

## **Chapter 11**

### **Multiplication Vision**

*“Now glory be to God, who by his mighty power at work within us is able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of—infininitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, or hopes” (Eph. 3:20, TLB).*

I love what Paul says here in his letter to the church at Ephesus. God has big dreams for us—“infininitely beyond” anything we can fathom. What does that look like for you and your church?

In this chapter, we’re building on the solid foundations for a new scorecard that we talked about in chapters 8 and 9. We’re discussing the vital need to transform our current addition-focused vision into a vision rooted in multiplication and then to identify the pathway that gets us to our desired destination.

Like the picture on a puzzle box, your vision communicates a clear and compelling image of the future. Your multiplication pathway gives you the map for getting there. Together, they move forward your new multiplication-focused scorecard and give you tools for bringing everyone else along on the journey.

That said, here’s the critical question: *How strongly is your vision rooted in making disciples who make disciples that plant churches that plant churches?*

A vision rooted in multiplication conveys a strong commitment to sending and releasing disciples to plant churches that plant churches. When our vision is greater than growing and expanding our own kingdom (your church, your network, your denomination, etc.), the fruit of disciple making produces churches that plant churches—ultimately growing and expanding God’s Kingdom.

## **The Paradox of Vision**

For church leaders, vision provides a bit of a paradox. On one hand, we know through Scripture that God will hold us accountable for being good stewards of the resources He entrusts to our care. We all want to face Jesus some day and hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Like the servants in the parable of the talents, we must act to risk and extend the resources the Master gives us. Vision stretches us to be fruitful.

On the other hand, we know that God cares more about our faithfulness and surrender to Him and His plans than our man-made visions and strategies.

Consider the pursuits of Noah, Abraham, Peter, Paul, Nehemiah and Ruth. Were their visions clear and world-changing? Not at all. These leaders we look to didn’t know what they were doing. Noah couldn’t comprehend God’s bigger picture. Abraham said “yes” and didn’t even know where he was going. Peter and Paul had no human idea how God would use them in the greatest movement in history. Nehemiah simply wanted to rebuild some walls and had no idea of God’s bigger vision to rescue His people. And Ruth, she died without knowing the real legacy she’d leave in Jesus’ lineage.

The heroes of the faith were known more for their faithfulness to cooperate with and surrender to God than they were their vision or strategy. When Jesus shared the last supper with His disciples and prayed for them, He could have laid out the master plan and grand vision for a world movement. Instead, He prayed for their faithfulness and after His resurrection, gave them His Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) and the Holy Spirit.

We get in trouble not for our lack of vision, but for our lack of obedience to “go” rather than “stay,” and “accumulate” rather than “send”—making cultural Christians instead of biblical disciples. When our vision is more about living *our* dreams than God’s

dreams and building *our* strategies rather than cooperating in His plans, our good intentions for multiplication will always fail.

Your key question is not, “Where do *I* want to go?” or “Who do *I* want my church to become?” but rather, “Where does *God* want our church to go?” and, “Who does *He* want us to become?” In his classic study, *Experiencing God*, author Henry Blackaby perfectly summarizes the approach we need to take in developing vision in this familiar statement: “Watch to see where God is working and join Him.”<sup>1</sup> Perhaps a lesser-known Blackaby insight comes from his book, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda*. Obedience, he says, is key.

“If Christians around the world were to suddenly renounce their personal agendas, their life goals and their aspirations, and begin responding in radical obedience to everything God showed them, the world would be turned upside down,” Blackaby writes. “How do we know? Because that’s what first-century Christians did, and the world is still talking about it.”<sup>2</sup>

We need to discover God’s dream and vision, and then build our dreams around His. Too many times, we do the reverse. Yes, you need a unique vision for where God wants to take you and your church. You also need a pathway for getting there. But God must be the source of both.

### **Jesus’ Multiplication Vision**

The dream God gives each of us exists as part of a bigger dream rooted in Scripture. Right before His ascension into Heaven, Jesus shared His dream for His Church—His vision for multiplication:

*“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes up on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).*

The vision that Jesus gave His present and future followers focused on a movement. He had a powerful vision of God’s Kingdom

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coming on earth as it is in heaven. Through the Holy Spirit, we have the power to venture beyond our home base and ultimately take His Good News to every tribe and every nation so that one day, “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:10-11).

Jesus knew that gargantuan dream would not be accomplished with one or even 1 million churches. He is asking us as Christ followers and leaders of His church to join with Him to accomplish His mission and grow His Kingdom. In the process, He grows and matures us. If you don’t already know it, having a God-sized vision is a true life-changer.

Allowing your heart and mind to pursue a vision that’s bigger than you will change you in significant ways. When you begin to get a clear vision for multiplication both as a leader and for our church, you start to see how God prepares and shapes you for that vision.

### **A Vision for Multiplication Changes Your Questions**

When it comes to vision, one question will lead to another. The size of your vision will often determine the types of questions you ask. Easily manageable smaller vision requires one set of questions while God-sized vision will lead you to ask an entirely different set of questions. Since co-founding Exponential and starting NewThing Network, Dave Ferguson’s questions have changed with the size of his dreams.

“Ten years ago, our dream was to start a network of new churches, so I had to ask, *How can I attract, train and deploy church planters?* Now our dream is to see a movement of reproducing churches, so I’m asking, *How can I create systems that reproduce networks and attract, train and deploy apostolic leaders?*”

As you start to ask the challenging questions that will help lead you toward your multiplication vision and move your new scorecard forward, your questions for how you measure success will begin to change. While we may still ask, “How many people

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worshipped with us this weekend,” a multiplication vision requires us to think toward the future:

- How many churches will we plant this year and over the next five years?
- Will we budget significantly for church multiplication (an actual line item)?
- How many new churches outside our own church will we support?
- Will we release and send out leaders to multiply churches—even the most valuable ones?
- How many people will we encourage to leave and start a new church?
- If we pursue multiplication and our weekend attendance goes down as a result, will we see ourselves as successful?

Your vision guides both your personal scorecard and scorecard for your church. The greater your multiplication vision, the more profound the questions you will ask and the more your scorecards will change.

### **A Vision for Multiplication Changes Your Prayers**

A vision for multiplication that’s too big for you and your church to accomplish through your own efforts and giftings will drive you to your knees. It keeps you looking to God and depending on Him.

For West Ridge Church Planter/Pastor Brian Bloye, prayer was a catalyst for becoming a Multiplier. Bloye has led West Ridge’s transformation from a congregation focused on size and growth into a community bent on Kingdom multiplication.

“My initial vision when I planted West Ridge was to become the biggest church we could be and to reach as many people as we could. But as we grew, God began to work in me,” Bloye explains.

“I realized that God has not called His Church to my vision. He has something much bigger in mind. As I laid out this new

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multiplication vision, I knew that God was going to have to do a work in our staff, and in the leadership of our church. And then He was going to have to do a work in our church. Even though I knew it would be a hard work, I knew that if I was praying about multiplication, if I was praying about reproduction, if I was praying about sending, then I was praying in line with God's will. If you pray in line with God's will, you will begin to pray powerful prayers."

As Exponential has directed its focus, energy and resources to Kingdom multiplication, Dave Ferguson's prayers have changed. Each day in his journal, he writes "4% > 10%."

"Every day I pray, 'God, use Exponential to see the number of multiplying churches in the U.S. go from 4 percent to 10 percent'" he says, "and then, 'God, use NewThing to create a global movement of 10,000 multiplying churches.'"

### **A Vision for Multiplication Changes the People Around You**

Vision is contagious. When we get a vision for multiplication and begin to share it, we start a chain reaction. Have you ever seen someone's soul awaken as he/she begins to wonder about the role he/she could play in advancing the Kingdom?

Think about whose Kingdom vision has influenced you and made you say, "I want to lead a church that follows the biblical call to multiply disciples." In the same way, your multiplication vision could actually be the match that starts a wildfire! Sharing a clear vision for multiplication will slowly begin to change the people in your path in several ways:

*People start to take ownership of the vision.* Following a multiplying leader removes much of the mystery about how to pursue a vision. Think for a moment about how the process of visionary leadership is multiplied and transferred as the lead visionary mentors key team players.

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Will Mancini has served as a vision architect for hundreds of churches. We partnered with him to help us do what he does best (Will worked with us on *Dream Big, Plan Smart* and wrote our *Dream Big Workbook*). For more than a decade, he has come alongside teams to help them bring clarity to their vision. He can look back and see how his mentors' God-sized dreams have led him to where he is today.

"I remember serving on Bruce Wesley's leadership team at Clear Creek Community Church in Houston," Mancini recalls. "I learned a ton about decision-making, communication, integrity and self-discipline. Most importantly, I learned from Bruce's mastery of calling others to commitment. Without his model in my life, I never could have imagined transitioning to a coaching ministry."

*Watching a leader achieve his/her dreams removes fear and insecurity for everyone else that might dare to dream. We all know church leaders that relegate visionary leadership to a select few. Scripture tells us that daring to imagine big things is the opportunity of every believer. People begin to see themselves as visionaries, and recognize that everyone is part of the vision, and that everyone has a unique calling.*

Unfortunately, many church leaders don't empower lay leaders to play this kind of role. Instead, they are the "ball hogs" of the Kingdom, never allowing the fruit of Ephesians 4 to grow and mature. Paul tells us that God gives gifted men and woman to the Church to *equip* the saints for the work of ministry—not to *excuse* the saints from the work of ministry.

When you start to prioritize Kingdom growth over growing your own kingdom, that vision will change others—from the high capacity donor to the risk-taking lay leader, to the high school freshman in your student ministry. The key question for Multipliers is, "How are you preparing for and expecting the chain reaction of visionary leadership to take place and grow?"

## **A Vision for Multiplication Changes You**

Multipliers who are pursuing Level 5 multiplication can easily look back to see how vision has changed them personally.

Currently, Dave Ferguson dreams of seeing his Chicago-based church move from Level 4 to Level 5 multiplication. That dream, he says, has transformed him: “Other than becoming a Christ-follower, making the decision to become a multiplying church and pursuing a multiplication vision has been the biggest change in my life as a church leader.”

Below, Ferguson identifies the various ways his dream has changed him and other multiplying leaders:

*A multiplication vision deepens your relationship with God.* Think about how the vision that God gave Moses began to change not only him, but also his relationship with the God who called him out of the desert and into new life. At the crossroads of each and every challenge, Moses’ respect for God and His Word grew. His trust in God’s promises for a future land strengthened him in adversity. Throughout Exodus, we see how Moses’ utter dependence on his God for every provision changed him.

When you depend on God to fulfill a vision He has given you, your relationship with God—how you see and respond to Him—changes and changes you.

*A multiplication vision shapes your closest relationships in ministry.* Few people in Scripture exhibit such a noticeable focus on relationships like Paul does. Letter after letter shows us how Paul built relationships with the churches he started. Moreover, the Barnabas > Paul > Timothy powerhouse is one of our strongest examples of mentoring in Scripture. Paul knew his relationships were vital to advancing the gospel. When we pursue a God-given vision, like-minded people with the same passions and goals inevitably cross our paths. Our opportunities to influence and be influenced by high-capacity leaders increase, and we begin to seek



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out and spend time with people who have our heart for movement and Kingdom focus. Your relationships will change you.

*A multiplication vision shapes your priorities.* Having a vision keeps us laser-focused. When opportunities come our way with no clear connection to multiplication, it's an easy "no." A clear vision provides us with a filter through which we can run every idea, opportunity and decision. Vision gives you a picture of an unrealized future and the guardrails you need to stay on the path.

### **A Vision for Multiplication Changes Your Church**

Multipliers can tell story after story of how they've seen their church transform as a result of their focus on a vision beyond their backyard, city and state.

Casting a clear, compelling vision that calls your church to a specific purpose and mobilizes people into a life of mission lays the foundation for a church that thinks, acts and prays differently than a church focused only on its own growth. A church that carries out a strong multiplication vision begins to develop the characteristics of Level 5 multiplying churches. Consider some of the specific ways a multiplication vision changes your church:

*Vision incubates a Kingdom-centric church.* When people know and truly grasp that they are part of something bigger than themselves—something with eternal impact—they begin to be less focused on building *their* kingdom (their church) and more focused on seeing Jesus build *His* Kingdom. That means fewer tensions to navigate and more buy-in on all fronts as you pursue multiplication.

*Vision nurtures a culture/community of biblical disciple making.* In a church that embraces a vision for multiplication, making and multiplying disciples is paramount. Everyone in the church is a biblical disciple maker, reproducing disciples in community.

In 2016, Celebrate Community Church in Sioux Falls, South

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Dakota, announced its vision for becoming a Level 5 multiplication church. Lead Pastor Keith Loy is pursuing a vision of raising up disciples within the church to become church planters who will plant fifty churches in ten years. This Level 5 vision, says Reed DeVries who serves as the “architect” for it, has “transformed the church.” Celebrate has asked a local seminary to bring training to their lay people as they plant.

“We caught the vision of Level 5,” DeVries says, “and we’re not going back.”

*Vision breeds an apostolic atmosphere.* As a Multiplier, your vision for multiplication must be tied to the spectrum of APEST (Ephesians 4), which brings not only unity but also maturity in the faith. Missiologist Alan Hirsch points to the connection between APEST and a church’s “sending” impulse: “When leaders begin to embrace all five giftings of the Church—apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers—the key value of sending and releasing becomes a natural and expected part of your church,” he explains.

*Vision activates your church’s “sending” impulse.* In a church that has a strong multiplication vision, multiplication spreads spontaneously and exponentially. People know they are called to make disciples. They know that they’re part of a church that releases and sends them out to carry the gospel to every nook and cranny of society.

What would it look like if your church had a scorecard that embraced and reflected all of these values? How would things be different? How would your community transform? What would it look like for you to lead a church that’s sold out to multiplication, working together for the purpose of advancing the Kingdom?

Pursuing a multiplication vision moves us toward this picture. A clear vision for multiplication is essential to every leader aspiring to become a Multiplier.