A Ministry for Equipping the Saints

Ministry Planning
Made Easy

Developing a Workable Plan for Your Ministry

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Table of Contents

Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 5

Section 1 - The Problem of Ministry Planning ................................................................. 6

The First Step in Planning – Admitting You Have a Problem ........................................... 6

Indicators that We have a Problem ...................................................................................... 7

- It takes much too long to plant new churches
- Churches are often small and struggling
- Ministries are often evangelistically ineffective
- Discipleship and lay leadership development are frequently lacking
- The lack of financial resources affects many ministries
- Far too many ministries simply die after a few years
- Planers become homesteaders

Why People Don’t Plan ..................................................................................................... 10

- Many people don’t know how to develop a ministry plan
- People don’t see the benefit of planning
- Some people don’t plan because they have never seen it done before
- Planning is considered too time consuming
- Planning is considered too hard
- Planning is considered too restrictive

Section 2 – Ten Benefits of Ministry Planning ................................................................. 13

Ministry Planning is a Good Investment ............................................................................ 13

The Benefits of Ministry Planning ..................................................................................... 14

- Ministry planning helps you avoid ministry schizophrenia
- Ministry planning helps you establish clear goals, objectives and policies
- Ministry planning builds stability and momentum into your ministry
- Ministry planning increases your effectiveness and productivity
- Ministry planning enables you to have a more balanced ministry
- Ministry planning builds cohesiveness and unity into your ministry
- Ministry planning provides a basis for evaluation, measuring progress and assessing of results
- Ministry planning attracts greater funding and increases giving
- Ministry planning is good stewardship
- Ministry planning enhances your leadership standing
Section 3 – Ministry Planning is Biblical .................................................................19

God is the Ultimate Planner ....................................................................................... 20

Biblical Support for Planning ..................................................................................... 22

Biblical Examples of Planning .................................................................................... 24

Abraham and Eliezer
Joseph
Moses
Joshua
David
Nehemiah
Jesus
Apostle Paul

Section 4 – Ministry Planning is a Process ............................................................... 30

Step One – Start with the End in View ................................................................. 30

Step Two – Find Out where you Are ................................................................. 32

Step Three – Develop a Series of Goals that Address the Most Important Issues ........ 36

Step Four – Break your Goals into Smaller Pieces .............................................. 37

Step Five – Build Contingencies and Evaluation Points into your Plan .............. 40

Step Six – Provide for Implementation in your Plan ............................................. 42

Planning Template (short version) ................................................................. 44

Planning Template (expanded version) .......................................................... 45

Endnotes ................................................................................................................ 47
Introduction

Some folks will undoubtedly question the title of this manual – *Ministry Planning Made Easy*. In their view, there is nothing easy about developing a ministry plan. They are probably right. Planning represents hours and hours of hard work. It is sometimes accompanied by difficult struggles and debate that can produce a good deal of frustration. Some may even question the long run term results of such a process.

The very mention of the words *ministry planning* or *strategic planning* send chills down their backs. There seems to be a built-in negative connotation to those phrases. For some, they represent something to be avoided at all costs.

We have to admit that planning does take time – sometimes more than we might wish to invest. However, the benefits of a well-thought-out ministry plan far outweigh the time and effort invested in developing one.

In his book on *Advanced Strategic Planning*, Aubrey Malphurs points out that only about twenty percent of American churches engage in any type of strategic ministry planning.¹ This may help explain why eight out of ten churches in America are either stagnated or in decline. Without a ministry plan to follow, they have run off the road and are traveling in circles in the wilderness. The old adage, *he who fails to plan, plans to fail*, is often true when it comes to ministry.

Without adequate, on-going planning your ministry is likely to struggle and will end up somewhere other than where you envisioned it being when you started out. Planning is a vital part of life that cannot be ignored without placing your ministry in jeopardy.

If you want your ministry to succeed (and who doesn’t?), then you must plan accordingly. Whatever plan (or lack of one) you have in place will significantly influence the outcome of your ministry. That is true whether you are pastoring or planting a church, working on a college campus, teaching a class or crossing the sea to serve on a foreign field. The plan (system, mechanism) you have in place is perfectly designed to give you the results you are getting or will get. If you want to be productive in your ministry, then you must invest the time and effort to produce a ministry plan that will give you the results you desire.

The purpose of this manual is to simplify the planning process, to make it understandable, and easy to use. While planning is time consuming, it is not that hard. Anyone can do it. You can do it.

Planning is simply the process of thinking and acting.² It involves three things: 1) Thinking about what you want to accomplish; 2) Determining what you will do to make that happen; 3) and then doing it. Come with me as I walk you through the process.

Your Servant in Christ,

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Section 1

The Problem with Ministry Planning

*Houston, we have a problem!*

Those words were spoken by astronaut John Swigert, Jr. aboard Apollo 13 as it sped toward a rendezvous with the moon on April 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1970. The spacecraft was approximately 200,000 miles from earth when its Number Two oxygen tank exploded and blew out the side of the space craft.

With most of its oxygen, water, and power supplies gone, many doubted the crew could be saved. For the next three days, the public was glued to their television sets as engineers struggled to develop a plan to bring the crippled spacecraft home safely. Working under tremendous pressure, Ground Control improvised, tested, and implemented a plan that not only averted further disaster, but which resulted in the safe return of James A. Lovell, John L. Swigert, and Fred W. Haise to earth on April 17\textsuperscript{th}.

Research later indicated Apollo 13 had a problem from the very beginning. Insulation on wiring in the oxygen tank was dangerously thin. This allowed two wires to short out creating the spark that caused the oxygen tank to explode. The problem was there all along, but it went undetected until the catastrophic explosion occurred. Even then, the astronauts only felt a slight jolt and heard a mysterious “bang.” They didn’t know what had happened, but they knew something wasn’t right. It was not until they admitted they had a problem that they were able to address it, and begin to take steps to correct it.

In the same way, pastors, church planters, campus workers, and others involved in various ministries need to take a serious look at their ministries to evaluate why the things they are doing are not producing the results that should be reasonably expected from their efforts. Saying that, “We are working in a hard place” just doesn’t cut it. In most cases, that is just a cop-out, a way to avoid admitting the obvious – WE HAVE A PROBLEM!

The First Step in Planning

The first step in ministry planning is to admit that there is a problem requiring change. As long as people are content with the status quo, they will continue doing the same things they are now doing. They will follow the same routines and engage in the same activities that have proven unproductive in the past. Many of us participate in a variety of activities that we refer to as “ministry,” and yet we know something is wrong because what we are doing is not producing the results we want to see. In far to many cases, souls are being saved only rarely, lay leaders are lacking, finances are short, discipleship isn’t happening, and churches show little progress after a decade or more of effort.

Rather than admitting we have a problem, we tend to justify this lack of productivity on the basis of faithfulness. We say, “Well, faithfulness is more important than fruitfulness.” Where did that
Ministry Planning Made Easy

alien concept come from? Faithfulness and fruitfulness are not mutually exclusive. They tend to
go together. If you faithfully do the right things, you will generally get the right results. If you
are faithful, you will be fruitful, and if you are fruitful, you are generally faithful.

When a ministry is not producing the intended results, something is wrong. There is a problem.
Rather than ignoring it or rationalizing it away, we need to face up to it and fix it. Admitting that
there is a problem is the first step in correcting it. That is true with health issues, financial
problems, and ministry malfunctions. Just as an alcoholic cannot be helped until he admits he is
a drunk, just as a cancer patient cannot be treated until he acknowledges he has a dread disease,
just as a troubled marriage cannot be fixed until the couple agrees there is a problem, so the
servant of Christ cannot fix what is wrong with his ministry until he admits he has a problem.

Indictors that we have a Problem

There are any number of indicators that point to serious problems in ministry today. For
example:

*It takes much too long to plant new churches.* In Scripture, new churches were often planted in
relatively short periods of time. In some cases, the Apostle Paul only spent a few weeks in an
area preaching the gospel, winning souls, discipling new believers, and starting a church, before
he moved on to his next target. The longest time he ever spent in one place was three years in
Ephesus (Acts 20:31). We would readily admit that Paul was a highly gifted and uniquely
qualified church planter. Few of us could ever approach his skill level, his giftedness or his
commitment to Christ.

That is no justification, however, for the fact that many church plants (and other types of
ministries) take ten, fifteen or even twenty years to develop. Sadly, many of these ministries
have only a handful of converts after a decade of effort. In most cases, the problem is not that
the people in those areas are more hardened by sin than in other areas (although that may be true
in rare situations). In some cases, the problem may be that the one conducting the ministry lacks
the skill and training necessary to be effective in ministry. If that is the problem, then it can be
solved by providing the training needed to do the job.

The larger problem is the fact that many ministries were started without first sitting down and
deciding what was to be accomplished, how it was to be done, when it was to be done, and by
whom it was to be done. In other words, there was a lack of planning. The planter, the campus
worker, the prison evangelist, the individual discipler, the person leading the ministry did not
take the time to develop a ministry roadmap that would take him to his desired destination. As a
result, he is now out in left field stuck in the sand with no apparent way to get out of his
predicament.

Churches can be planted and brought to maturity sooner. Others are doing it. It should not take
a decade to build a congregation or to develop a campus ministry that can stand on its own two
feet without outside assistance. Ministry planning provides the tools, the guidance, and the
resources for doing just that very thing.

*Churches are often small and struggling.* One fourth of all Protestant congregations in North
America have fewer than thirty-five people in attendance on Sunday morning, and one half of churches average less than seventy-five worshippers present on any given week-end. Many of these congregations are located in rural and small town localities where they have a relatively small pool of congregants from which to draw. It should not be assumed, however, that these churches are small because they have few people living in their areas. That concept is debunked by the existence of many larger churches which are located in small towns. The difference is often one of vision and planning.

Small churches are small because of the ministry planning (or lack thereof) they have in place. If they have a ministry plan, their plan is such that it produces little results. Their plan is not designed to attract more congregants and to expand their ministries. The old maxim is true which says, the system (plan) you have in place is perfectly designed to give you the results you are getting. If they are to grow, these churches need a better plan.

Many church plants remain small and continue to struggle for decades largely because of the lack of ministry planning. They have no destination is sight. They don’t know where they are going and have no idea of how to get there. They need to admit they have a problem so they can begin to correct it.

Ministries are often evangelistically ineffective. The Great Commission lies at the heart of all ministry. Jesus commanded us to be “witnesses” and to “make disciples” wherever we are (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19). That is true of church planters, pastors, campus workers, and specialized ministries. The goal is always the same – to win the lost and to turn them into mature followers of Christ. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to plant a church or to expand any type of ministry without winning people to the Savior.

Witnessing, soul-winning, and discipling believers lies at the heart of what we do as servants of Christ. Thom Rainer points out however, that evangelism rarely takes place unless it is intentional. Intentionality requires planning. Ministries that are known for their effectiveness in winning people to Christ do so because they have a plan in place that enables them to achieve that goal. Evangelism training, outreach ministries, and a focus on conversion growth are part of their overall ministry plan.

Far too many church planters depend on “transfer growth.” This occurs when believers leave one ministry and join with another one. It is not unusual for planters to request prayer that God would send them some mature believers to help in their ministries. Who among us would not want to have the help of an Aquila or a Priscilla or a Timothy in our ministries? None of us would turn those people down. Yet, in many cases, this represents a wrong emphasis and is the result of a lack of ministry planning. The focus should be on winning and discipling new believers into mature believers. You will not become evangelistically effective until you devise a plan for doing so.

Discipleship and lay leadership development are frequently lacking in our ministries. Discipleship involves one believer helping another believer make biblical change toward Christ likeness.Discipleship involves growing spiritually as we change our value systems, thought processes, and responses to life. Growing spiritually is a process people go through as they move along a continuum from spiritual birth and infancy to spiritual maturity to ministry
involvement to spiritual leadership. It doesn’t just happen. It’s not automatic and doesn’t happen by osmosis. Sitting in church and listening to sermons is helpful, but by themselves they are inadequate to produce spiritual maturity in people’s lives. More is needed.

If people are to grow spiritually, then you need to have a plan in place for facilitating that. An effective discipleship ministry first asks questions such as: What does a disciple look like? What qualities or characteristics do we want him to have? What changes do we want to see in his life? How do we want him to treat his spouse and family? What do we want him to know? What do we want him to be able to do? What skills do we want him to possess? What ministries do we want him to be involved in? Until you answer those questions you are shooting at a moving target in the dark.

You have to know what you want to produce before you can produce it. Once you know what a disciple is and what qualities and characteristics you want him or her to have, then you can design a plan (program) for developing that kind of person. Your plan may not be perfect, but it will be far more effective than a non-existent one.

The lack of financial resources affects many ministries. Finances are often an issue in ministries, especially church-planting ministries. Churches are started without raising adequate funds and without having a plan in place for developing the finances of the church. In Luke 14:28 Jesus pointed out the folly of such an undertaking when he spoke of a man attempting to build a tower without first sitting down and evaluating the cost involved, and developing a plan to fund it. In spite of that, that is exactly what many people involved in ministry do. They launch their ministries without adequate funding and without developing a stewardship plan to grow their ministry. They assume (falsely) that God will somehow bail them out by providing the funds they need. This seldom happens, however, because they have violated biblical principles of stewardship and planning. Stewardship must be part of the overall ministry plan you develop. If your church or your ministry is struggling because of insufficient funds, you have a problem, and that problem indicates the need for better ministry planning.

Far too many ministries simply die after a few years. Estimates vary widely concerning survivability rates among new churches. We do know that approximately 3,700 churches close every year.6 Many of these are old-line denominational churches in declining communities, but a surprising number are relatively new churches. A 2007 research report by the Center for Missional Research on “Church Plant Survivability” found that eighty-one percent of churches were still in existence by the end of their third year,7 That means that one in five churches dies before its third birthday. Churches that do not grow to maturity are sometimes “graduated” and left to struggle alone until they succumb to the inevitable. It is strongly suspected that if we could autopsy these deceased churches we would find that many of them suffered an untimely death because of the lack of ministry planning that undermined their effectiveness and ability to survive.

Planters becoming homesteaders. Everyone involved in ministry should keep his end game in mind. What are you trying to accomplish? Where do you want to end up? What does the finished product look like? You will never arrive at your destination unless you know where that destination is located and what it looks like. Far too many people get bogged down in the
minutia of the journey and forget where they are going. This is especially true of some planters. When they started out they envisioned a new congregation of believers capable of standing on their own feet and carrying on effective ministry without outside assistance. But lacking a plan for accomplishing that goal they somewhere along the line lost sight of their destination and transitioned from being a planter to being a pastor to the group they assembled about them. The goal is no longer to work themselves out of a job. Instead, their mission becomes open ended with no destination in sight. They become comfortable receiving mission income along with a small salary from the church. These churches often end up in “mission status” for decades because the planter did not have a plan that would enable him to reach his goal.

By its very nature this chapter is somewhat negative. The intent is to raise awareness to the fact that many ministries do in fact have a problem. Until we recognize that fact and are willing to admit it, we cannot solve the problem. Acknowledgement of a problem is the first step toward resolving the problem.

We have highlighted seven areas, each of which indicates that we have a problem. The problem is the same in each case regardless of the circumstances – there has been, and is, a lack of planning that undermines ministry. Without adequate planning, a ministry will often have only limited success. Churches that do not engage in ministry planning will generally be smaller, and growth will usually be slower or non-existent. Ministry planning is essential to successful ministry.

We need to admit the obvious – we have a problem with planning. Either we don’t do it at all or we don’t do it well.

Why People Don’t Plan

There are many reasons why people don’t develop ministry plans to guide them through the process of developing a church or campus ministry. People have different temperaments and personalities. Some are “doers” while others are “thinkers.” Some are people-oriented while others are project-inclined. Each approaches ministry differently.

Here are some of the reasons people fail to develop ministry plans before launching their ministries:

Many people don’t know how to develop a ministry plan. A lack of know-how is one of the primary reasons people in ministry don’t develop ministry plans. The whole task seems overwhelming to them. They have no idea how to go about doing it. They don’t know where to start or how to proceed. When you start talking about goals, objectives, action steps, SWOT analysis, critical masses and timelines, they just roll their eyes and say, “This isn’t for me.”

We spend our lives learning new things and learning to do things we don’t know how to do. From infancy we are constantly learning. First, we learn to walk, dress ourselves, and tie our shoes. We go to school to learn to read and write. We take classes to study for ministry or for our life occupations. Learning to plan is no different. It is simply part of the process in developing effective ministries. It is one of the skills we must learn if we want to be successful
in what God has called us to do. Anyone can learn how to develop an effective ministry plan. It is not that difficult if we are teachable and willing to learn new skills.

People don’t see the benefit of planning. People know planning takes time and effort, but wonder whether it is worth the expenditure. After all, they are accustomed to functioning in a reactive mode. They made quick decisions based on whatever is happening at the moment. Ministry gets done that way, services get held, and activities are carried on. So, from their viewpoint, why bother with planning? Things are just fine as they are (or so they think).

It may be they have sat in on planning sessions where nothing ever got done. The meetings may have been boring or marked by controversy, debate, and endless wrangling over minor issues. People fought “turf wars” to protect their own interests. Rather than uniting the church such meetings only resulted in hurt feelings and disharmony among members. They see no benefit to ministry planning.

It is possible they and their co-workers may have worked long and hard to produce a ministry plan only to have it lie on a shelf collecting dust. Having put in hours of hard work they have nothing to show for all their effort. Their planning didn’t do any good and was largely a waste of time. They saw no benefit from it and so now, having been burned once, they are reluctant to put their hand on the stove again. They correctly conclude that without implementation there is no benefit to planning. The problem, however, is not with the planning itself, but with absence of follow through.

In some cases, people don’t plan because they have never seen it done before. Relatively few people grow up in church having the opportunity to see what goes on behind the scenes. They were not party to the lengthy planning sessions attended by the pastor, deacons, youth leaders, and education directors of the church. Like many in the church, they assume ministry just happens. They are unaware of all that goes into making ministry work successfully.

They may have grown up in a church where there was relatively little planning done, especially if they grew up in a small church. Because their congregations were small and growth was not a major focus in many of those churches, planning was minimal. It doesn’t take a lot of planning to maintain the status quo. You just keep doing what you are now doing. Any planning that takes place occurs in relatively brief deacon or teacher’s meetings. There is no overall plan to guide the church toward a desired destination. Growing up in such a church limits a person’s ability to see the benefits of a good ministry plan.

Planning is considered too time consuming. There is no doubt about it. Planning takes time and effort. Regardless of whether you do it yourself or pull together a team of people to work with you in developing a ministry plan, it will take considerable time to do that. Putting together a ministry plan isn’t something you do in a couple of hours. It will take hours and hours, if not days, of discussing, thinking, brainstorming, and evaluating to develop a workable plan for your ministry. You’ll need multiple sessions. Once you have reached agreement and written out your plan you should let it set for a few weeks, and then come back to review it and make changes in it. There will be times when you will ask: “What did we mean by that?” or you will conclude that some proposed action is unrealistic. Review and adjustment are part of the process of developing a workable plan.
Because they do not value planning nor see its benefits, many folks are not willing to invest the time required to produce a carefully crafted document to guide their ministries. When Apollo 13 exploded on its way to the moon, engineers at Mission Control worked around the clock for three days developing a plan to return the astronauts safely to earth. They were willing to invest whatever time it took to complete their mission successfully. Since the fate of countless lost souls is in our hands, should we not be willing to invest as much time as is needed to develop a plan that will ensure the success of our mission as well?

**Planning is considered too hard.** It is true. Ministry planning is hard work, but sacrifice and hard work goes with our calling. As good soldiers of Christ we are to endure hardness (II Timothy 2:3). If we have a worthy goal (such as planting a church, developing a campus ministry or reaching into our prisons), then whatever effort is required in order to achieve it is a good investment. Anything worth doing is worth doing well.

What soldier would undertake a mission into enemy territory at night without first developing a plan that enables him to complete his mission? He will cross rivers, climb mountains, endure freezing temperatures, and go without sleep to achieve his mission. That is what soldiers do. That is what is expected of them. Should any less be expected of us as soldiers of Christ? Absolutely not. So, let’s stop complaining about ministry planning being hard work, and let’s get on with the task of getting the job done.

**Planning is considered too restrictive.** Ministry plans crimp the style of some leaders. Such plans contain specifics, goals, timelines, and action steps that detail what is to be done by whom and when. Once adopted, they focus attention on specific actions to be taken. They channel funds into certain projects. They outline certain things that are to be done at particular times. Ministry plans keep people on track moving in the same direction toward the same destination.

But they also restrict our movement. They don’t allow us to go off course or to chase down “rabbit trails” that lead us away from our goals. Too often, we are like a ball in a box that bounces aimlessly from point to point. There is lots of activity, but little progress. We like the freedom that comes from not having a plan to follow. Thus, we feel restricted and constrained by adopting a ministry plan.

We need to remember, however, that true freedom and blessing is found in living within the restrictive guidelines of life. Just as a railroad engine finds its greatest liberty in staying on the tracks, so the servant of Christ finds the greatest freedom and productivity in following a well-thought-out ministry plan that keeps him on track toward his destination.

In nouthetic counseling, the first task of the counselor is to gather data and to give the counselee hope by helping him recognize he has a problem. Then, and only then, can the problem be resolved and the counselee be restored to a healthy condition.

Likewise, in ministry, the first step is to help churches, church planters, and Christian workers recognize that they have a problem that could be helped through ministry planning. Then, and only then, can we help them resolve that problem and restore them to a healthy ministry.
Section 2

Ten Benefits of Ministry Planning

Many people question the value of ministry planning. They haven’t had the opportunity to be involved in a ministry where planning played a vital role. Thus, they haven’t seen the benefits of doing so. Anyone who has ever done effective ministry planning knows that the upside of doing so far outweighs the expenditure made. Success hangs in the balance.

Ministry Planning is a Good Investment

There is always a cost-benefit ingredient to ministry. It involves the amount of time, money, and effort we are willing to invest in order to get the return we want. The Apostle Paul articulated this principle in Second Corinthians 9:6 when he wrote: “He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.” In other words, there is a direct relationship between your investment and the results you receive. If you invest a lot of time, money and effort in a project, you tend to receive a lot in return. If you invest little time and effort in what you are doing, you will generally receive little in return.

If a man wants to harvest five hundred bushels of corn, then he must plant enough acreage to produce the desired yield. If he plants too little, then he will not meet his production goal. There is a certain price the farmer must pay to buy the seed corn, a certain amount of effort he must invest in preparing the soil, and countless hours he must give in order to produce the outcome he wants.

The same thing is true in ministry. If we want to see souls saved, lives transformed, churches planted, campuses reached, homes restored, and ministries expanded, then we must make the required investment of time, money, and effort in order to produce those results. Ministry planning is part of the price that must be paid if we hope to succeed in what God has called us to do. Its benefits are enormous and will significantly influence the outcome of our ministries.

Fisher Howe points out in his book on strategic planning that the purpose of planning is not to decide what should be done in the future, but to decide what should be done NOW to make desired things happen in an uncertain future. To a great degree what you do now will determine your success in the future. Your chances of success in ministry are far greater if you develop a well-thought-out ministry plan before you start than if you jump in with little preplanning.

You may be in a situation in which you launched your ministry without first developing a ministry plan. You have struggled to keep that ministry going against seemingly impossible odds. Yet in spite of everything you have done the results have been far less than you hoped for.

Well, it is not too late. Ministry planning can occur wherever you are in the ministry process. If you currently do not have a ministry plan, complete the reading of this manual. Then take the
time to prepare one based on what you learned. The benefits of doing so will be enormous.

**The Benefits of Ministry Planning**

People often fail to develop a ministry plan because they do not see the value in doing so. For them, the cost outweighs the benefits. So, let me articulate some of the benefits your ministry will receive from taking the time to develop a good ministry plan.

1) *Ministry planning will help you avoid ministry schizophrenia.* This is a serious disease that afflicts many ministries. It occurs when a ministry develops multiple personalities as the result of picking and choosing from various ministry models and attempting to blend them into one. People within the ministry are unsure of who they are, where they are heading or what they are supposed to be doing. There is no cohesive policy or philosophy that holds them together. Consequently, they bounce from activity to activity and move in a multiplicity of directions. A schizophrenic ministry often has only a fuzzy idea of why it exists (purpose), what it is supposed to be doing (mission), what things it wants to communicate (values), where it is going (vision) or how it will get there (strategy).

Putting together a over-arching ministry plan establishes a coherent, concise roadmap that directs the ministry along a specified course and provides the ministry with clearly defined steps that lead to a clearly defined goal. Those participating in that ministry will know who they are and what they are supposed to do. Rather than competing with one another, they are able to work together toward a common objective. It is said that *everyone gets somewhere in life, but only a few people get somewhere on purpose.* A ministry plan enables you to be one of those people.

2) *Ministry planning helps you to establish clear goals, objectives, and policies.* If you don’t know where you are going, it will be difficult to get there. Sadly, many of us in ministry are like the little boy who received a bow and arrow set for his birthday. One day his dad found him out behind the barn target practicing. As the father stood watching, the boy drew back the string and let the arrow fly. When it hit the side of the barn with a “thud,” the boy ran to that spot and painted a bull’s eye around the arrow.

We often deal in vague concepts and generalities such as, “I’m planting a church;” “We’re going to develop a campus ministry” or “Our focus is on reaching a particular ethnic group with the gospel.” Those terms are so imprecise that it is like shooting at the side of a barn. If you do not have clear, precise goals and objectives you can articulate to people, you are unlikely to ever achieve what you set out to accomplish.

Ministry planning forces us to think about what we want to do. It compels us to focus on the specifics of where we want to go and how we plan to get there. It draws a target on the side of the barn and then demands that we hit it. To be functional, goals have to be specific, attainable, measurable, realistic, and time sensitive. People are attracted to ministries that have thought through what they want to accomplish. They are energized by clear objectives and action plans for achieving them. Don’t settle for illusionary targets on the side of the barn when with a little effort you can have a big, precise target right in front of you.

3) *Ministry planning builds stability and momentum into your ministry.* People are looking for
ministries that are stable, innovative, and forward moving. They want to know you will be in the same place doing similar things each time they come back. They want to see the same greeters at the door and the same teachers in their children’s classroom. Their confidence in your ministry grows as they see your ministry plan unfold before them. In contrast, frequent changes and uncertainty leads to instability, ineffectiveness, and frequent turnover of workers. People will not stay with a ministry if the leaders don’t know where they are going or what comes next.

Ministry planning gives you a blueprint to follow. It identifies objectives to achieve, milestones to surpass, and critical masses that must be met as you progress along the path toward clearly defined goals. Momentum and forward movement are built into the plan so you can traverse from Point A to Point B to Point C, etc. You know what comes next because you have already thought through the process and have identified the next steps. People get excited and willingly give of their time and money to organizations that know where they are going and how they are going to get there. Rather than bouncing from pillar to post and going in circles like the children of Israel in the wilderness, churches with a well-written ministry plan have a laser beam that guides them to their destination.

4) Ministry planning increases your effectiveness and productivity. Ministries are often like treadmills – there is a lot of activity, but little progress. Services are held, sermons are preached, lessons are taught, tracts are distributed, often with little visible results. That is well and good, but that is not why we are here. That is not what we set out to accomplish. All too often, we allow the means to become the goal while our effectiveness diminishes and our productivity sinks.

God has called us to be productive, to reproduce, to be effective in serving him in whatever type of ministry he calls us to do. We glorify him by producing fruit (John 15:16). Successful businessmen are productive because they have a business plan which they follow. Successful farmers develop plans that increase their productivity of milk, corn and wheat. Servants of Christ who want to be successful in their ministries develop plans that enhance their effectiveness and productivity.

Ministry plans keep your goal in front of you and force you to think in advance about what you need to do in order to be effective and to produce the results you want. They help us choose between those activities that will move us forward and those that only create a lot of motion without any forward movement.

5) Ministry planning enables you to have a more balanced ministry. Ministry is multi-faceted. In Matthew 22 and Matthew 28 the Lord Jesus identified five major focal points or emphasis that we should follow in ministry (worship, ministry, evangelism, fellowship, and discipleship). Most people are gifted in only one or two of these ministry areas. Ministries tend to reflect the strengths of their leaders. Thus, a church with a compassionate pastor tends to focus on ministering to hurting people while neglecting the other focal points. A church with a pastor who is gifted in evangelism will tend to focus on winning people to Christ, but will be weak in the area of worship and discipleship. A great many (dare we say “most”) churches and ministries are lopsided emphasizing some areas of ministry while neglecting the other areas. Their ministries are unbalanced.
A carefully crafted ministry plan enables you to have a well-rounded ministry. It enables you to build in each of the ministry activities Jesus highlighted in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. It provides opportunities for people to focus on worship as well as listening to sermons. It gives you the chance to provide discipleship training for new believers. It enables you to build in ministry activities that allow your people to participate in outreach and service events in the community. Yes, you can do those things without having a ministry plan. The problem is, however, that you probably won’t do them all well unless you have a plan that calls for those specific activities. A ministry plan allows us to be intentional rather than haphazard in what we do.

6) **Ministry planning builds cohesiveness and unity into your ministry.** One way to spell “ministry” is T-E-A-M. Regardless of whether it is just you and your spouse, a group of co-workers or a host of lay volunteers, you must work together toward the same objectives if you hope to succeed. As long as you are a team of one you can do whatever you want. But as soon as you inject other people into your ministry there may be competing agendas about what is to be done, when it is to be done, and by whom it is to be done. Team players often pull in opposite directions causing dissent, disunity, and failure.

A written ministry plan spells out what the goals are. It explains where the ministry is headed. It gives everyone on the team a common objective. It details what needs to be achieved before moving to the next step. It articulates who is responsible for specific actions. It establishes a timeline that is to be followed. Following a ministry plan builds togetherness and stimulates unity between workers. It enables you to have everyone in the canoe paddling in the same direction.

7) **Ministry planning provides a basis for evaluating, measuring progress, and assessing results.** Everyone in ministry needs to stop periodically to assess how he is doing. Are you moving forward? Is the ministry growing? Have you reached critical mass? Are you ready for the next stage? Is it time to launch that new program you have been discussing? How long before the ministry will reach its objective? What progress has been made? What problems need to be solved before taking the next critical step?

It is impossible to answer those questions accurately without having a ministry plan in place. You have to know where you are going and what specifically you are trying to achieve before you can evaluate your progress. A written plan gives you a starting point, a destination, and several milestones along the way by which you can determine where you are and how far you have come. Your ministry plan is the “fixed position” by which you can determine if you are on course or not.

**Activity is not a suitable measure of progress.** You can have all kinds of ministry activity while actually regressing. Many in ministry get sidetracked by engaging in “good” ministry programs that do nothing to move them toward their objective. There are all kinds of service activities that help hurting people, but which do nothing to move the ministry toward its goal. We are not saying you should not be involved in those things. Instead, we are saying those things must be kept in balance with the overall objective. Your ministry plan might even include some of those servant evangelism ministries, but they might be designed with the idea of training lay people to do them, rather than doing them all by yourself. Servant evangelism and care ministry should be
part of the strategy for developing a well-rounded ministry, not a substitute for it.

A ministry plan includes attendance goals, income and expenditure projections, discipleship processes, lay leadership development objectives, and many other things that enable you to make mid-course corrections when you get off track. Your ministry plan is the GPS tracking system that keeps you headed in the right direction. Don’t leave home without one.

8) Ministry planning attracts greater funding and increases giving. Fundraising is a major part of ministry. Missionaries, church planters and campus workers all have to raise money to fund their ministries. Some struggle more than others with this. Some have to raise larger sums than others depending on the type of ministry they are involved in. A single church plant can cost well in excess of a million dollars for personal support, operating expenses, land acquisition, and construction of a new edifice. Where is this money going to come from?

A carefully choreographed ministry plan is one of the secrets of successful fundraising. Money tends to flow to those who can articulate what they want to do and how they plan to do it. They are able to place in the hands of perspective donors a ministry prospectus that traces the steps they plan to follow as the ministry moves from phase to phase. Knowing where, when, what, how, and who builds confidence among contributors.

Once the ministry begins and people are attracted to it, the income and donations will generally be greater and more consistent if the people’s attention is periodically drawn back to the ministry vision of the leader. If you want people to join you on your journey, if you want people to fund your ministry, you must build up their confidence that you know what you are doing and where you are going. A well-devised ministry plan does exactly that.

9) Ministry planning is good stewardship. Stewardship has to do with how we use the things God entrusts to us. Many people think stewardship is primarily about money. It isn’t. It is much larger than that. Stewardship is primarily a management issue. It focuses on what we do with the resources we have available to us – things like time, personnel, skills, and possessions, as well as money. A lot of time, talent, and treasure are wasted in the Lord’s work. People are plugged into ministry slots for which they are not gifted. Talented people are held at arm’s length because we don’t know how to utilize their skills. Funds are wasted by pursuing activities that are inconsistent with our objectives or because we have no real objectives.

A ministry plan can help minimize much of the waste that occurs in some ministries. A good ministry plan will focus on developing and utilizing the talents of lay people. It will provide for ongoing discipleship and leadership training. It will focus on using ministry funds to achieve specific objectives. It will help you to say “no” to ideas and activities that will sidetrack you and chew up your time in pursuits that produce no tangible results.

A good steward is accountable to his master. He has to give an accounting of how he used the resources entrusted to him. He may have been “busy” with ministry activities, but the master will not be happy with the outcome unless he can show significant results from what he has done with his master’s goods. A ministry plan helps you do exactly that. It keeps you on course. It enables you to make better choices. It utilizes the skills and talents of people more wisely, and it produces more results than is true without a plan.
10) *Ministry planning enhances your leadership standing.* Leaders see more than others see, they see farther than others see, and they see before others see.\(^\text{10}\) They have a picture of their mind’s eye of where they are going and how they are going to get there. They have developed a working plan for achieving their dream. People are drawn to people who know where they are going. They follow leaders who can tell them how they plan to accomplish their objectives.

Leadership is about influence. The best way to influence people to join you in ministry is to articulate a compelling vision of the future as it relates to you ministry, AND to show them a detailed plan for getting there. People’s confidence in your leadership grows when they see a well thought-out ministry plan. It tells them you have done your homework. You have thought through the problem areas, you have figured out solutions, and you have made preparations for reaching your goal. People like to follow people who know where they are going.

Ministry planning is the oil that keeps the engine running, it is the track leading to the station, it is the means for achieving success. The benefits are enormous. If you want to have a successful church-planting ministry, if you want to develop a growing campus ministry, if you want to build an expanding prison ministry, if you want to win and disciple more people, then you must answer the “how” question. How are you going to do it? Your ministry plan details your answer to that question.
Section 3

Ministry Planning is Biblical

Some people might question the above title. The words *plan, planned, planning, goals, objectives, actions steps, milestones, critical mass, timelines* and other planning phraseology do not appear in Scripture, at least not in the Authorized Version of the King James Bible. They would view these as secular concepts not taught in Scripture, and thus to be avoided, especially in light of the fact there are a number of passages that seem to warn against planning.

For example, Psalm 33:10 says, “The Lord bringeth the counsel (plans) of the heathen to nought; he maketh the devices (plans) of the people of none effect.” Psalm 140:1,2 declares: “Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man; preserve me from the violent man: which imagine (plan) mischiefs in their heart.” James 4:13 issues a warning to those who say: “To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain.”

These, and other passages like them, are not injunctions against planning in general. Instead, they are warnings about a certain kind of planning – namely, planning to do evil, taking advantage of others, and leaving God out of the planning process. God will not bless nor sanction plans that run contrary to his will. Selfish planning is never biblical planning.

Planning is biblical, however, when it is done for God’s glory and in an effort to further his work in accordance with the principles laid out in his Word. Our plans may not always coincide with God’s. We must always be ready to adjust our plans so as to fit into his plan. Acts 16:7 tells us the Apostle Paul and his missionary team planned to carry the gospel into the province of Bithynia, but “the Spirit suffered them not.” Realizing that God was not leading them in the direction they had planned, Paul and his team altered their direction and headed west toward Troas and Macedonia. They adjusted their plan as they went along and fine-tuned it to fit with what God revealed to them. Ministry plans are never set in stone. They always allow for corrections along the way, but nevertheless serve as guides for the journey.

It is true that many of the modern words associated with planning are not found in the Authorized Version of the Bible. Silence, however, does not negate the principle. The words *trinity* and *rapture* do not appear in Scripture either, but those truths are repeatedly taught in the pages of Holy Writ.

Moreover, in Scripture there are numerous examples of older terms, such as *counsel, devise, devices, etc.*, that refer to planning. For example, Psalm 20:4 records this prayer: “Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel (plans).” Proverbs 19:21 tells us, “There are many devices (plans) in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel (purpose) of the Lord, that shall stand.” In Psalm 41:7 we read, “All that hate me whisper together against me; against me do they devise (plan) my hurt.” These older terms are often translated as *plan, planned, and planning* in newer translations.
There are numerous other passages in Scripture that use similar terminology to convey the concept of making plans for the future. We will look at some of them a little later on.

**God is the Ultimate Planner**

God is a god of order, structure, and planning. Through the power of inspiration he admonishes us to “let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40). Randomness, haphazardness, disorganization, and a reactive mode are not part of God’s plan for our lives nor our ministries. He exemplifies for us how we are to do ministry. We only need to look at the world around us to see the meticulous planning that went into the creation of our world.

Creation demonstrates that God is a creative architect – the ultimate designer and planner. Whether we study the vastness of space or the intricacies of the human body, we quickly note the planned order and structure of all things. The earth is ninety-three million miles from the sun. If it were just a few thousand miles closer to the sun we would all be burned to a crisp. If the earth were a few thousand miles further from the sun we would be locked in an eternal ice age. Either way, life would be unsustainable as we know it.

The Psalmist said, “For I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are thy works” (Psalm 139:14). The human body is a wonder to behold. It is an undeniable example of God’s intricate planning for each of us.

In the providence of God one cell from your Mom and one cell from your Dad, each containing twenty-three chromosomes that make up one-half of your DNA, merged into a single cell. When those chromosomes met, they formed four nucleotide that contain the three billion characters which comprise your human genome. If you were to take that one cell and stretch out the DNA in it, it would extend for six feet.

If you were to read the three billion characters that make up the DNA in a single cell of your body at the rate of one character per second, it would take ninety-six years just to read God’s description of who you are. And that’s just you. It is different for every single human being who has ever lived or who ever will live on planet earth. No two are the same. There is a plan in your DNA that determines who you are.

Amazingly, that one cell formed from the one cell from your Mom and the one cell from your Dad set out to build the model found in your DNA. After three days there were sixteen cells, each with the exact same DNA in them. In the course of time those cells divided over and over until you were born and became the unique person you are today – only today you have seventy-five trillion cells. Each one of them has the same six foot, three billion characters of your DNA.

There is enough DNA in your body that if you laid it end to end it would reach from earth to the moon 178,000 times. In the time it takes you to read this sentence, fifty thousand cells in your body will die and be replaced by fifty thousand new cells. Each has the exact same DNA code as the ones they are replacing. That process continues day and night for as long as you live.11

All of this doesn’t just happen randomly. We are not biological accidents nor random occurrences in a meaningless existence. We are the result of God’s carefully and uniquely
crafted plan for each of us. God is a planner, and you and the world you live in are proof of it.

Our redemption and our salvation are proof of God’s planning. Ephesians One speaks of God’s eternal redemptive plan in these words:

> According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. Having *predestinated* us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

> Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath *purposed* in himself; That in the dispensation of the fullness of time he might gather together in one all things in Christ both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him; In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being *predestinated* according to the *purpose* of him who worketh all things after the *counsel* of his own will. (Ephesians 1:4-11)

Sin did not take God by surprise. When Adam and Eve disobeyed and ate of the forbidden fruit, God did not have to scramble to come up with a way to deal with their sin. Before he created them he knew they would rebel against him. Moreover, he knew how he would deal with their sin. He had a plan in place. He made reference to that plan in Genesis 3:15 when he said, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

> When he spoke those words God was looking down through the ages to when the fullness of time was come, and he sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law (Galatians 4:4). His redemptive plan was in place from eternity past. We’re told that we were chosen in him before the foundations of the world were laid (Ephesians 1:4). God’s ultimate plan is to call a people out of the world unto himself and to conform them to the image of his Son, the Lord Jesus (Romans 8:29).

Referring to Christ and his death on the cross for our sins, First Peter 1:20 says, “Who verily was *foreordained before the foundation of the world*, but was manifest in these last times for you.” God’s plan of redemption was in place long before he hung the stars in space or laid the foundations of the world.

The fact remains, God is a god of order, structure, and planning. He is the ultimate planner. He set the example for us to follow. If God laid out a plan of what he was going to do, how he was going to do it, and when he was going to do it, then certainly we should follow his example. We can do that by developing ministry plans to guide what we do as we plant churches, develop campus ministries, and seek to win and disciple people for Christ. Planning is biblical.
Biblical Support for Planning

There are numerous passages in Scripture which refer to the benefits of planning, and warnings against planning to do evil. We sometimes overlook those passages because we don’t recognize the terminology used. Below are thirty-four Scripture texts that refer to planning. I have taken the liberty of inserting in parenthesis the modern equivalent of the word that refers to planning in the text.

Job 42:2 – I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought (plan) can be withholden from thee.

Psalm 20:4 – Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfill all they counsel (plans).

Psalm 33:10,11 – The Lord bringeth the counsel (plans) of the heathen to nought; he maketh the devices (plans) of the people of none effect. The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts (plans) of his heart to all generations.

Psalm 140:1,2 – Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man; preserve me from the violent man; which imagine mischiefs (devise plans) in their heart; continually are they gathered together for war.

Psalm 140:8 – Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked; further not his wicked device (plans); lest they exalt themselves.

Proverbs 12:5 – The thoughts (plans) of the righteous are right; but the counsels (plans) of the wicked are deceit.

Proverbs 12:20 – Deceit is in the heart of them that image (plan) evil; but the counselors of peace is joy.

Proverbs 13:12 – Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire (plan) cometh, it is a tree of life.

Proverbs 13:16 – Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge (thinks ahead); but a fool layeth open his folly.

Proverbs 13:19 – The desire (plan) accomplished is sweet to the soul.

Proverbs 14:15 – The simple believeth every word; but the prudent man looketh well (plans) to his going.

Proverbs 15:22 – Without counsel purposes (plans) are disappointed; but in the multitude of counselors (advisors) they are established.

Proverbs 16:1 – The preparations (plans) of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord.
Proverbs 16:3 – Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts (plans) shall be established.

Proverbs 16:9 – A man’s heart deviseth (plans) his way; but the Lord directeth his steps.

Proverbs 19:21 – There are many devices (plans) in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel (plan) of the Lord, that shall stand.

Proverbs 20:18 – Every purpose (plan) is established by counsel; and with good advice make (plan) war.

Proverbs 21:5 – The thoughts (plans) of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want.

Proverbs 21:30,31 – There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel (plan) against the Lord. The horse is prepared (preparations are made) against the day of battle; but safety is of the Lord.

Proverbs 22:3 – A prudent man foreseeth the evil and hideth (prepares, plans) himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished.

Proverbs 24:3 – Through wisdom (wise planning) is an house builded; and by understanding it is established.

Proverbs 27:23 – Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well (plan) to thy flocks.

Isaiah 14:24 – The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought (planned) so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.

Isaiah 14:26,27 – This is the purpose (plan) that is purposed upon the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it?

Isaiah 25:1 – O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; they counsels (plans) of old are faithfulness and truth.

Isaiah 32:8 – But the liberal (noble man) deviseth (plans) liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand.

Isaiah 37:26 – Hast thou not heard long ago, how I have done it; and of ancient time, that I have formed (planned) it? Now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste defenced cities into ruinous heaps.

Isaiah 46:10 – Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel (plan) shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.
Isaiah 55:10,11 – For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please (plan), and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Jeremiah 29:11 – For I know the thoughts (plans) that I think (have) toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts (plans) of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

Micah 2:1 – Woe to them that devise (plan) iniquity, and work (plot) evil upon their beds! When the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand.

Acts 2:23 – Him (Christ), being delivered by the determinate counsel (plan) and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.

Acts 4:27,28 – For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel (plan) determined before to be done.

Hebrews 11:39,40 – And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise; God having provided (planned) some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

There are undoubtedly many other Scripture passages that refer to the making of plans and to the importance of planning. These suffice to demonstrate that Scripture does indeed have a great deal to say about this important topic. It behooves those of us who are involved in ministry to seek God’s will as we look to him for guidance in developing a ministry plan to guide each step as we seek to build that ministry for his glory.

Planning is biblical. It is something that is taught in Scripture. We neglect it to our own harm. How foolish to attempt to do the work of God and not follow God’s example and admonition. A well-constructed ministry plan will go a long way in helping us to reach our goal of a fruitful ministry and a completed task.

Biblical Examples of Planning

If ministry planning is biblical (and it is), then there should be numerous examples of it in Scripture. Bible heroes and great men and women of the faith should be seen planning and implementing plans that enabled them to succeed. That is indeed the case. Below you will find some of the greatest people in the Bible regularly engaged in “ministry” planning.

Abraham and Eliezer – When it came time to find a wife for Isaac, Abraham called his steward Eliezer and laid out a plan for finding the right girl for his son to marry. According to the plan Eliezer was to return to Abraham’s ancestral homeland in Mesopotamia and choose a wife for Isaac from among Abraham’s kindred (Genesis 24:3,4). Abraham’s servant then thought through the process that he would need to follow in order to complete his mission successfully.
First, he determined what resources he would need to accomplish his assigned task. Then he recruited the helpers he would need, gathered the food and resources required, and outfitted a caravan of ten camels for the trip (24:10). He had to plot his route and delegate his responsibilities at home to reliable people who would carry on in his absence.

Once he arrived on site in Mesopotamia, he checked with God and sought his guidance as he implemented his plan. He had thought long and hard about how he would choose a wife for Isaac. He would stand a short distance from the community well observing the women as they came to draw water. When he saw a promising prospect he would ask her for a drink of water. This in itself was not an uncommon thing. Wayfarers often asked for a refreshing drink of water from whoever might be at the well. The difference was that Eliezer’s plan required that the girl God had chosen for Isaac would not only give him a drink of water, but would also volunteer to water all ten of his camels and their drivers (24:14). That was an enormous task that was highly unlikely and would require considerable work.

No sooner had he prayed and sought God’s help in implementing his plan than Rebekah arrived to draw water from the well. Not only was she related to Abraham’s family, but she readily offered to give the man and his camels drink. His plan was working. God was blessing his plan far more than he had anticipated. Things were moving rapidly, but the servant had already planned his next steps.

When he was ushered into the home of Rebekah’s parents the servant refused to be sidetracked from his plan. He kept his eye on his objective and stated why he had come. He distributed gifts to the family (as planned) and related how God has blessed his planned journey. He then asked permission to take Rebekah with him to be Isaac’s wife (24:48,49). As unlikely as it was for Laban and Bethuel to give their daughter to a total stranger, they recognized the hand of God in this, and granted permission for him to take her. What was it that convinced them to let Rebekah go? Verse 50 indicates that they recognized the man’s plan was of God and that God was in it.

When the family suggested that Eliezer wait several days before taking their daughter and returning to Abraham and Isaac, the man declined the invitation because of the timeline he was on. It was urgent for him to return to Canaan as quickly as he could. There was no time to waste. He returned home on schedule, delivered Rebekah to become Isaac’s wife, and everyone rejoiced greatly that he had been so successful in his mission. The thing that made it all possible was his devotion in seeking God’s guidance and meticulous planning that went into it. He serves as a great example of what we must do if we want to be successful in our appointed area of ministry.

Joseph – Joseph had been sold as a slave by his brothers to Midianite merchantmen (Genesis 27:28), who took him to Egypt and sold him to the Egyptians. Through the miraculous guiding hand of God upon him Joseph went from slave to household manager to prisoner to Prime Minister. Everything he touched was marked by success. He rose to leadership wherever he went. He became the second most powerful man in the world by the time he was thirty. What was his secret? First, he recognized the hand of God upon him in the midst of his trials (Genesis 50:20). He knew God was in control of his life even when things seemed to be swirling out of control. He trusted God to lead him and orchestrate the events in his life.
But there was another contributing factor in Joseph’s success – his skill as a planner and manager. He was able to devise and implement detailed plans that resulted in success. Even before he became Prime Minister he sketched out the broad outlines of plan for dealing with a seven year drought and famine that would descend upon the Middle East with a vengeance (Genesis 41:34-36).

Pharaoh immediately saw the wisdom of Joseph’s plan and elevated him to a place of authority. There Joseph was able to refine and implement his plan. During the seven good years of plenty Joseph collected twenty percent of the abundant harvest and set aside massive quantities of food in store cities throughout the country. By the time the famine struck he had huge reserves of food set aside, enough not only to feed everyone in the country, but to supply the needs of countless people from foreign lands as well.

When crops failed and the land lay fallow and parched, Joseph had a plan in place for feeding the people (47:14-17). He implement a massive resettlement program (47:21), and developed a plan that brought the land back to prosperity when the famine ended. Millions of people would have died and the Messianic line of Christ would have perished if it had not been for the plans Joseph developed and carried out. He serves as a biblical example of how godly men should function as they seek to fulfill the ministry God has given to them. Developing a ministry plan is crucial to success in serving God.

Moses – Moses was a reluctant leader. He didn’t want to go to Egypt to deliver God’s people from four hundred years of bondage. Though well-schooled and highly intelligent, he had learned that planning without God’s input can lead to disaster. He had tried to deliver God’s people on his own forty years earlier and had failed miserably. He wasn’t interested in trying again. Planning to him was a waste of time.

God, however, has a way of putting us in positions of leadership that require us to learn to plan and manage effectively in order to accomplish what God has called us to do. So it was with Moses. After some initial success in delivering the children of Israel from bondage Moses was struggling with the “next steps.” He didn’t know how to plan or how to manage two million newly freed slaves. He was working himself to death trying to meet all the needs of the people and to do everything that needed doing. At age eighty, he was still a ball of fire. He had enormous energy. He worked from sunup to sundown, and still couldn’t get everything done.

What he needed was a plan, but he didn’t know how to develop a ministry plan until his father-in-law, Jethro, came along and taught him what to do. After observing Moses in action for a few days, Jethro told him, “The thing that thou doest is not good” (Exodus 18:17). He then laid out a ministry plan for Moses to follow. The plan called for Moses to choose capable men who would serve as lay leaders over the nation. He was to divide the nation into cell groups ranging from ten to a thousand people. A group leader was to be placed over each of the groups depending on the leader’s leadership abilities.

Moses’ ministry plan then called for him to delegate authority to these group leaders. They were to shepherd their groups. They were to teach them the laws of God. They were responsible for handling everyday disputes. They made decisions affecting the people under them. They handled the “small stuff” and only took the hard cases to Moses to resolve. Moses’ ministry plan
removed a lot of the stress he was experiencing and allowed him to focus on the big picture. It gave him time to deal with the issues that affected the majority of the people. It allowed him to think and to dream. In the meanwhile, the needs of the people were being cared for by those working under him. It is a great picture of how a ministry should function.

Later, when it came time to build the Tabernacle we find that Moses needed a plan to make it happen. He had never built a Tabernacle before. He had no idea what it should look like, what materials were needed or what skilled workers would need to be recruited to do the work. Once again, he needed help in developing a ministry plan to guide him.

This time, it was God that provided a detailed plan for achieving the task assigned to Moses. God met with him in Exodus 25:8,9 and told Moses, “Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.” Again in verse 40 God reiterated the plan he had given him when he said, “And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount.”

God then proceeded to give Moses a detailed plan for building the Tabernacle. The plan included the size, shape, materials, and design for each piece of equipment, the tent, the outward boundaries, and the placement of each piece of furniture. It also described how sacrifices were to be offered, the procedure for killing the sacrificial animals, and how the remains were to be disposed. Nothing was left to chance. All was prescribed in detail in the plan God gave to Moses.

Moses’ ministry lasted for forty years. Today, he is viewed as one of the greatest men in history. He is known as the Law Giver, a liberator, and a leader. People still read his writings. They still study his leadership style, and one of the things they learn is that planning is crucial to one’s success in life. If you want to be successful in your field of ministry, Moses would tell you to take the time to develop an effective ministry plan that will lead you to your desired destination.

Joshua – Joshua had been born into slavery in Egypt. He was a young man who served as Moses’ “minister” or assistant (Exodus 24:13). He was privileged to accompany Moses on the mount of God (24:13) and had a tender heart for God (33:11). He rose through the ranks, served as one of the twelve spies who searched out the Promised Land. He became the military leader of the nation and eventually succeeded Moses as the leader of the nation. Planning was an integral part of all he did. He knew there was no success without it.

Whether he was spying out the land or locked in battle with the Amalekites, he had a plan for achieving his objective. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the battle for Jericho. This was a massive, fortified city surrounded by an inner and outer wall. The outer wall was six feet thick and twenty-three feet tall. The inner wall was twelve feet thick and thirty feet tall. The space between the two walls was filled earth.

Even with the formidable army that Joshua had (over 600,000 men), Jericho was virtually impenetrable because of its massive fortifications. God gave Joshua a plan for capturing the city that defies human logic. For six days the army was to march around the city without uttering a word. Was this a form of psychological warfare? Possibly. On the seventh day the plan called
for them to march around the city seven times in silence. The priests were then to blow the ram-horn trumpets with a long, loud, sustained blast that was deafening. This was to be accompanied by the 600,000 man army shouting at the top of their lungs (Joshua 6:3-5). That was the plan. Ridiculous? Not when it comes from God. Innovative? Absolutely. Did it work? You bet it did because verse 20 tells us “when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.”

Archeological digs verify that the mud-brick walls of Jericho did indeed fall outward just as the Bible describes and as Joshua’s plan called for. Every ministry plan is unique. No two are the same. Each plan has to be designed to achieve the particular objective you are seeking to achieve. Sometimes those plans will be uniquely innovative and challenging. They may be ambitious, even bordering on the impossible, but with godly faith and tenacity, God does the miraculous in response to your plan.

**David** – Herding sheep since his childhood resulted in David becoming a master planner. As a shepherd boy he learned to develop a logistical plan that included a timeline for taking the sheep out in the morning, bringing them back in the evening, and causing them to rest along the way. He strategized about where to take the sheep for the best pastures and water. He implemented a security plan for protecting them against predators such as wolves, bears, and lions.

When he faced Goliath, David formulated an unorthodox strategy (a plan) that included a sling and five little stones. His plan called for engaging the giant in a verbal exchange that distracted the heavily armed man and caused him to drop his guard long enough for David to get off a deadly shot to the forehead (I Samuel 17:40-49).

David became a masterful military planner. He was so successful that the women sang, “Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (I Samuel 18:7). Because he sought the Lord’s guidance in his planning, he was often innovative, unorthodox, and creative in his planning (II Samuel 5:23,24).

He surrounded himself with advisors and men who knew how to plan and to get things done such as Joab, Ahithophel, and Hushai. His ability to plan averted almost certain disaster and death when Absalom attempted to overthrow him. It was David who drew up the plans for Solomon’s temple and began stockpiling the resources to build it. David was indeed a masterful planner who understood the importance of strategic planning.

**Nehemiah** – Nehemiah lived in exile in Babylon and served as the cupbearer or food taster to the Persian king, Artaxerxes. His heart was heavy because the city of Jerusalem lay in ruins as the result of God’s judgment upon his people at the hands of the Babylonians. Ezra the scribe had lead several thousand Jews back to their homeland in 475 B.C., but the city of Jerusalem remained in ruins thirty years later.

Nehemiah was determined to do something about the deplorable conditions in Jerusalem. So in 445 B.C. he requested permission from King Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem as the provincial governor with permission to rebuild the city walls. He formulated a plan and presented it to the king (Nehemiah 2:5-8). His plan included a political appointment as governor, permission to
rebuild the wall, and authorization to cut timber from the king’s forest for use in the construction project.

Once Nehemiah arrived on site, his plan called for him to make a detailed inspection of the ruined walls and the formation of a reconstruction plan. He then laid out a detailed plan of what was to be done and who was to do it. People were assigned to work on particular sections of the wall. Precautions were taken to guard against surprise attacks. Security plans were implemented.

People said it couldn’t be done. Opposition grew to the project. Threats were made. Intimidation and ridicule were heaped upon Nehemiah and his workers, but they stuck to their plan and continued building. Amazingly, although the city had lain in ruins for decades and every previous effort to rebuild it had failed, Nehemiah and his workers rebuilt the city walls and set up the gates in just fifty-two days (Nehemiah 6:15.) How did they do it? They had a plan that guided them step by step through the rebuilding process from conception to finished product. If you want to succeed in ministry, one of the key elements is to follow Nehemiah’s example and develop a detailed plan for doing exactly that.

Jesus – The Lord Jesus serves as perhaps the greatest example of strategic planning in the Bible. In keeping with God’s plan, when the fullness of the time was come, he was sent forth, made of a woman, made under the law (Galatians 4:4). He had a plan for redeeming a lost mankind that including going to the cross to pay the price for man’s sin. He developed a strategy for recruiting and training a core of men who would carry on his ministry after him. He methodically moved through his “ministry plan” teaching, preaching, and training those who would help him implement his plan and achieve his goals.

What happened to Jesus was no accident. He wasn’t the victim of circumstances. Rather, he followed a carefully crafted plan that resulted in sin’s penalty being paid and the gospel being preached around the world. If Jesus planned, then surely we ought to do the same.

Apostle Paul – The Apostle Paul was a master strategist and church planter. Highly educated, he had been trained to think and plan critically. He understood logistics and the value of good planning. If you follow him in his three missionary journeys you find he picked key population centers, commercial districts, and places of influence for his church plants.

Rather than going to the out of the way places, he focused on those areas where he could have the greatest impact. Then he trained scores of helpers to carry the gospel into surrounding areas. In Acts 14, he laid out his three-prong ministry plan for church planting: evangelism of unbelievers (21), edification of the new believers (22), and the establishing of new churches (23). Even today, church planters talk about following the Pauline model (plan) for ministry.

His letters are thoughtful, carefully crafted documents that lay out biblical truth in a systematic fashion that evidences preplanning. This is especially true of the book of Romans with its three sections on sin, salvation, and sanctification.

The evidence is overwhelming. Ministry planning and strategizing is biblical. Virtually everyone who ever accomplished anything of value for God was a planner and a strategist. If
you want to be successful in ministry, then you need to be intentional in developing a workable ministry plan that will take you from where you are to where you want to be.
Ministry Planning is a Process

Ministry planning is an on-going process rather than a one-time event. It is not something you do once and then forget about it. It begins the moment God burdens your heart to start a new church or to start a campus ministry, and continues until that process is complete. You will be planning during each stage of development. The only questions are: “How will you plan? Will it be proactive and intentional or will it be reactive and haphazard?”

One of the problems we referred to earlier in this manual revolves around the fact that many men in ministry do not know how to develop an effective ministry plan. They haven’t had the training or have never been part of a ministry where strategic thinking and planning were standard practices. Bible colleges and mission agencies are just now beginning to see the importance of including strategic planning in their curriculums.

At a time when our personnel and resources are stretched thin, it is of upmost importance that we pray and plan and strategize wisely so we can use our people and funds to the greatest advantage. So, let’s walk through the six-step process involved in developing a good ministry plan for your ministry.

Remember, ministry planning is not difficult. It just takes time and effort.

**Step One – Start with the End in View**

You can’t get to where you want to go unless you know where you want to go. Any journey begins with the destination. When you go on vacation you don’t normally just jump in the car and head off down the road in any direction at random. You start by deciding where you want to go such as to grandma’s house or the Grand Canyon or the ski slopes of Vale, Colorado. Until you know where you are going, you can’t get there.

That is precisely the problem with many ministries – they don’t know where they are going. They have no specific destination in mind. Saying that you want to “start a church” or “begin a campus ministry” or “serve people” is so nebulous as to be meaningless. It is like saying, “I’m going to take a trip to somewhere.”

Ministry planning starts by determining where you want to end up as a church planter, a campus worker or servant of Christ. What specifically are you trying to accomplish? Until you have clarified your thinking on this issue, and are able to articulate in detail what the finished product will look like, you will have difficulty moving forward.

*Clarify your purpose and your mission.* “Purpose” has to do with the reason for doing whatever you are doing. Why do you do what you do? Why are you planting a church? Why are you starting a campus ministry? Why are you holding prison services? Why does your church
Ministry Planning Made Easy

(ministry) exist? Sadly, many people don’t have a biblical answer to these questions. They often substitute things like “preaching the Word,” “winning the lost,” “evangelizing the world,” “sharing the gospel.” Those are all good things that a church or ministry should do, but they are not the reason a church or ministry exists. The only biblical reason for a church or ministry to exist is to please or glorify God (I Corinthians 10:31; II Corinthians 5:9).

“Mission” has to do with what your church or your ministry is supposed to be doing. What is it supposed to be accomplishing? The key words are “supposed to be doing.” That is often different from what your church may actually be doing. Churches and ministries are often filled with activity, much of it good and beneficial, but at the same time neglect the very things they ought to be doing. The Great Commandment and the Great Commission lay out five major areas that focus on what a church or a ministry should be doing. These include worship, ministry, evangelism, accountability, and discipleship. How do these factor into what you are trying to accomplish? Your understanding of the purpose and mission of your ministry are major factors in determining where you want to end up.

Clarify your values and vision – “Values” are simply the things that are important in your ministry. They are the things that get emphasized. They are the underlying beliefs that guide and direct the things you do in your ministry. Often, they are expressed through the ministries that are conducted by the group. For example, it is not unusual for a church that values children to have an emphasis on children’s and youth ministries. A church that places a high value on salvation often will have a strong outreach ministry. Churches that place great value of the Bible and spiritual growth will frequently have a major focus on discipleship and teaching. Different churches and ministries have different values. They are not necessarily wrong. They are just different. You need to determine the core values that will be emphasized in your church or ministry because they will significantly impact the ministry plan you develop.

“Vision” refers to the picture you have (or should have) in your mind of what the finished product (church/ministry) will look like when it arrives at its destination of maturity. It is a mental image in your heart of the future as you believe it can and must be. It should be detailed and specific. You should be able to visualize how large it is, how it will function, what its leadership will be like, and the impact it will have on the community around it. It is difficult to build something that is not clearly defined in detail. Nothing becomes dynamic until it becomes specific, and nothing becomes specific until it flows from the tip of a pencil.

Brainstorm with your leadership or ministry team - Brainstorming is simply group creative thinking. It is joint problem solving. It involves gathering your leadership team (if you have one) or those interested individuals who want to see your ministry move forward, and exchanging ideas for doing so.

Bring the group together in a relaxed atmosphere. You may want to have some finger foods or refreshments available to snack on. Have a large white board or large sheets of paper on which to record ideas.

Begin with a question such as this: “If our ministry had all the resources and personnel needed, what would we want this ministry to do or to become over the next five years?” You want the people present to get their eyes off of what is, and to begin to think about what might be. You
want them to dream, to look into the future with the eye of faith. What could God do in this ministry if there were no restrictions?

As people begin to make suggestions and express ideas, record them on the board or on the large scratch pads where everyone can see them. When a sheet becomes full, put it up on the wall so it is visible to all. At this point, no idea is too dumb, too far-fetched, too ridiculous or too ludicrous. You want to get your people thinking and the creative juices flowing. For now, defer judgment on the efficacy of any ideas suggested. Just write them down.

There are four cardinal rules that come into play when brainstorming:

1. **Focus on quantity** – the more ideas you have on the table, the more likely you are to come up with effective ideas and solutions.

2. **Withhold criticism** – by suspending judgment, participants will feel more free to generate innovative ideas. There will be a time for evaluating various ideas and suggestions later in the process. For now, you want to get as many ideas as possible into the field of play.

3. **Welcome unusual ideas** – this is sometimes called “thinking outside the box” as people suspend assumptions and look at situations from new perspectives. New ways of thinking will sometimes provide better solutions.

4. **Combine and improve ideas** – one idea often leads to another. Better ideas often come from building on previous ones. One plus one really can equal three in some cases.

Brainstorming may take several hours or days. Don’t assume that people are finished being creative when everyone goes silent. Let them think and mull over the previous discussions. They will often generate a new group of ideas as they evaluate what has been said.

Once people have exhausted their creative energy, ask them to group all the similar ideas. This eliminates much of the duplication that almost certainly has developed. Next, give each person a sheet of paper and ask them to list the top five ideas in order of importance starting with the most important one first. Now, ask the group to share the ideas they have listed on their papers. As they do so, record each item on the board or scratch sheet where everyone can see it.

Repeat this process until the group gets down to the top five ideas, problems or dreams. Whether you realize it or not, you have just identified and focused the attention of your group on the five main areas you need to deal with in order for your ministry to move forward. Your destination is already clearer now than it was when you began.

**Step Two – Find Out where you Are**

Earlier we said you can’t get to where you want to go unless you know where you want to go. It is equally true that you cannot get to where you want to go unless you know where you are. If you are lost in the woods and you don’t know where home is, you aren’t unlikely to get there. Almost any direction you go in will be wrong. You need to know where you are before you take
an initiative and end up further from where you want to be than you were when you began. You have to get your bearings first, and then you can set a course that will take you to your desired destination. To do this, you and your leadership team should conduct a SWOT analysis.

Conduct a SWOT analysis – A SWOT analysis is simply an evaluation tool that helps you understand where you are and what your ministry is facing. The word “SWOT” is an acrostic that stands for four things: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

• “Strengths” are the internal positive things your church or your ministry does well that give it an advantage such as a good location, a solid core group, mature believers, qualified leaders, willing workers, excess income, a building of your own, etc.

• “Weaknesses” are the internal negative things your church or ministry lacks or doesn’t do well that place it at a disadvantage. Examples of these might be not having any trained musicians, inadequate income, an out-of-the-way meeting place, few young couples, a poorly maintained building, few workers, weak leadership or a changing ethnic makeup in the area.

• “Opportunities” are external positive things in the community that provide your church or ministry with the chance to improve your performance. These could be things like a new housing development nearby, a robust economy, a local government that looks favorably upon religious organizations, an influx of new residents into the area, ready access to students at the local college, etc.

• “Threats” are external negative things in the community that could cause problems for your church or ministry. These might take the form of restrictive building codes, a government indifferent or hostile toward Christianity, an increasingly secular worldview on campus, an emphasis on religious plurality and tolerance, a wider community acceptance of recreational drugs, homosexuality, abortion, and other social issues.

It is important to involve other people (your leadership team) in the SWOT analysis. They will have different perspectives than you do. They will see things that you don’t see. Some ideas may be uncomfortable to hear, but be gracious and learn from those God places around you.

Focus on each element of the SWOT analysis individually. Take one section at a time. As people mention various “strengths,” write them on the board until you exhaust all the strengths that people can identify in your ministry. Then do the same for each of the other elements. Once you have the four lists complete, ask people to pick out the top three or four items in each category until you have zeroed in on the most important items in each list.

By now, you have a pretty good idea of where your church or ministry is as well as where it wants to go. You have a starting point and you have a destination. Now, we have to connect the two. The shortest distance however, isn’t always a straight line. There are many roads that can lead you to your destination. Some are better than others. Some are smoother than others. Some are quicker than others. The key now is to identify the main issues, questions and choices you face so you can select the best course forward for your particular ministry. There is no “cookie cutter” pattern for successful ministry.
Identify the key issues, questions and choices – “Key issues” involve such things as clarifying your mission, values and vision. It includes determining your target community and focus group. It deals with core group development, leadership training, ministry structure and funding issues. We have already dealt with some of these, others we haven’t. You need to decide who you are going to try to reach, how you are going to pull your ministry together, and how you are going to fund your ministry. Some items will be more important than others. Some will receive greater emphasis than others.

One of the “key questions” you must answer is, “What will receive priority in our ministry and in our ministry plan?” Everything you do (or could do) is not of the same value. Some things are more important than others. If everything is of equal value, then nothing is of any value. You have to pick and choose what is going to be important in your ministry.

- What milestones or critical mass points will you set that must be achieved before you move on to the next point of development?
- How will you maintain a balance between evangelism and discipleship so that neither gets left behind?
- What leaders do you need to train? How will you train them?
- What materials will you use?
- How are you going to get a foothold in the community and build your core group?

These are some of the critical key questions you need to identify and answer as you prepare to develop your ministry plan.

“Key choices” are those decisions you must make along the way that will enhance or hinder the progress of your ministry. Wrong choices can sidetrack you or derail your ministry so that you make little progress whereas good choices can propel your ministry forward at a good pace. Some of the choices you will have to make include:

- Will the calendar (a predetermined date) or critical mass markers determine your schedule, and how fast you progress to the next stages of development?
- Will your ministry focus primarily on adults, children, students or prisoners?
- Will you seek to offer a full array of church services from the start?
- Will you seek to do a few things well or as many things as possible?
- Will you focus on property or personnel development first?
- Will missionary support or pastoral salary take priority in the use of funds?

These are some of the critical choices you must make as you develop your ministry plan. The issues you include, the questions you ask and answer, the choices you make will be reflected in your ministry plan and will significantly influence the success (or failure) of your ministry. So, choose carefully.

Now that you have determined where you are, where you want to go, and have identified the key issues, questions and choices you must address, it is time to move to the next step in the ministry planning process.
Step Three – Develop a Series of Goals that Address the most Important Issues

“Goals” are simply future accomplishments. They represent that which you want to achieve at some point in the future. They are terminus points, objectives, markers toward which you are moving. Goals create a target for you and your people to focus upon. They energize and unite people together in a common cause. They provide you with a measuring rod that you can use to evaluate progress and to determine changes that need to be made in the use of your time, personnel and resources. Without goals you have no destination, no clear direction, and little hope of achievement. Like the children of Israel, you are likely to wander aimlessly in the wilderness until your ministry comes to a less than glorious end. Goals are essential to the successful completion of the task you set your heart upon at the beginning.

Goals are big picture items. They look out into the future three to five years (sometimes longer) and identify specific things you want to accomplish such as the erection of a building, the development of a local liaison committee to direct your campus ministry, the launching of public services, the calling of a first pastor, the completion of the organizational process of your church, etc.

Goals do not normally deal with specific details such as who and how. Those specifics will come later in the planning process. They do however, need to be specific enough so people can understand what you are trying to achieve. “Planting a church” or “starting a campus ministry” are so general that they are virtually meaningless.

It would be far better to break down those nebulous concepts into broad, but specific goals such as: “It is our goal to identify three potential target areas by December 31st where new churches are needed in southern New Jersey.” Or you might say, “It is our goal to form an advisory council of pastors and laymen by June 1st to advise us in the development of a campus ministry at the University of Southern California.”

These goal are broad enough to give the big picture, but specific enough that people get an general idea of what you are trying to do.

In addition, your goals should be simple enough so they can be understood (the details and complexity will become clear as you move deeper into the planning process), realistic enough to be achievable, and time sensitive. To say that it is your goal to be running two hundred and fifty people in attendance within six months probably is not a realistic goal. You want your goal to be big enough to be challenging, and yet within the realm of possibility, if not probability. If it is not achievable, then it is not realistic.

The timeline is critical to the planning process. Goals without starting and completion dates are likely to linger in “never-never land” indefinitely. By attaching dates to your goals you stimulate action. Certain things have to be done by certain times if you are to reach your goal. You can’t simply sit back and wait for it to happen. Additional details for doing things will be added as you move through the other steps in the plan process.

Goals vary widely depending on the type of ministry you are in and where you are in that endeavor. The goals of someone who is on the front end of his undertaking will be much
different than those of someone who is several years into the process of development. The goals of a church planter will be different than those of a campus worker, a prison chaplain or someone working in Jewish ministry.

Understand that you cannot do everything. Some things are more important than others. Some things must be done before other things can be accomplished. So depending on where you are in your ministry process (starting out, well along, nearing the finish), select the five or six most important things that you want to achieve in the next three to five years.

Where do you want your ministry to be at the end of that time? What do you want to achieve? What progress do you want to see? What things do you want to develop? What level of development do you want accomplished?

Write out a one-sentence statement of what you want to achieve in each of the five or six areas you have chosen. Be sure to include a completion date for each statement. List them as “Goal #1,” “Goal #2,” “Goal #3” and so on.

Once you have written out your goals, go back and refine them. Rework them until they clearly say what it is that you want to accomplish in each of them. Have other people read over your goals to see if they understand what it is you want to do. If they are not clear to them, then you need to do some more work to clarify your goals. Remember, they are supposed to be specific enough and simple enough for others to understand.

Once you have finished developing your goals, let them set for a couple of weeks, and then revisit them. Do they still make sense? Are they still understandable or do you find yourself saying, “I wonder what we meant by that?” Are the dates for completion realistic or do you need to adjust the start or completion timeline?

Setting good goals is an important part of the planning process. A well-crafted goal makes the rest of the planning process much easier. Time spent on the front end thinking about what you want to accomplish and the goals you want to set will save you enormous frustration later down the road. It will also greatly influence the ultimate success of your venture. So, invest the time and effort to do it well. You will be glad you did.

**Step Four – Break your Goals into Smaller Pieces**

Goals are simply combinations of smaller building blocks called “objectives.” Every goal has numerous smaller parts that make up the whole. Just as a house is made up of bricks and steel, boards and shingles, doors and windows, so goals are made up of objectives and action steps. Each one contributes to the finished project. This is where goals and the things they are comprised of get more detailed. We are getting down to the nitty-gritty here.

**Determine your Objectives** - Break each of your goals down into smaller, more manageable parts. Goals by themselves are usually too large, too unwieldy to be achieved without reducing them into bite-sized pieces. In effect, you are cutting the “loaf of bread” into slices that can be handled more easily. Normally, this would include three to five items (objectives) for each goal, although it can consist of more.
For example, if we took the goal of identifying three potential target areas where new churches are needed in southern New Jersey, and broke it down into its smaller parts (objectives), it might look like this:

Objective #1 – To gather the latest U.S. Census information for southern New Jersey by August 1\textsuperscript{st}.

Objective #2 – To interview ten area pastors in southern New Jersey by September 1\textsuperscript{st} to ascertain the areas they consider the most needy and/or most potentially productive areas for church planting.

Objective #3 – To complete a “windshield tour” of potential target areas by October 1\textsuperscript{st} to ascertain what types of churches, factories, commercial centers, and housing are in each area.

Objective #4 – To conduct a door-to-door survey of 100-200 homes in the potential target areas by November 1\textsuperscript{st} to ascertain both the need for a new church plant and the receptivity level of the people.

Objective #5 – To make a selection of the three most needy areas in southern New Jersey for church planting by December 1\textsuperscript{st} based upon the information gathered in the above objectives.

The objectives will of course, vary widely depending upon what each goal is and the particular circumstances involved in achieving it. There are no “right or wrong” objectives, only good and better ones. The objectives for setting up a liaison committee to oversee a campus ministry would be much different than those associated with determining the best areas for planting a new church.

The key issue is to break down each goal into its component parts. What has to be accomplished in order to reach the goal? It is usually best to include other people in the planning process because they will see things that you will overlook. They have insights and experiences that we do not have. Wisdom does not begin or end with us. No one is so blind as the person who walks alone and refuses to listen to the input of others.

As with your goals, write out each objective so that it identifies some specific item that needs to be achieved in order to reach the particular goal you have in mind. Break the terminus date down into completion dates for each objective. If the date for achieving the goal is December 31\textsuperscript{st}, then you must take each objective and back it up to an earlier start and finish time so that all the objectives culminate with the date established in the goal.

Understand that dates and timelines are subject to change. They are only tentative in nature because things happen. Sometimes we are simply unrealistic. We bite off more than we can chew. Things don’t develop as quickly as anticipated. People fail to carry through on things as scheduled. That happens in ministry.

If that is the case, why include dates at all? Simply because they will motivate you to get started,
and will help to keep you on track as you move forward. They help you to measure your progress. They will energize people to do what they need to do as the target date approaches. You will get more done and be closer to achieving your objectives and goals if you include dates and timelines in your planning than you will be without them. They work to your advantage, so use them.

**Determine your Action Steps** – Objectives are the component parts that make up goals, but they are often still too large and too complex to handle without breaking them down into smaller, more manageable parts called “action steps.” This is where the rubber meets the road. This is where the action takes place and things get done. Here, we are going to get very specific and detailed. This is where the architectural plans are turned into boards and nails, and weather stripping so to speak.

In order to achieve the goals you established, you must pull together the constituent parts of those goals. In order to do that, you must break them down into their smaller parts, and then complete whatever actions are required to make that objective a reality.

Here (in the action steps), you are going to identify what has to be done, how it needs to be done, who is going to do it, when it is to be done, and even how much money will be allocated in order to do it.

The action steps will vary widely depending on each objective and goal that has been identified. Establishing a liaison committee for a campus ministry involves an entirely different set of action steps than are required for identifying potential church planting sites in southern New Jersey. Even establishing a liaison committee on one campus may be different than establishing a liaison committee on another campus, and identifying target areas in southern California may required different action steps than identifying target areas in southern New Jersey. Again, there are no “right or wrong” actions steps, just good and better ones. Your job and that of those who are helping you develop your ministry plan, is to identify and implement the best ways for achieving each objective so as to reach your goal successfully.

For the sake of illustration, let’s take the second objective above, the one that says, “To interview ten area pastors in southern New Jersey by September 1st to ascertain the areas they consider the most needy and/or most potentially productive areas for church planting in the target region.” What action steps might be needed in order to make this objective a reality? Here are some possibilities:

**Action Step #1** – Jim Johnson will compile a list of fundamental pastors in the Southern New Jersey region (including their phone numbers) by July 15th.

**Action Step #2** – Joe Hartman will develop a list of six to eight questions by July 15th to be asked to pastors in southern New Jersey that will help identify the most needy areas for church planting in that part of the state.

**Action Step #3** – Between July 15th and August 15th, Jim Johnson and Joe Hartman will each contact and interview five fundamental pastors located in Southern New Jersey to ascertain in their opinions which areas in southern New Jersey are in greatest need of
having new churches established in those areas.

Action Step # 4 - Jim Johnson and Joe Hartman will compile their findings from their interviews with fundamental pastors in southern New Jersey and will identify the three areas of greatest need for new churches in that region based in part upon the input gathered from area pastors.

Someone else pursuing the same objective might come up with an entirely different set of action steps that would enable them to reach that objective. The thing to notice isn’t necessarily the particular actions themselves (these will vary), but the fact that each action identifies someone who is designated to do it, along with a date by which it is to be done. Actions steps are of no value unless someone is assigned to carry them out within a certain timeframe.

Regardless of what type of ministry you are involved in, regardless of the goals you set, regardless of what objectives need to be met to make the goal a reality, you need to identify the specific things that are to be done in order to make those things happen. Without action steps, neither the objectives nor the goals will be attained. Action steps are the fuel that make the car run.

So, take the time to think through the process. What specifically needs to be done in order for each objective to become a reality. Things don’t just happen. They happen because someone took the time to make sure they would happen by identifying the steps needed to make them happen.

Step Five – Build Contingencies and Evaluation Points into your Plan

Things do not always turn out the way we expect. Proverbs 16:9 tells that “a man’s heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps.” God is the final arbitrator of success and failure. Sometimes in his sovereign wisdom, God overrules our best intentions. Regardless of how well you plan and execute your plan, there are always unexpected bends in the road that thwart our best efforts.

Someone gets sick, a key person falls into sin, or dies or moves away. A severe economic downturn can undermine the ministry’s ability to fund its activities. It may take longer to raise your support, put together a ministry team, or acquire property than anticipated. Government regulations, unknown restrictions, a terrorist attack, and many other things can sidetrack, delay or even eliminate your ministry. There is no end to the list of things that can possibly go wrong. All the planning in the world cannot prevent some things from happening.

Contingency planning - That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t make plans or that developing a ministry plan is a waste of time. Not at all. Rather, it means that we should make provision in our planning for a number of eventualities that could possibly hinder us in some way. Proverbs 22:3 says, “A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.” He doesn’t run away and hide in a closet. Instead, he makes contingency plans that will help him to avoid the situation entirely, minimize its negative effects or survive its impact.

Establishing safety policies, financial guidelines, and ministry requirements can go a long way
toward minimizing potential harmful eventualities. As you formulate your ministry plan, look down the road and think about what could possibly go wrong. Then build in elements that will help you counteract the potential problems. Adopting child safety guidelines, financial counting procedures, counseling policies, and review processes can do much to help you deal with negative situations that may arise. It is always better to have a carefully crafted policy in place when the unexpected happens than it is to try to deal with it on the fly. Contingencies are back up plans sitting on the shelf in case they are needed.

Not all eventualities are necessarily bad. Unexpected good things do happen in ministry from time to time. Some represent opportunities that were totally unexpected such as when the CFO (chief financial officer) of a computer firm got saved and started attending a small church. His first tithe check was for $10,000. The church had to develop contingency plans on what to do with this unexpected influx of money. It might be that the highway department might take your property and give you a much better piece of land. Perhaps a very talented musical family will begin to attend your church.

Because unexpected things (both good and bad) do happen in every ministry you need to be ready to modify your ministry plan as you go along so you can adjust to the changing landscape. Remember, ministry plans are guidelines rather than straightjackets. They are flexible. They expand and contract depending on what is happening around them.

_Evaluate, Evaluate, Evaluate_ – Schedule regular times of evaluation into your ministry plan. Every three to six months, stop and ask yourself, “How are we doing? Are we where we want to be? What is working well and what needs greater attention?” Don’t simply plunge ahead with your plan regardless of how well it is working. To do so is a folly that could eventually undermine what you are trying to do. If the wheel is squeaking, stop and grease it. If the engine light is on, stop and find out why it is on, and then fix it before proceeding.

As you plan, build in milestones and critical mass markers that must be met before you proceed to the next level. These will provide you with natural evaluation points along the way as you implement your plan. Critical mass markers could be any achievement that needs to be completed before moving on to the next level of development such as the completion of your foundational documents, the recruitment of a launch team, the accumulation of a certain amount of funds, a certain level of attendance at services, the availability of rental space, the training of certain lay leaders, etc.

Sometimes church planters will set a target date for launching public services, and will tenaciously hold to that date even though other parts of their plan (such as a launch team, core group size, etc.) have not been achieved. Rather than stopping and evaluating where they are, they just push ahead, often to their detriment. It would be far better for them to stop and evaluate their progress and readiness to move forward. If necessary, they could then push back their tentative launch date until the other components of their plan are in place.

It would be absolutely foolish for a pilot to start the engines and begin taxing down the runway without first running through his preflight checklist to be sure the plane is fueled up and in flying condition. Yet, that is exactly what some planters and pastors do because they don’t stop and evaluate where they are in relationship to where they want to be.

Adjustments will often be needed in the plans you develop. Some things will go faster than expected. Others will take longer than anticipated. Costs will increase, circumstances will change, people won’t follow through as promised, delays will be inevitable. So, periodically stop and reassess where you are, what has been completed, what still needs to be done, and what
changes you need to make. You are much more likely to reach your goal if you do so.

Step Six – Provide for Implementation of your Plan

File cabinets are full of them. Shelves are stacked high with them. They often lie in obscurity collecting dust unseen by the light of day. I’m referring to ministry plans such as the one you are working on. Missionaries, church planters, and pastors put in hours and hours of work to develop a ministry plan to guide them as they build their ministries, and then turn right around and forget all about it. Rather than following through with their plan, they revert back to doing things the way they have always done them. In airplane terminology, they “fly by the seat of their pants.”

Plans only work if you work the plans. They have to be implemented and followed if they are going to do you any good. As long as they lie on the shelf or in the desk drawer they will not be of any value. As the leader of your ministry, you have to take responsibility for seeing that your ministry plan is implemented. If you don’t do it, no one else will. This is your baby. You have to make it work.

Building evaluation points into your plan is one way to encourage implementation. Including both start and completion dates in your goals, objectives, and action steps also stimulates implementation. Identifying who is responsible to do what further promotes implementation.

Perhaps the best way to ensure that your plan will be put into practice is to include a comprehensive timeline at the end of your ministry plan that chronologically lists everything to be done. Look through your list of goals, objectives and action steps and determined which item comes first on the calendar? Put down the date and what is to be done. Include a notation of where it is found in your ministry plan (goal #, objective #, action step #). Look through your ministry plan again. What is the next date for something to be started or completed? Put it down on the list with its date and notation of where it is found. Continue this process until everything in your ministry plan is arranged in chronological order.

You may find that you have multiple things that are due to be started or completed at the same time. Can you realistically achieve all of them? If not, you need to go back and adjust the dates in your ministry plan. This is one of the values of making this chronological list. It keeps you from being overwhelmed by too many things needing to be done at the same time.

Once you complete your chronological list of events, you will have a reference sheet that you can check as you move forward. At the beginning of each month (sometimes more often), check your chronological list to see what needs to be done during that month. What needs to be started? What needs to be completed? Who needs to be notified? What needs to be ordered? What is coming up that you need to prepare for?

Take each item that is coming due for that month and list it on your weekly calendar so it gets done on time. If you don’t schedule it, it is likely to be left undone or you will forget about it until the last minute, and then it may be too late to do it.

Review your chronological list with your ministry team members every few months in order to
keep everyone focused on the things that need to be done. Remind key people in advance when something is coming up for which they are responsible. Good leaders make sure their team members are aware of what needs to be done. Just because you assign someone to do something doesn’t mean they will do it or have it done on time. By checking with them and by reviewing the ministry plan periodically, you keep your people focused and in the loop.

Ultimately, the “buck stops here” with the leader. The person in charge is responsible for seeing that everything under him gets done, even when assignments are given to others. Your church plant or your ministry will function as well as you plan for it to function. God tends to “give the increase” when we do a good job of planting and watering.

If you want your ministry to be healthy and to grow both numerically and spiritually, then you need to develop a ministry plan that is conducive to healthy growth. The system you put in place will be perfectly designed to give you the results you will get. A well-designed system (plan) will generally experience God’s blessing and will give you the results you want to see. The converse is also true. A poorly designed system (plan) generally will not experience God’s blessing and will not give you the results you want to see.

The problem is not with God or with the community in which you are working. More often than not, the one in charge needs to do a better job of designing a system (plan) that God can bless. God wants his church to grow. He is not reluctant to pour out his blessing upon those who are seeking to serve him in that endeavor. He is simply looking for men who are sensitive to his leading and who do a good job of putting together the best ministry plan possible for carrying out his command to make disciples among all people groups.

No two ministry plans will be the same. Every ministry and every minister is different from all others. While there are some similarities, each plan will be unique in its details. Your plan will be unique to you, your ministry, and your community. Putting it together will take time as you consult with your ministry team and coach.

It will be time well spent however. In the end, if you do a good job of planning, your church and your ministry will have a stronger foundation, be better organized, be more effective, and grow more rapidly than would otherwise be the case. Ministry planning really does work.
Planning Template

Step #1 – Determine your destination (Where do you want to end up? What do you want the end product to look like?)

1. Define your purpose, mission, values, and vision.
2. Brainstorm with your leadership group to define the five most important things you want to accomplish through your ministry and the five major problems facing your ministry.

Step #2 – Find out where you are

1. Conduct a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) with your ministry (launch) team.
2. Identify the key issues, questions and choices that need to be addressed in your ministry plan.

Step #3 – Develop a series of goals you want to achieve in the next three to five years (include a completion date for each goal)

Step #4 – Break your goals down into smaller pieces (objectives)

1. Determine your objectives (component parts) for each goal.
2. Determine your action steps for each of your objectives.

Step #5 – Build contingencies and evaluation points into your plan

1. List provisions you have made in your plan for handling unexpected emergencies.
2. List the evaluation points (times) you have established in your plan.
3. List the milestones and/or critical mass markers in your plan that must be met before you can proceed to the next stage of development in your plan.

Step #6 – Provide for Implementation of your ministry plan

1. Create a chronological list of all goals, objectives and action steps contained in your ministry plan.
2. Review your chronological list monthly and schedule upcoming events (activities) on your weekly calendar.
3. Adjust your plan as contingencies develop.
Planning Template
(Expanded Version)

Step #1 – Determine your Destination (Where do you want to end up? What do you want the end product to look like?)

1. Define the following terms as they apply to your ministry:
   a. Purpose – Why does your ministry exist or what is the reason you want to start your ministry?
   b. Mission – What is this ministry supposed to be doing according to Scripture?
   c. Values – What are the main things that will be emphasized in your ministry?
   d. Vision – What will your ministry look like when it reaches maturity (completion)?

2. Brainstorm with your leadership group.
   a. List the five most important things your brainstorm group identified that you want to accomplish through your ministry.
   b. List the five major concerns (problems) identified by your group that need to be addressed in your ministry plan.

Step #2 – Find Out Where You Are

1. Conduct a SWOT analysis with your ministry (launch) team.
   a. Strengths – What do you do well? List the positive things that exist within your ministry.
   b. Weaknesses – What don’t you do well? List the negative things that exist within your ministry.
   c. Opportunities – What positive things are there in your community that will be a help or benefit to your ministry? (List them here)
   d. Threats – What negative things are there in your community that will be a hindrance to your ministry? (List them here)
2. Identify the key issues, questions and choices that need to be addressed in your ministry plan.
   a. Key Issues – List the most important issues that need to be dealt with in order to make your ministry a success.
   b. Key Questions – List the most important questions that need to be answered in order for your ministry to succeed.
   c. Key Choices – List the most important decisions that must be made in order for your ministry to succeed.

Step #3 – Develop a Series of Goals you want to Achieve in the next Three to Five Years
   (include a completion date for each goal)
   Goal # 1 –
   Goal # 2 –
   Goal # 3 –
   Goal # 4 –
   Goal # 5 –
   Goal # 6 -

Step #4 – Break your Goals Down into Smaller Pieces (objectives)

1. Determine your objectives (component parts) for each goal.
   Goal # 1 –
   Objective A –
   Objective B –
   Objective C –
   Objective D –
   Objective E –
   Goal # 2 –
   Objective A –
   Objective B –
   Objective C –
   Objective D –
Objective E –

Continue this process for each of your goals. Be sure to include a completion date for each objective.

2. Determine your action steps for each of your objectives.

Goal # 1 –

Objective A –
- Action Step 1)
- Action Step 2)
- Action Step 3)
- Action Step 4)

Objective B –
- Action Step 1)
- Action Step 2)
- Action Step 3)
- Action Step 4)

Objective C –
- Action Step 1)
- Action Step 2)
- Action Step 3)
- Action Step 4)

Objective D –
- Action Step 1)
- Action Step 2)
- Action Step 3)
- Action Step 4)

Objective E –
- Action Step 1)
- Action Step 2)
- Action Step 3)
- Action Step 4)

Continue this process for each objective under each goal. Be sure to include completion dates for each action step.

Step #5 – Build Contingencies and Evaluation Points into your Plan

1. List provisions you have made in your plan for handling unexpected emergencies.
2. List the evaluation points (times) you have established in your plan.

3. List the milestones and/or critical mass markers in your plan that must be met before you can proceed to the next stage of development in your plan.

Step #6 – Provide for Implementation of your Ministry Plan

1. Create a chronological list of all goals, objectives and action steps contained in your ministry plan.

2. Review your chronological list monthly and schedule upcoming events (activities) on your weekly calendar.

3. Adjust your plan as contingencies develop.

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2 Ibid., p. 11.
6 David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1008), p. 120.
11 Louie Giglio, How Great Is Our God DVD (Sixstepsrecords.com)
13 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brainstorming