles that you will be asked to fill may change ten times in one day. At the end of the day, you may not know if you are coming or going!

## *Patience.*

Established churches need pastors who take initiative and lead people to new challenges. Churches must be shaken from their complacency to see the possibilities of God. But established churches also need pastors who have patience, who can wait on God's timing without much frustration, especially when it seems that nothing is happening. Established churches need pastors who have the wisdom to know when to move or when to wait.

### ***Sensitive and Tough-Skinned.***

Pastors, don't you love it when you have just been through a round of criticisms and a well-meaning church member tells you to get your act together? "Pastor, you just have to have tough skin. You can't let everything hurt you."

Yet before the week is over, you may be taken to task for your insensitivity for not visiting someone. That particular church member may even articulate that you are just not sensitive enough. Such is the tension that is, and will continue to be, a part of your life. Certain occasions will call for you to have the hide of a rhino, while others will demand you be sensitive and caring.

### ***Ambitious and Content.***

You must have a desire to see your church grow, to reach people for Christ, to reach new heights. You need to set ambitious goals and challenge your members to meet them. You must believe that the God you serve is a God of miracles, and that He will work miracles in your church.

You must also be content with what may seem to be like the pace of snail. And you can't be discouraged because your church is not like the

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larger and more active church in the community. You must be ambitious, yet you must be content. It is a paradox. But you're in good company. The Apostle Paul dealt successfully with that same paradox. If you are doubtful, read both Philippians 3:14 and 4:12. He did it. So can you.

### ***Traditional and Contemporary.***

You must lead your church to reach a contemporary world. Some of the methods must change if that possibility is to ever become a reality. But you must be willing and even eager to hold on to some of those traditions that really matter.

Your church is to “become all things to all people,” so that by all means some might be saved (1 Corinthians 9:22). But your church must not conform to the pattern of the world (Romans 12:2). You must lead your church to be in the world but not of the world.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **THE BLESSING OF GOD HIMSELF**

Pastoring a church has always been a demanding profession. Most churches need to change, but they don't desire it. When you are hired, the people ask for strong leadership then vote down your proposals. The demands are even greater now. Many churches are teetering on the precipice of possible closure.

Don't give up.

You're in the fight of your life, and it's exactly what God called you to do. The American church is beginning to learn how to scrap for survival. Think back to when you were first called, and you dreamed of the moment that became the catalyst for a work of God.

We're living in the moment right now. Exhaustion is leading to a complete reliance on the Spirit. One of the most misunderstood concepts in the Bible is God's blessing. It's also one of the most misapplied concepts as well. We assume we know how God wants to bless. We assume we know what God's blessings should look like. Why? We want a blessing on our terms, in our way, and within our timing.

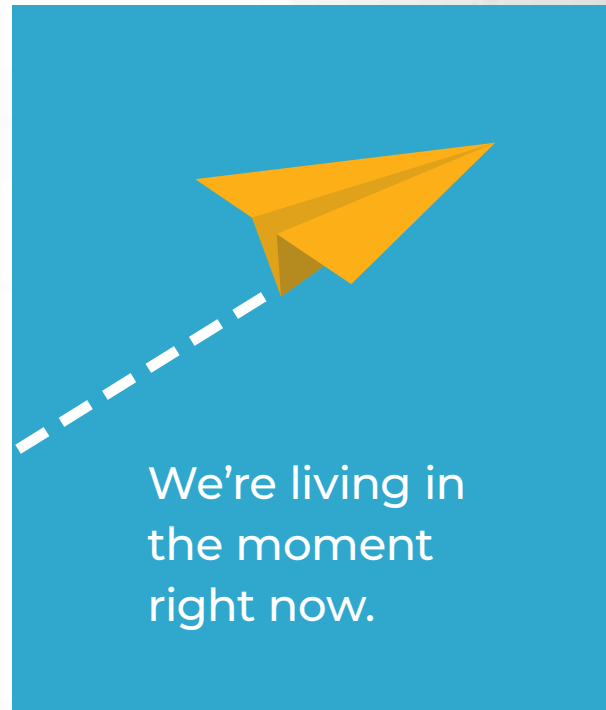
I'll never forget listening to a preacher proclaim boldly, "God is a GIVER! Not a TAKER!" I wanted to scream the words of Job to him: "The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

If you think God's blessing means the easiest path, or even a level of success, then you would be mistaken. God's blessing is ultimately not about the good life and a vibrant ministry. God's blessings can come through the hard nights and the tears. Pain and loss can unravel us, but pain and loss can also transform us.

A blessing is complete satisfaction in God no matter what is happening around you, to you, or in your church. God got the attention of His people in the book of Haggai by ruining their work. They didn't have enough to eat. They were never satisfied. They stayed cold and could not get warm. They worked hard but not for God. They were frustrated, disappointed, tired, and discouraged. When you read Haggai, you might think it was written about today

Then something happened in that low point. God roused their spirits. The language in the text implies sleepiness. They heard God's alarm clock. The American church has hit the snooze button far too many times. The Spirit is stirring.

You're tired. I'm tired. I'm sure Haggai was tired too.



Is it a good time to be a pastor? It's the wrong question. When I read the prophets in the Old Testament, I'm not thinking, "This was a good time to be a prophet." Frankly, it's a hard time to be a business leader, parent, school teacher, and a lot of other things.

I hear God's alarm clock. It's jarring. I'm not so sure I'm ready to wake up. I could use a few more hours of sleep. But I'll get up and get to God's work. Maybe we're right where God wants us.

The blessing is God Himself.

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