

Why I Quit My Ministry Dream Job (And Would Do It Again)

By Ben Hardman, Gravity Leadership
<https://gravityleadership.com/quit-ministry-dream-job/>

When I was 27 years old I was offered what I thought was my ministry dream job. I was hired as a team leader for the one of the largest churches in the country.

I had a great corner office and oversaw over 80 staff. I was preaching every week to thousands of people, and the ministry grew numerically year after year.

I believed this was the pinnacle of success. I was impacting lots of people, the buildings and the budgets were going up and to the right. I believed I had arrived, and that this would bring me joy and contentment.

Trouble in paradise

But in the midst of all this outward success, **I started noticing some troubling trends.**

- I noticed that my ministry was better at producing consumers than leaders.
- I noticed that there was almost no disciple-making happening at all.
- I noticed that as the ministry grew, the pressure on me to perform only increased.
- I noticed my workload and stress levels were steadily rising.
- As the pressure to perform increased I started to believe more and more lies about my own leadership capabilities, capacity and character.
- Ironically, I also became more and more prideful.
- I became difficult to work with to be around, not just at work but at home with my wife and kids.

I noticed that I wanted the stage more than I wanted real transformation for myself and others. My marriage was a mess, I was exhausted and worn out.

I had believed that when the ministry grew I would work less. I thought when more people showed up I would feel more fulfilled, but I found myself empty, even as the ministry grew.

Ready to quit ministry

I was exhausted, lonely, frustrated and ready to throw in the towel completely on ministry. I carried all the weight of my ministry because I was always working out of my own strength and power.

- When things went poorly I agonized over them.
- When I got a negative email it gnawed at me for days.
- When someone left or complained I tore myself up inside.

So one day, after delivering another heartfelt message about living on mission and making disciples and such, I walked off the stage of our brand new \$30 million building and called a mentor.

I told him everything that was going on and just said, “I don’t know what to do!” He asked me a question that rocked my world and changed the course of my life and ministry forever:

“Maybe you are trying to take people to places where you have never been yourself?”

Quitting my job and starting my ministry

As I pondered his question, I realized that although I taught each week about living on mission, loving your neighbors, and living an integrated life, I wasn’t living *any* of those things!

I was trying to convince people to go places I hadn’t been before. I was teaching *about* things that I hadn’t been living myself.

So, I quit! I walked into my boss’s office at the church and said, “I’m out!”

Not to quit ministry, but to start learning what ministry actually was. I wanted to learn to live on mission and let my ministry to others flow out of that reality.

I moved my family into the 3rd poorest zip code in the United States and planted a church for the urban poor and young college students.

I spent the next four years learning to *live* what I had only learned how to *teach*. **I started to allow my character to catch up with my competency.** I started to learn some simple practices that pushed me and my family into everyday mission.

Moving from talking to walking

As I’ve reflected on my experience over the past ten years and spoken with hundreds of pastors, I realize that what happened to me in ministry happens in thousands of churches every week.

I realized that just because we changed the way we *talked* about things on Sunday mornings didn’t mean that anything had changed in the way we *walked* on Monday morning.

Just because “living on mission” had become *common language* did not mean it had become *common practice*.

At Gravity Leadership, one of our goals in coaching and training pastors is to lead them **from good intentions into concrete practices**. Every pastor has great intentions, but only a small few seem to be effectively translating this into practices that move them into mission consistently.

What happened to me is that my paradigm had shifted but my practices had not. I had learned so much about the MACRO level of the church but I desperately needed to learn the MICRO level of missional discipleship.

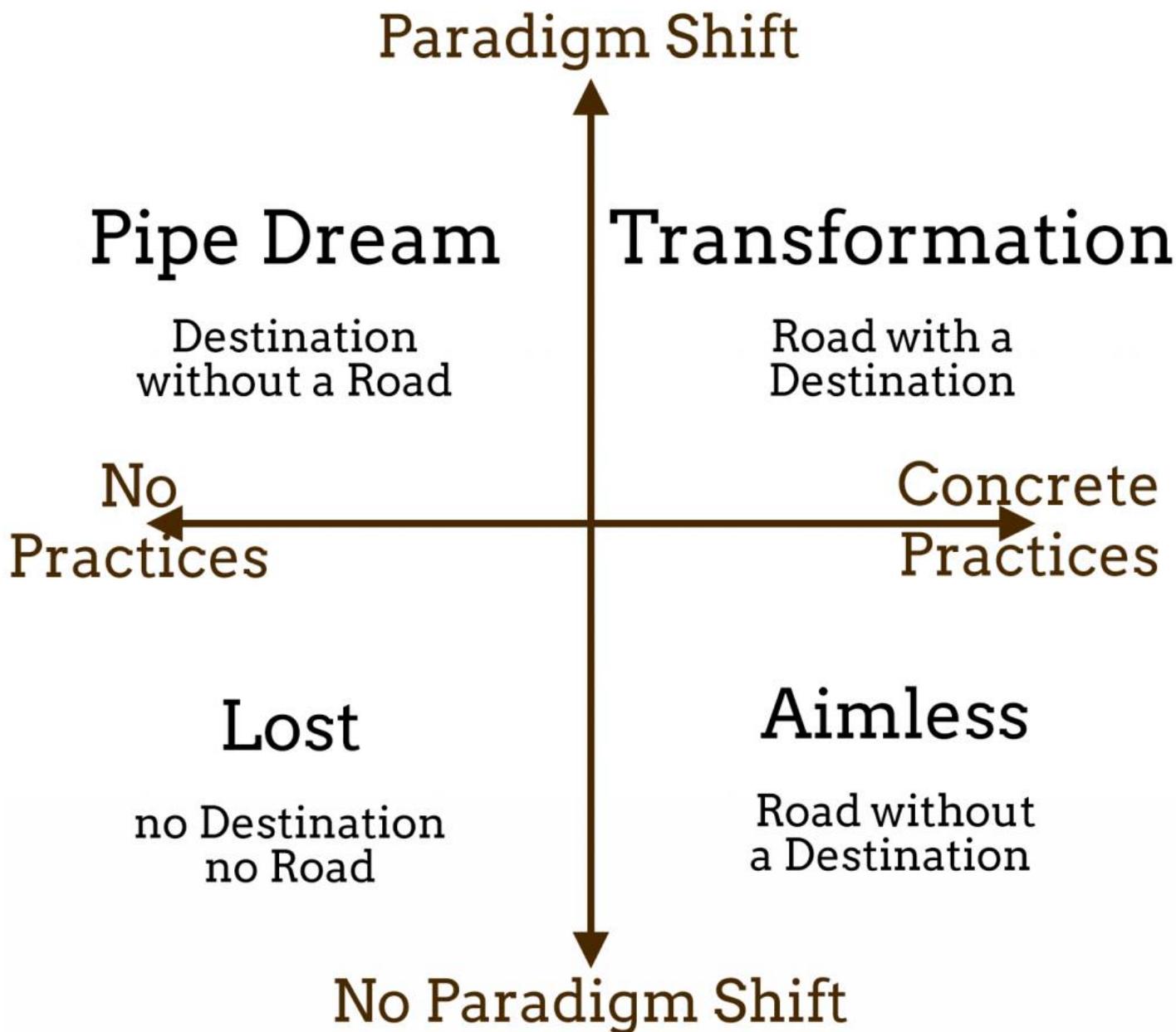
No training is complete until you’re living differently. A journey can’t take place only in our minds.

I know a lot of pastors feel stuck just like I was. They have had their *mind* changed. They know they need to train their congregants to follow God into mission in their everyday life. They just don’t know *how* to do it (besides talking more *about* it).

They've had the paradigm shift, but they haven't had a shift in practice.

Paradigm and practice

Think about it this way. Let's put "paradigm" and "practice" on a 2x2 matrix. I find that most churches fit into one of these four quadrants:



1 – Paradigm without practices

This was me. My *thinking* had changed, but the rhythms of my life hadn't. I knew how to talk about where I wanted to take people, but I didn't really know how to get there.

I talked about a destination with no road to get there. In many ways, **my entire ministry was a pipe dream**. I know that sounds harsh, but that's what it was – just something I wished for, but didn't really exist in reality.

2 – No paradigm, no practices

Unfortunately there are a lot of churches that haven't had a paradigm shift about missional living and making disciples, and aren't shifting into any new practices, either.

3 – Practice without paradigm

This is an interesting one. Some churches are great at activating people into new practices, but there hasn't been a paradigm shift toward missional discipleship.

The result is they have lots of programs and activities, but it's not really going anywhere coherent. It just becomes busyness for busyness's sake. They have plenty of roads, but they haven't defined the destination.

This is why so many church people become consumers. They simply come to consume the latest spiritual goods and services (teachings, events, service projects, Bible studies, worship experiences).

Lots of roads that don't really *go* anywhere. Incremental change but no lasting transformation.

4 – Paradigm and practice

This is where we all long to be: a church where people understand the goal is following Jesus into their everyday life (we've had a paradigm shift), and we are living into it together in practical ways (we've got practices).

This is where people have been given both a **destination** (*missional discipleship* in everyday life) and a **road to get there** (*practices and rhythms* that move people toward it).

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