



PURSUING GOD'S WAYS



Reconciled
World

Framework for Transformation
Book 7

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Introduction: Seven Core Principles

This is just one of seven core principles in this Framework for Transformation. All seven work together and reinforce one another as we seek to see God bring transformation to the brokenness in our world. The principles are:

- **Depending on God** - It's God who transforms. We need to look to Him for wisdom, provision, and supernatural intervention.
- **Nurturing Truth and Confronting Lies** - To see transformation in physical poverty and injustice, we must confront the wrong beliefs that undergird them.
- **Integrating Physical and Spiritual** - The biblical teaching that all of life is meant to be lived for God's glory changes how we understand poverty and the way we seek to address it.
- **Partnering with the Church** - The local church, Christ's bride, is key to addressing brokenness.
- **Focusing on the Vulnerable** - To see lives transformed, we must help vulnerable people to reclaim their identity as image-bearers of their Creator and stewards of the earth.
- **Mobilizing Local Resources** - As people stuck in poverty discover and use their God-given resources for God's glory, their thinking is transformed.
- **Pursuing God's Ways** - We need to be intentional and faithful to choose God's ways, which are higher than our own.

You can download PDFs of the other booklets (or request hard copies) and access additional articles, stories, and blogs about these seven core principles at frameworkfortransformation.org

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PURSUING GOD'S WAYS

I first went to church before I could stand. I grew up on the stories of David and Goliath, Joshua and Jericho, Moses and the crossing of the Red Sea. Since I absorbed them before I could really process how peculiar they were, they never seemed that shocking to me. Of course David turned up at a battle, the King loaned him armor which didn't fit and had to be removed again, and David—armed with only a sling and stones—fought a giant. Naturally David won. Similarly, while I certainly was aware that battles weren't usually fought by walking in circles around a city, it was easy to accept the story of Jericho and move on. As a child, the surreal seems normal. So many children's stories include such elements as talking animals or a girl with hair so strong and long a grown man could use it to hoist himself up a tower. So while I loved the biblical stories, I never really thought about how it would have felt to be David, Joshua, Moses, or even the Israelites on any of those occasions.

Sometimes I wonder what it would be like to read the Bible for the first time as an adult. Do you spend the whole time going, “Say, what?!” Are you left constantly wondering what God is up to and why He so often sends people on the most extraordinary paths?

And this strangeness of God’s ways is not confined to the Old Testament. From before he was even born, John the Baptist recognized Jesus as the Messiah.¹ Decades later, Jesus asked John to baptize Him when He was about to begin His ministry.² Initially John refused, saying he wasn’t worthy. But Jesus insisted, so John baptized Him. As Jesus came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit came down as a dove and a loud voice from heaven announced, “This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.” And yet, less than three years later, John was left wondering, “Is Jesus really the Messiah?”³ Clearly the way Jesus was behaving was not at all what John expected. Jesus’ three years of ministry had left a huge question mark in John the Baptist’s mind.

The disciples James and John seemed equally confused. In Mark 9, Jesus shares with His disciples about His coming death. In the very next section, we find the disciples debating who was the greatest. Jesus again tells them He will soon be arrested, mocked,

“What is God up to? Why does He send people on such extraordinary paths?”

1 Luke 1

2 Matthew 3

3 Matthew 11

tortured, murdered, and will rise again.⁴ In the next verse James and John request to sit at Jesus' right and left hand in glory. Jesus was talking about sacrifice, suffering, and death. They were talking about position and power. Jesus' forewarning of what was to happen clearly made no sense at all to them. Their idea of a Messiah was limited to one that would rule and restore Israel to power. A Messiah who would die and leave them all scrambling even to survive wasn't at all what they had imagined. What they envisioned and what God had planned were about as opposite to each other as two things could be. Clearly the Old Testament warns that the coming Messiah would suffer (Isaiah 53:7, for example). And yet since that didn't sync with their society's ideas of power, those verses were seemingly skipped over or forgotten.

God's Ways Are Higher than Ours

In Isaiah 55:8-9 we read:

*"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways My ways,"
declares the Lord.*

*"As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are My ways higher than your ways
and My thoughts than your thoughts."*

4 Mark 10

When we think of pursuing God's ways, we first need to acknowledge the fact that God's ways are not the same as ours. In fact, if everything we do as a Christian organization is the same as a non-Christian organization, then there might be something wrong. God's ways are not our ways; they are higher. Pursuing God's ways means intentionally trying to figure out how God would have us work, rather than just following the best practices and societal norms around us.

In the first six booklets of this series, we mostly looked at how God's ways affect our efforts to walk with people who are vulnerable. We learned that God's glory—not improved lives—is our highest calling.

That biblical truth and obedience—not big projects—are what's necessary to overcome poverty. And that we need to see vulnerable people the way God does—made in His image with immense potential and a high calling.

“ *Pursuing God's ways means intentionally trying to figure out how God would have us work.* ”

Now we will look inward. How do God's ways affect how we run our organizations?

Romans 12:2 says, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing, and perfect will.” As followers of Christ, we aren't to run organizations by the world's standards, best practices, or norms. Instead we need to seek to know God's will.

For many of us this idea isn't new. We have long been taught that we need to live differently as Christians. We are called to love our enemies, to forgive, and to be generous for example. But most of us haven't been taught much about what that means in terms of running organizations or mission groups. At an organizational level we don't have a lot of enemies, nor

“*As followers of Christ, we aren't to run organizations by the world's standards...we need to seek to know God's will.*”

do we have a lot of people to forgive. But in the same way as we need to apply the Bible to every part of our lives—from marriage to money—we also need to apply the Bible to our organizations.

A role model of pursuing God's ways

I once went to visit a Christian friend's factory in China. My friend's role was to look at every system and practice to make sure each one reflected the biblical values of the company. This company was serious about pursuing God's ways, and it was obvious. They were odd by the world's standards.

The first oddity was that they had built their factory in a rural village. It was far from the port, which meant that everything they made had to be loaded onto trucks and driven to the port for export. It would have made more sense to put their factory in the port city. But they were concerned about families in China. In most rural villages, you will find very few adults between the ages of 20 and 50. They have all moved to the cities

to work in factories. To save money, they live many people to a room, so any children are sent back to the village to be raised by the grandparents. And thus, China is filled with tens of millions of children being raised by elderly grandparents and only seeing their parents once a year. These Christian factory owners realized this really isn't God's design for families. So, to keep families together, they moved their factory to the workers rather than having all the workers move to them.

“ *This company was serious about pursuing God's ways...they were odd by the world's standards.* ”

These Christian businessmen also believed Jesus' words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), and "Give, and it will be given to you ... For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6:38). So they felt that challenging staff to give was important. They developed a "generosity fund," to which workers could voluntarily contribute. The staff elected leaders to look after the fund, and each month they would vote on what need to meet with the money that had been given. The month I was there, they used the fund to help one of the staff pay for heart surgery for her son.

Likewise, while the normal business practice in China (at least at that time) was to pay suppliers nine months after receiving invoices, this company's policy was to pay in 30 days. They recognized that the typical long lag time made it difficult for small businesses to survive. So "loving their neighbor" meant they didn't keep suppliers waiting so long.

Their desire to pursue God's ways impacted their Human Resource practices. Understanding that all people are made in the image of God and need the opportunity to be productive members of society, they employed deaf people and a translator to help communicate with them. Recognizing that many of their workers had the potential to do so much more than gluing together widgets, the company trained them for higher-level, better-paying jobs. Many of these people went on to get better jobs at other businesses. Of course, the wisdom of the world would say that this practice was causing turnover and costing them money. They were investing money into training but getting no return from that investment. Those who they trained went to work at other businesses. But this company was more concerned about honoring God and His creation than about profit margins.

Every part of their business was scrutinized through the filter, "Are we defaulting to follow the norms, or are we seeking God's ways and glorifying God through our business?" I don't know of any other organizations that are quite so intentional about seeking out what God's ways would look like in every situation. Anyone who walked into this factory knew it was different.

I'm not sure we often see such a dramatic difference between non-Christian and Christian non-profits. There are differences for sure. We are far more likely to have devotions or even a prayer room. We have different posters—ones that remind us to trust God. And we hopefully pray about our decisions a whole lot more.

But my friends in China give us a better example of pursuing God's ways. It takes more than adding a few spiritual practices to our work place (although this is a great start, and if you haven't done that yet, I would definitely recommend it).

An example from marriage

My husband is Asian and had never left his home country when we married. He grew up in absolute poverty and surrounded by extended family, friends, and neighbors. I, on the other hand, grew up in New Zealand, with more money and fewer people, and had traveled a good bit. Our wildly divergent backgrounds and cultures meant that the expectations and assumptions we each brought into the relationship were very different.

“Pursuing God's ways takes more than adding a few spiritual practices to our work place.”

For example, early on in our dating relationship, he popped around one day after work and handed me his pay. “Why are you giving this to me?” I enquired. “Because women look after money,” was his answer. I remember thinking that was super strange. But, I locked it up in my safe anyway, careful (with my Western mindset) to keep two separate piles of cash and detailed notes so as not to mix up our money while we were dating. So we managed our different expectations about money without too much drama.

However, after our marriage, when we were no longer saving for a wedding, my new husband declared that the appropriate way to use any spare funds at the end of the month was to give them all away. Now I was a bit more concerned. "You're supposed to save for future emergencies or retirement or holidays," I explained. As it turned out, not so in his view of the world. He strongly believed we ought to give it all away and then, if we were to have an emergency, people would give to us. As for retirement, people's children are expected to look after them in old age. And vacations ... well, they were a mystery to him. He considered having money sitting around in "corrupt banks" or hiding in the house ready to be stolen to be a complete misuse of money. "You shouldn't keep what someone else needs," he said.

As these different understandings of money (and countless other issues) arose we were forced to go back to scripture, since that was the only standard we agreed on. We had drawn-out conversations about the meaning of passages, which often revealed the cultural filters we read them through. Instead of relying on the norms of our cultures, we had to find a new way.

As we build organizations, we need to do the same. Instead of using all those great leadership, communication, and strategic-planning practices to set our standard, we need to start with scripture.

God's Ways Challenge Us

I have always oriented my life around trying to work out what God's ways are and following them. That passion didn't come so much from a belief that it would make for a smooth life. Twenty years in a country that faced significant persecution meant I was under no illusion that following God would be the beginning of an easy, comfortable life. Rather, I tried to walk in obedience to God so that, when things did seem to fall to bits or failed to make sense, I could at the very least, look back and say, "Well, at least I tried to walk in obedience to God."

So in 2013, when I co-founded Reconciled World with my husband, I brought with me that desire to be able to say, "No matter what the results, I did try to follow what God was showing me." That way, I figured, success or failure wasn't my responsibility but His. My job was solely to be obedient. While by no means a formula for success, it does bring a certain peace of mind. Here are some of the ways that God has shaped our understanding as we've sought to pursue His ways:

Planning

Planning is one area in which I have been challenged deeply. Years ago, I took the "StrengthsFinder" test. It identified "Future" and "Strategic" as my second and third top strengths ("Belief" took the number one slot, if you're curious). "Future" means I like to plan, and "strategic" means I am good at it. You need a plan? I can knock you out one without even batting an eyelash (or, as it happens, praying a prayer).

But, in my 20-plus year career, God has never really let me have a 10-year plan or even let me know too far ahead what's happening. Mostly I figure that's because, if I had a clear plan, I would probably just head off and do it, leaving God on the sidelines.

I pray often that God will help me never forget my dependence on Him. And He replies by never letting me have any idea what is coming. I stay blind and dependent. While I like planning and am good at it, I (like Paul) have been asked to use my weaknesses, not my strengths.⁵

Once I decided to teach planning to a group of rural pastors. We had goals and objectives and problem trees and goodness knows what else. By the end of my three days of teaching—complete with lots of practice built in—the pastors all declared they had headaches. “Does the Bible really say we have to do all this?” they questioned in bewilderment. “No,” I admitted, since it's super hard to think of a passage on problem-tree analysis. We all agreed it was a waste of time, and they graciously agreed to return in two months for a new training for the churches. I promptly burned the training about planning.

That experience left me questioning the whole area of planning. How much was I influenced by society, rather than the Bible? Many management and leadership books warn that without a plan we basically won't achieve anything and will be a worthless mess. “If we don't know where we are going,” they say, “then anything we do is good enough.” These books assure

5 2 Corinthians 12:9

us that the first thing a leader needs to do is to set the vision. But what does the Bible teach on it?

At first glance, it does seem that the Bible is very pro-planning. Many of us can quickly recite, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18a, KJV). But Proverbs as a whole could be interpreted as saying both "definitely make a plan" and "maybe don't bother, since God determines what happens." For instance:

- Proverbs 15:22 – Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.
- Proverbs 16:1 – To humans belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the proper answer of the tongue.
- Proverbs 16:3 – Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.
- Proverbs 19:21 – Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.
- Proverbs 20:18 – Plans are established by seeking advice; so if you wage war, obtain guidance.
- Proverbs 21:5 – The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.

In reality, there are huge chunks of the Bible that warn about the dangers of planning without God. Isaiah 30:1-3 reads:

*"Woe to the obstinate children," declares the Lord,
"to those who carry out plans that are not Mine,
forming an alliance, but not by My Spirit, heaping sin upon sin;
who go down to Egypt without consulting Me;*

*who look for help to Pharaoh's protection,
to Egypt's shade for refuge.
But Pharaoh's protection will be to your shame,
Egypt's shade will bring you disgrace.*

Not exactly a shining endorsement of planning.

Even when we unpack the verses that are most commonly used in those management and leadership books, we see that Proverbs 29:18 doesn't actually say we need to have a vision (in fact you have to dust off your Old King James Version to even find the word "vision"). A more accurate translation is "Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint." The word "revelation" can also be translated "prophetic vision." This verse is talking about receiving revelation from God. It's has nothing to do with something that we summoned up in board room.

“*When we unpack the verses most commonly used, we see they have nothing to do with human planning.*”

Luke 14:25-35 is another common passage used in Christian books touting the value of planning. Here, Jesus points out that anyone building a tower will sit down and work out how much it costs. However, a quick look at the verses in context show

it has nothing to do with planning, but everything to do with counting the cost of becoming a disciple and considering if you are truly willing to make that commitment. In the nation where I've lived for twenty years, that cost could be everything from family rejecting you to having your houses and crops burned down. At the very least it means bringing great shame

on your family, which is by far one of the greatest sins that anyone can imagine. The cost is real, and the verse is worthy of consideration. But it isn't telling us to make a strategic plan before we start the next year of work.

So, in reality the Bible isn't perfectly clear. There isn't one verse that says "make a plan" or "don't make a plan." But there are certainly some principles that we can remember. Most importantly, if we are going to create a five-year strategic plan, then we need to be sure that it comes from God and not just our collective good ideas. Every example of good planning in the Bible starts with God issuing the plan. Noah's plan for the ark was God's design, not his own. Likewise, when Joseph made a plan to get Egypt through the seven-year famine, it was through revelation from God. The detailed instructions for building the temple and the ark were both from God. Never was it a team of leaders who got together and sketched up a list of goals for the new year. The plans were given by God.

Now, by "planning" we could mean "developing lists of tasks and assigning responsibilities and due dates." Those type of project management plans can be helpful. They allow us to steward well the resources God has given us and not fall into chaos. But we do need to realize that they aren't the biblical standard for good organizations—just something helpful for us. If we teach planning to churches and Christian organizations around the world, we need to be careful we are presenting just like that—that this is a human tool that might be helpful. And be aware that it might not be at all helpful to non-Westerners, especially for those with little education. It might be that, like the pastors I was teaching, they prefer to manage all that complexity in their heads.

Likewise, there is a level of planning that comes with raising funds. We write a lot of grant proposals, and pretty much every funding request includes objectives for what we will accomplish with the foundation's money. It's something we pray carefully about as a leadership team and write with a level of trepidation.

“Plans aren't the biblical standard—just something helpful for us.”

So, what does it look like to operate with no strategic plan?

For our organization we do have a sense of calling—we believe we know what God has called us to do. We have a direction we are marching in and if something comes up that takes us away from that then we are going to spend a lot more time praying about whether that's really the right thing. It's certainly not a decision we would make lightly.

Despite the fact that we've never in our history had a strategic plan, certainly not one for growth (and don't even use "growth" as one of our measures of success), one of our programs has grown 900 percent. How? Mostly, we look for what God is doing and try to respond to that.

In 2016 a friend asked us to go to DR Congo to do a vision casting for TCT. We agreed to go, and, in meetings leading up to the trip, we agreed to start a pilot with 70 churches. Before our first trip, the program coordinator, Martin, requested that we come for two weeks. We told him we could only stay for 10 days. And then the government shut down the internet. So, beyond getting our visa letters, we had no communication

with our Congolese hosts. We arrived at the airport unsure if we were even being picked up. In the meantime Martin had restructured our trip—because we didn't have the time to go to the area he wanted us to train, he instead invited 50 denominational leaders to the vision casting. While, at the time, I was baffled at the logic behind the change, I've since learned that it would have been a slight to leave anyone out. Regardless, I can assure you it's extremely hard to only work with 70 churches when there are 30 denominations excited about applying your program. So without really knowing how it happened, the 70 churches we had planned for became 2,000. We returned from that first trip to DR Congo wondering how on earth we would manage such a number, but, after much prayer, we did decide God was in it. Today 6,000 churches in DR Congo are participating in our program, and God is using them to bring amazing transformation to their communities. No strategic plan we could have made would have included the kind of impact that God had in mind.

“*Mostly, we look for what God is doing and try to respond to that.*”

Communication

Communication is another area where we are constantly challenged. Unless we are very careful, it is all too easy to fall into best practices instead of pursuing God's ways. From some of our earliest leadership gatherings, we felt like God gave us the organizational directive to “tell the story”—to share what we have seen Him do. Since the Bible is jam-packed with examples of retelling the stories of God's faithfulness, it seemed

to have a good biblical basis. We also believe strongly that we are to make sure that we keep God as the hero of the stories we tell. The Bible has a lot to say about not stealing God's glory.⁶

And yet, even though God's instructions are clear, it's an area in which we seem to constantly be course correcting. We recently wrote our five-year annual report. The first draft talked about the doors God had opened for us, the ways we had grown, the people that had joined our team; there were financial charts that showed our good stewardship and stories of transformation. But something felt off. God wasn't really the hero. More like an extremely successful assistant, making us super great. We rewrote it, but still it seemed we weren't really giving God all the glory.

What, we wondered, would happen if we wrote an annual report not about us, but about God? For a while we floundered. We had never seen an annual report that wasn't about its own organization. What if in the world would it look like and would it even be possible? Isn't an annual report supposed to be about the organization? Don't supporters want to know how we spent their donations? What is required content for an annual report?

After looking into it, we discovered that an annual report is not legally required. Consequently an annual report has no restrictions. We decided to start over a third time. Instead of our achievements, we shared stories of miracles and transformation and trials. Instead of pie graphs showing good

⁶ Isaiah 42:8 and 48:11, for example

stewardship, we told about God's provision and faithfulness. Certainly the end result wasn't perfect, but wrestling with how our annual report could communicate God's glory was important.

Accuracy in our communication is another value we hold dear. We seem to spend silly amounts of time correcting tiny details. Our program leaders (many of whom speak and write English as a second language) send us stories through email, text, voice recording ... And we have a writer who's tasked with turning those raw stories into something that would make sense to a casual reader. Sometimes the stories turn out beautifully, but not quite true. Two villages can accidentally get meshed into one. A quote from one pastor gets mixed in with a story from another church. It flows together nicely and it all did happen, but it's not quite accurate. We do a lot of fact checking. And many times things have to be re-written into a less beautiful, less simple, but more accurate version. It can be a painstaking process, but we all agree that, even if it leaves the story less smooth—and even if no one would ever know the difference—it's important to get it perfectly correct.

We also strive to treat others with love and respect. Externally, that means we won't criticize other organizations or point out what we think they're doing wrong in order to build up our own methods and solutions. There have been many documents sent back around for rewrites because they could have been interpreted as critical of other organizations.

This value of showing love and respect also impacts how we communicate about those we seek to serve. For one thing, we are careful not to add to the story that Africa is poor and needy.

Instead, we highlight the beauty of the continent, how amazing the people are, and the incredible potential that is there. When I first went, I was stunned by how green it was and the breathtaking landscapes everywhere. Many Africans I've met are extremely hard-working, talented, and skilled. And God is most certainly at work in powerful ways on their continent.

“ *Our communications strive for accuracy, love and respect, and—above all—to glorify God.* ”

But the beauty of Africa and her people is one of the great secrets of the world.

Why? Quite simply, marketing best practices

tell us that photographs of children in rags with bloated bellies bring in the most donations. So that's what we get.

But we need another standard. With every photo we choose, we must ask ourselves, “Does this picture really glorify God and honor the people? Does it tell the whole story or just a part? Does it leave us believing that some people are hopeless and that we can be saviors?” We want to make sure that the story we tell is honoring to God and His creation.

Fundraising

I'll be the very first to admit that our current resource-raising structure is beyond strange—we have no fundraising department. No direct mail, no marketing or advertising, no major donor fund, no events, no director of church partnerships. None of it. What we have is one person who dedicates about 25 hours per month to managing private grants. I would certainly

hesitate to recommend this strategy to anyone. However, there are three lessons that God has taught us that can apply more broadly:

Trust God

As an organization we deeply believe that God is our provider. We do strive to be faithful to “tell the story” and submit grant proposals. But, at the end of the day, we truly believe that everything comes from God.

Fifteen years ago, I was working for a Christian development organization in a creative-access country. Although we had seen some good things happen, it was far from the transformation I longed for. Part of the trouble was that the government had a careful eye on everything we did, and did not look kindly on any work that involved churches or Christian doctrine. So I closed down our official work and, in its place, we started (illegally) partnering with churches. The head office for the organization I was with explained that it was going to be pretty much impossible to raise money—the work could hardly appear on the website, and most of our donors wanted to sponsor children and dig wells, not pay to train pastors. Despite their dire financial predictions, I went forward, believing that training churches was what we were supposed to be doing.

In that organization, we had to submit our budget to the head office each year—both the minimum we could survive on and the maximum we could wisely spend. I don’t remember the exact budgets, but I would say I needed something like \$30,000 to \$50,000. Then the fundraising department would let us know what they were willing to commit to raising for us. And year after year they came up with numbers like \$7,000. I would

pout for a couple of days after getting these funding commitments, and then move on. Honestly, there was work to be done and who has time for sulking? Since I didn't live anywhere to raise funds and had to stay relatively quiet about my work, I was forced to simply trust God with our financial needs. My input was limited to prayer. And each year we received more than the top number I had entered –the most I thought I could possibly use. (We also grew more than I could wrap my head around each year; God knew we needed more money than I knew how to ask for.)

There were times when I had no idea how we would pay expenses. I remember late one evening someone turning up at the door and handing me a few thousand dollars. It was money that God had just reminded him that he owed us. As it turned out, we needed that money the next day to pay the training advances for the staff that were all about to leave town. I had completely forgotten that we had no money. But God hadn't.

That said, not everything went smoothly. One year there was a glitch. Even though funds had come in for our program, they got lost in the systems at our head office so they couldn't be transferred, and we had no funds for about six months. Yet, we look back and see God's hand in it. Since we couldn't get funds, I went to the churches we had been training and told them there was no money. To my surprise, they volunteered to pay their own expenses rather than miss out on training! It opened our eyes to possibilities we had never considered. We had just assumed that we would have to pay for all training costs. So when God allowed us to be short of funds, our belief in the capacity of the local church was strengthened.

Trusting God as the source of our funds does allow us to overcome some of the usual temptations. The temptation to give happy reports by not mentioning the problems and failures. The temptation to exaggerate—to make your successes just a little shinier. And the temptation to compare and compete—to try to make it seem like your program is the answer God intended for the world, instead of seeking to build each other up.

One great example of not competing is a Giving Tuesday post from Hope International that I recently came across. The post listed some of their favorite organizations and encouraged people to give to those. I am sure Hope International needs to raise funds (most of us do), but instead of presenting their own need, they asked us to give to others. How many of us would do that? Why is it so rare? Mostly, it's because we fall into a scarcity mindset. Even though, at some level, we know that God's resources are infinite, somehow we believe that, if others get more, we might not have enough. We lose sight of the fact that God alone is our provider and look to our own hustle and access to resources.

For us, trusting God means we have talked to donors about returning grant money we couldn't spend fast enough. And in our reporting, we ask ourselves, "Is there anything else we can disclose?" rather than, "Is there any way to make this sound better?"

We once received a grant for a program where concerns with the leader's attitude toward accountability and transparency had come to light. So we had to go back to the donor and say, "These are the issues and how we're addressing them. Do you

still want to give?" The donor was glad (and a little surprised) we were transparent, and she told us how rare it was to get a call like this in her 20-plus years of Christian philanthropy. I'd like to think it's rare because no one else ever has dramas and conflicts, but more likely we just don't reveal them.

These difficult conversations and sometimes self-incriminating honesty are only possible when we are grounded in the belief that God is our provider.

Love those who give

When Reconciled World was starting up, I found myself learning a whole lot of things that I never ever wanted to know about—like the US Tax system and the endless requirements for international banking transfers. I also learned about norms in the nonprofit world that horrified me. Our contracted accountant was delighted to show us all the features of the donor management software that was required as part of our accounting system. It could, she explained, be used to track all of our marketing campaigns so we would know exactly how much was raised. Then we could divide up the lists and send different wording to different lists, thus learning what wording would extract (maybe not the word she used) the most money out of the donors. We could use that to determine our different donors' preferences so we could "more effectively communicate." If that wasn't enough joy, we could also purchase access to a database that would match our donors to their giving capacity so we knew who to target for more money. Our accountant was eager to give us lessons. I assured her I had absolutely no need to learn. Yet the systems and schemes she was trying to teach me (and more) are prevalent in magazines, books, and conferences geared toward Christian non-profits.

There are seemingly endless tactics to raise funds. But I think we need to be careful. Do these things honor God and show dependence on Him as the source of our funds? Are they treating others as we would want to be treated? Would our donors feel loved if they witnessed themselves being matched with capacity lists, run through databases, and targeted for letter sequencing?

While these tactics might (and probably do) result in more donations, isn't it better to follow God's ways, love people who donate to us well, seek their good, and look to God as our provider? While Paul certainly got on to the Corinthians—challenging them to be generous like the Macedonians—I don't think he was motivated by the same things we are. He genuinely wanted what was best for them. Too often I think our motive is money—we just need to raise our budget.

So if the idea of sitting down with one of your donors and walking them through your “donor management” process makes you squirm, then it's probably something to pray about. Similarly, if an organization wouldn't want to put a banner on their webpage advertising the amount they pay Christian artists to promote them, then perhaps they ought to question whether they're actually pursuing God's ways. If we're pursuing God's ways, all of our inner workings and fundraising practices could be written up on the front page of the New York Times, and we wouldn't

“Would our donors feel loved if they saw ‘behind the curtain’ of our fundraising?”

be ashamed (maybe we'd look a little odd and foolish, but not ashamed).

Be obedient

If you have read the “Mobilizing Local Resources” booklet, you know we put a huge value on locally raised funds. Initially our vision was small. We hoped to see churches volunteering a few hours to do a few small things like fix a pothole or clean trash from the street. But as we challenged churches to show love to their communities, they went on to do bigger things than we ever imagined—like building roads, irrigation and water systems, and bridges.

As time went on, we felt God challenging us to raise money in the country where we worked. We tried to think of all the wealthy people and churches we knew so we could hit them up for money. That didn't work at all.

Then the Myanmar Program Director shared that God had shown her that we were showing favoritism in our fundraising efforts and that we needed to give everyone—including the very poorest in the most remote of villages—the opportunity to give toward program costs. And that we needed to be truly grateful for “widows' mites”—just as committed to thanking them as we are when big checks come in. That left us confused. Was God really proposing that we go to the poorest and ask them to donate money so other churches could do the program? It seemed both a little ludicrous and highly impractical. While we had learned that churches could fund their own trainings—usually by all bringing a handful of rice or a chicken—the logistics involved in collecting money from one area to give to another area made our heads hurt. It wasn't like

they could give into a bank account or via an online system. And yet, since we agreed it was from God, it wasn't so much, "Should we do it?" but rather a case of working out how to do it. Our role was (and is) simply to be obedient. And God has been faithful. Today we raise a significant portion of our budget from villages that graduated from the program. God's ways, while surprising, are definitely better than our ways.

“ We felt God challenging us to value the widow's mite and not to show favoritism toward the rich.”

And yet even with all those lessons, it is still hard. There are times I look at our ever-growing budget and feel sheer terror. After all these years of watching God do miracles, I am still learning to look at our budget and feel some excitement about the miracles that must be coming up this year. Mostly I feel sick. And then I pray and I fast and I plead with God. I'm hoping one day my faith catches up with our budget. In the meantime, we try to keep to the standards that we believe that God has called us to.

Rhythms

"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."⁷ That's the verse that God gave me for this year. Two years ago it was, "Be still, and know that I am God."⁸ Both left me going "huh?" I

7 Luke 5:16

8 Psalm 46:10

lead an organization. While we aren't the largest organization, we also aren't the smallest. We are working in more than 20 countries through partnerships—training thousands of churches, running two schools, discipling artists, and campaigning against gendercide. Managing those partnerships are 19 staff. Beyond the Reconciled World staff, the leaders of

“*I am still learning to look at our budget and feel some excitement about the miracles that must be coming.*”

several of our partner organizations are considered staff and look to me for guidance and support. We have a company that does all our office and accounting work in the USA, which also generates a whole lot of email. The list of things I would like to get done is always just a little longer than the hours in the day.

And yet God keeps sending me silly verses like, “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” Did you see that word “often” in there? Good grief.

When God gave the whole organization the verse, “Be still and know that I am God,” I threw up my hands in frustration. “We’re an organization,” I muttered to God. “We do important stuff. We can’t just ‘Be still!’” Nevertheless, I challenged our team that we needed to seek to be still. And so we made that our theme. Our organization more than doubled in size that year—being still certainly didn’t result in a collapse like I feared.

As I look at the verse, “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” I feel the same arguments growing: I can barely

keep up with my work now, I have lots of good ideas or projects I want to jump into this coming year, I can't just vanish for patches of time ... Surely it would be super weird if the leader just kept vanishing? And yet, if anyone was the perfect leader, it was Jesus. And we see Him heading off to pray when there were crowds clamoring for His preaching, desperate people needing to be healed, and the disciples seemingly clueless how to handle things in His absence.

Rhythms reveal what we truly value as an organization and as leaders. Where we invest our time tells us a lot about what is important. Do we put aside enough time for prayer or is it just a habitual way to begin every meeting, sort of like grace before a meal—something that becomes so routine that sometimes we have to wake ourselves up to make sure we're even paying attention? Are we taking time to listen to God and really expecting Him to speak?

How important is rest and Sabbath? If people are overworked and burning out, why? What beliefs drive that? While we certainly will have busy days (so did the disciples), I don't believe that God is asking any of us to live on the edge of burnout or try to accomplish 26 hours of tasks in the allocated 24 hours.

I do believe that He designed us to sleep 7-8 hours a night most nights. If we can't do that because we have too much work and too many responsibilities to jam into the day, then we need to examine the reasons. Are we doing more than God has asked

“Where we invest our time tells us a lot about what is important.”

us to? Are we seeing ourselves, rather than God, as the savior of those we seek to serve?

*Do not put your trust in princes,
in human beings, who cannot save.
When their spirit departs, they return to the ground;
on that very day their plans come to nothing.
Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God.
He is the Maker of heaven and earth,
the sea, and everything in them—
He remains faithful forever.
He upholds the cause of the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets prisoners free,
the Lord gives sight to the blind,
the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down,
the Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the foreigner
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,
but He frustrates the ways of the wicked.*

As Psalm 146 reminds us, it's God who sustains the fatherless and widow, who gives food to the hungry and upholds the cause of the oppressed. It's a common message in the Bible. While He does use us, we shouldn't be working as if it all relies on us. We shouldn't feel burdened by all we are "doing for God." Our Father invites us to walk lightly, knowing His promises go before us.

Hiring

Hiring is another area I often ponder. Since we are growing faster than I would like, we do seem to be hiring people on a fairly regular basis. One of the verses that always springs to mind when I think of hiring is 1 Corinthians 1:26-29:

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

If there was ever someone who wasn't really suited for the job they ended up with, it's me. When I was first hired by a not-for-profit, I didn't have any relevant qualifications in the area of poverty alleviation; I had a marketing degree. Then I started a ministry in a country where training churches is illegal. I'm white, so I stuck out like a sore thumb in Asia. I'm female, so church leaders were deeply suspicious about whether they should listen to me at all (it's certainly against what they've been taught). And I was young—in a culture where age is considered a marker of wisdom. I remember one denominational leader saying to me, "Can't you find an older Asian male to teach this?" It was understandable—it just didn't make sense that I was doing it. Even I could see that. And yet, I was the "weak, foolish thing" that God chose.

The denominational leaders, as I mentioned, were not wildly impressed by this young white female, and so I ended up working with the churches who no one else would work with—those churches who the leaders said were “too stupid to learn.” And so “too stupid to learn” and “young white female” headed off on a crazy journey together. And God did something beyond remarkable. Today, people come from all over the place to learn from these villages. The denominations have sent their experts to understand what in the world happened, as has the government. Churches who aren’t already participating are queuing to get involved. People who we don’t even know boast that they know us. We went from stupid to brilliant. (God also moved us out of the country so our heads didn’t swell up and pop. He’s good like that.)

So, when I hire, I think about how God uses the foolish things, and I wonder what that means. Am I supposed to look through the pile of resumes and find the one that seems wildly unqualified and hire them? That seems to be madness. And yet it’s apparently the standard that Jesus used in calling His disciples. He definitely didn’t go out and recruit the best and brightest—those who were the best qualified and could really add useful skills to the team. He ended up with under-educated fishermen, a tax collector (horrifying), a guy referred to as “the zealot” (not typically everyone’s favorite person at the party), and a traitor. They largely seemed to misunderstand what He was saying, struggled to stay awake to pray, argued about which of them was the best, and endlessly offered the worst advice. Paul, who turns up later, seems better qualified and a bit more in control. Weren’t there a few more like him around in Jesus’ day? One must assume there were, and yet they weren’t the ones that Jesus chose. Instead, He stepped

away and prayed and came up with this ruffian crew of 12. What does that mean for our hiring practices?

We don't actually have a policy of always picking the least qualified person for any job. But we do try to look past qualifications to something deeper. The Bible tells us that, while people look at outward appearances (qualifications and great interviewing skills), the Lord looks at the heart.⁹ Of course, that's a bit tricky for us. Hearts are hard to peer at in online interviews. But it's what we try to do.

We interview, and then we each take time to pray and ask God to show us, "Who?" More than once God has shifted us from one person to another as we prayed. In one case, we had a highly qualified person—someone we thought would be fantastic—and someone else who, well, he was an engineer. And we do church training. While we like engineers, it seemed a bit of a mismatch of skills and talents. And yet, as we prayed, God told us quite clearly, "The second person, the engineer, is a man after My own heart. Choose him." And we did. And he's great.

“Try to look past qualifications to something deeper.”

Mustard seeds

"Mustard seeds" is another concept that constantly rattles around in my brain. The leadership books will tell you that big

9 1 Samuel 16:7

is good and bigger is better. While the Bible doesn't completely dismiss that, it reminds us that "the big" (the Kingdom of heaven, moving mountains) starts with the mustard seed¹⁰—something tiny and obscure. Something so small that we can't imagine how it will turn into a tree where birds can perch in its shade, except that God does something in between.

I find myself often saying, "Make it smaller," especially when it comes to program design. We want churches to reach out to people who are differently abled. So we ask, "What's the first, smallest step that they can't possibly fail at?" We might brainstorm: visit one family and ask them to share about their life. If that's too big, make it smaller: maybe increasing the print size of their bulletin so those who struggle with sight can read it. Whatever is smallest. Start there. It can seem like a waste of time, or like we should be encouraging people to do more. And yet the Kingdom of God starts like a mustard seed.

We've seen it happen more than once. A small church is challenged to do just the tiniest of thing—picking up litter for an hour or something like that. It's unimpressive. And yet, time and time again, we also see that, as they are faithful in the small things, God opens up opportunities to do bigger things. They start to repair roads. And the next thing we know, they're building bridges. Their abilities grow, and so, too, do the blessings they see from God. Their resources multiply both miraculously

“ We feel like we should be doing more, but the Kingdom starts like a mustard seed.”

¹⁰ Matthew 13:31, Matthew 17:20

and as a natural result of walking in obedience to God. But if we started with some big community development project, the vast majority of the churches where we work would run the other way. Or they would look to us for funds, and end up reinforcing the belief that they need outsiders' resources to do anything.

The challenge is whether we can be satisfied with small, seemingly insignificant things. There is always a temptation to do more and grow bigger.

Measures of success

Related to mustard seeds is measures of success. What is our definition of success? Is it when all the graphs go up and right, when we see growth in every area? Or is it about obedience

“*Fruitfulness comes through God's working and in God's timing.*”

and faithfulness? I am constantly reminded that in the passage about the talents in Matthew 25, Jesus said, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” not “good and successful.”

And yet, even as I say that, I have to note they were successful—they saw fruit. They did have more talents to bring to the King. And indeed, God seems to promise that very outcome. In John 15, we see that as we abide we are promised that we will “bear much fruit.” And in Psalm 1, we are promised fruit as we meditate on the word day and night.

Apparently we are supposed to be fruitful. But I think we get muddled in two different areas. First, our role and God's. In each of these passages (and the many others that fill the Bible) our role is to abide and to meditate on God's word. We somehow read that as "go make things happen; come up with great projects and plans." The other thing we miss is timing. The Bible doesn't promise immediate fruit. In fact, Psalm 1 has the audacity to suggest the fruit will come in season. Personally, I would vote for immediate fruit. Any sensible management book tells you about the importance of quick feedback. But not God. His fruit comes in His timing.

I knew of one missionary couple who had sacrificially served one people group for 25 years with very few people coming to God. In the last years, just as they were about to retire, a revival broke out and tens of thousands were saved. Twenty-five years of close to nothing. And yet God was faithful to bring fruit.

Thankfully, God hasn't given me that challenge. He knows I'm not strong enough to bear up under that. But as we measure success, it's worth noting: sometimes progress is more like growing bamboo. Some types of bamboo show no growth for six to seven years, while their roots spread underground, making a strong foundation. And then, just when you are ready to declare the plant useless, it suddenly leaps into action and grows 50 feet in just a few months. I'm sure God made bamboo just to remind us that His ways have nothing to do with our ways. Our great ideas of how the world should work—slow and steady (or maybe speedy) progress—aren't always His plans. Some things do grow steadily. Some fruit comes quickly. But others take years.

So I try to remember, as we reflect back each year, that our measure of success shouldn't be growth (or lack thereof, if that happens) but rather, "Did we strive to follow God's ways? Were we committed to time in prayer and listening to God? Did we love others well?"

If we can get a "yes" in those measures, then it doesn't really matter about the rest. But if we are faithful in those things, then the fruit will turn up exactly when God intends it.

“As we measure success, it's worth noting: sometimes progress is more like growing bamboo.”

How to Get Started

Pursuing God's ways is a journey. The organization I lead and I, myself, are just at the beginning of that journey. We have so much to learn. We are still finding all the many ways that we tend to default to best practices or cultural norms without even taking time to consider if God has a different way. So we can't offer perfectly formulated expert advice from the mountain top, only tips from one traveler to another.

Work out what the Bible says

In order to pursue God's ways, we need to try to work out what God's ways actually are. What does the Bible really say? On many issues that trip us up, there isn't one clear verse. And even when we can find a verse, we need to be a tad careful.

There is a verse in the Bible that recommends keeping the poor happily drunk so they forget their poverty (Proverbs 31:7). Another one seems to say we should pay bribes (Proverbs 21:14). With a little creativity, people have been able to justify pretty much anything they have wanted to do by pointing to a verse in the Bible. And yet that doesn't make it God's way.

While it's far outside of this booklet to explore the depths of biblical exposition, I would say that it's important to search the Bible for *all* that it has to say on a matter. When you have ideas about something, ask yourself how that lines up other parts of the Bible. How does it fit with Jesus' life? Make sure you read all scripture in context. For instance, Luke 14:28-30 says, "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'" As mentioned in the "planning" section of this booklet, people point to this verse to make the case that Jesus would have us make strategic plans. It's not until we read the whole passage that we realize He's not talking about planning, but about examining our hearts to know whether we are willing to endure the cost of becoming a Christian.

“It's important to search the Bible for all that it has to say on a matter.”

Similarly, we find many commands to give food to the hungry. But later we discover Paul declaring that, if you don't work, you

don't eat.¹¹ Either verse taken alone leads us down distorted paths. On one track, we are giving handouts in ways that leave others dependent on us and dishonor the image of God in people. But by relying on the second verse alone we may end up seeing anyone who is poor or needs help as simply lazy. That's not right either.¹² The point is, we always need to make sure we look for as much scripture as possible that might apply to the situation, and not stop at the first few verses we find (or the most commonly referenced).

Be intentional, create guidelines

Like in the example of the factory in China, we start pursuing God's ways by first deciding it's important. We are called to line up every aspect of our organizations to God's intentions. One good way to do that is to create guiding documents that outline what you believe God is telling you about various areas of your organizational life.

When we first started as an organization, one of the things that we did was to create a "theology of fundraising." A team of us prayed, read scripture, and debated until we had agreed on our beliefs about resource raising. Now I'm not going to say that we pull it out daily and use it as a guideline for every action and decision. But the process of creating it made us wrestle with what is really true. It helped us to be a lot more intentional. It then also made it easier to pass on to new people that

11 2 Thessalonians 3:10

12 The booklet "Focusing on the Vulnerable" takes an in-depth look at what the Bible says about vulnerable people and how to respond to their circumstances.

joined our team. And when we get stuck or something seems off, we go back to it.

Having agreed upon guidelines for how we communicate and interact means that it's easy for us to keep each other accountable. We can easily point out when a picture doesn't bring dignity, when a story seeks to make us the hero, or when we're critical instead of encouraging.

Whether it's fundraising or another area of your organizational life, it's important to bring together a group to identify what you feel God is saying. Start by hunting out scripture or biblical stories that might inform your practices. Then struggle together to write your theology on that area of your organization. Ask questions like:

What biblical principles apply here?

What assumptions are we making about this area?

How do our assumptions line up with the Bible?

What are some of the common verses that we use? Do they represent major biblical themes?

Then make it practical—how does this principle impact the way we will do business, make decisions, or treat one another?

Examine your why

When it comes to activities and day-to-day decisions, it's good to ask yourself why you do things the way that you do, and then see where the answers take you. When we looked at why we created an annual report that made us the hero, we strug-

gled to find the reason. Because we legally had to? Nope, no law about that. Because people want to know about us? Maybe, but I bet they would be even more excited by a few great God stories. Because it's what is expected or the only way we've ever seen it done? Seems like a weak reason. Or is it because, if people know how great we are, they will fund our work? Where are we putting our trust?

Commit to looking at your motivations again. Choose one type of activity every month or so and ask yourself, "Why do we do this the way we do? Could there be a way that better matches God's ways?"

Read critically

Recently I packed up everything I owned and started a nomadic life. Packing was a good reminder of the extraordinary number of books I owned. Literally hundreds of books covering topics from agriculture to leadership, cross-cultural communication to community development. And that was only the tip of the iceberg—as of today my kindle has 1,156 books (and that's after I deleted a few hundred). Clearly I like to learn. But all that reading and learning does have a danger—it's easy to get things upside down.

I often wonder how much my ideas about how to run an organization are shaped by what society believes is normal and how much I am shaped by the Bible. If I'm honest, and I would prefer not to be, I probably have spent significantly more time reading all those books than reading the Bible. And while I do often pause while reading to ask myself, "Is this really what

it says in the Bible?" I still wonder if just maybe they have too much influence.

Since what we feed our minds has a huge impact on our beliefs and what we consider normal, we do need to be careful. While there is a growing acceptance of some biblical wisdom—for example, servant leadership—there is still plenty of “wisdom” the average author touts that really doesn’t line up with the Bible. As we read, we do need to take time to prayerfully reflect on each idea (especially those we want to apply) and ask God to help us see how (if) it lines up with the teachings of scripture.

“Pause while reading to ask yourself, ‘Is this really what is says in the Bible?’”

Risk looking foolish

Recently my husband and I felt like God was asking us to give up our home and become nomads. It made exactly no sense to me. I wrestled with everything from the practical details—How does someone pack for every season and every possible occasion in one suitcase? What address do I put on forms?—to larger questions like, “How will I ever feel settled?” I like to nest. Having no home seemed completely incomprehensible. I wrestled with the idea for months, maybe years, trying to make sense of it. It didn’t seem like God would really ask someone to have nowhere to live (beyond, of course, Jesus, but He lived in a whole different era). But in the end my husband and I agreed that it was what God was asking us to do. Now, as we travel the world, people are mystified. They ask many of

the same questions I did. Some conclude that it simply can't be true that we have no home. From a human perspective, becoming nomads is complete foolishness.

The Bible makes it clear that the wisdom of God is foolishness to the world.¹³ If we really are pursuing God's ways, then some of the things we do should seem like foolishness. I'm sure someone told Hope International

it would be foolish to ask people to give to other organizations on Giving Tuesday. For us, not having a resource-raising department means we often face concerns about our stability and sustainability. They're legitimate concerns, and we don't always have an answer beyond, "But God ..."

“Are you willing to be foolish to do something God shows you?”

Look at the things that you do—what is foolishness? Are you willing to be foolish, to put aside conventional wisdom to do something that God shows you? It isn't always easy. But God's ways are higher, better and wiser than our ways.

Invite different perspectives

As I mentioned, I was challenged most about how some of things I do might be more cultural than biblical when I started dating and then married someone from a completely different culture and background. Things that I always accepted as “the

13 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

right way” were suddenly challenged. It is incredibly hard to self-examine and separate cultural norms from biblical truth. The best way to do it is to listen to others whose perspectives are significantly different from our own.

When we work on something like our resource-raising guidelines, we do try to make sure we have people from different parts of the world and in different roles in the organization working on it. We want to see where we are defaulting to norms and where we are truly reflecting the Bible.

In today’s global neighborhood, it can actually be challenging to find people with perspectives uninfluenced by Western culture. With access to (and influenced by) the internet, global economy, and missionary movements, just about every Majority World church leader has absorbed the message that you need a vision (sadly, few know that, if you do have a vision, it must come from God). But regardless, there is something wonderful about engaging with people from different cultures—especially people who disagree with you, who see the world through a different lens. It challenges you to ask yourself why you do what you do and how you know what you think you know.

Conclusion

Many of us struggle with some aspect of pursuing God’s ways. Perhaps the ideas of slowing down, starting small, and committing to more prayer and less planning feel like a waste of time and resources. Sometimes our intellect is the barrier,

when God's ways contradict the advice of experts, scholars, and our own logic. Perhaps looking foolish to "key stakeholders" seems like an enormous risk.

In every case, pursuing God's ways forces us into greater dependence on Him. If we examine the places where we struggle, we usually find a deeper issue: what we believe about God. Will He really be faithful to provide? Does He want to bless us? Is He able? Or perhaps the struggle is rooted in what we believe about ourselves. Does our value come from pleasing other people? From accomplishing great things? If we fail, whose lives will be impacted?

We can and should bring these things before God, confessing the wrong beliefs that bind us. We need to retreat, to withdraw to quiet places and spend time in His presence. But we can also walk forward in faith to pursue God's ways even when it feels uncomfortable. God is incredibly good and more faithful than we can imagine. When we pursue His ways in the face of fear and doubts, we have the opportunity to experience anew His blessings and His presence. Our obedience opens the way for God to heal our broken beliefs, replace our fears with freedom, and use us all the more for His Kingdom purposes.

REFLECT AND APPLY

In what ways have you practiced pursuing God's ways in the past? What about now—have you become more or less committed to knowing God's ways and walking in obedience?

Have you ever chosen God's ways when it didn't seem to make sense? What happened?

Perhaps one of the most radical things Anna notes about the organization she leads is that they operate with no strategic plan. She says that, instead, her organization relies on a sense of calling. All strategic plans aside, what is your ministry's calling from God?

Regarding what it looks like to operate without a strategic plan, Anna says, "Mostly, we look for what God is doing and try to respond to that." Can you think of a time in your ministry when that statement described a decision made or activity undertaken? If so, what happened? In what ways did you see God at work before, during, and after?

If your ministry currently has a 3, 5 or 10-year strategic plan, take some time before answering the next questions to review it, and then to lay it before the Lord in prayer. Ask Him to guide your thinking as you reflect.

Describe how the strategic plan was created. Who was involved? What was the process?

Do you believe the vision and goals of the plan came as a revelation from God?

If the plan reflects mostly human wisdom, what would it look like to drop it? Who would resist? What would their concerns be? What systems or programs would be impacted? What or who would benefit? In what ways would God have to show up to save the situation?

Anna lists several more areas where pursuing God's ways seems to contradict best practices or even common sense:

- Communications - transparent and honoring vs. high-impact marketing
- Fundraising - trusting God as provider and showing love to those who give to your work; refusing common practices for donor management and self-promotion
- Work rhythms - rest and prayerfulness as a corporate culture
- Hiring practices - looking beyond job qualifications
- Program design - small "mustard seeds" vs. large programs
- Measures of success - obedience vs. growth; fruitfulness in season vs. immediate results

Take a few minutes to pray through the list. Put a mark next to any area where you feel pursuing God's ways would require a new act of faith or obedience for your ministry.

On page 38-39 Anna recommends that, for each area of your organizational life, you should “bring together a group to identify what you feel God is saying. Start by hunting out scripture or biblical stories that might inform your practices. Then struggle together to write your theology on that area of your organization.” She goes on to say later that the ideal group has people with diverse perspectives and cultures.

Do you feel creating guiding documents would benefit your ministry? If so, what might be the first area to address?

Who would you invite to be in the group?

When could the group come together?

Who would need to approve the resulting guiding document? Take time now to add an event to your calendar or reminder to your task list that will help you pursue this in the midst of the “tyranny of the urgent.”

If you already have guiding documents or theological statements about various areas of your organization, when were they created, how, and by whom? How often are they referred to? Is it time to pray and think through them again?

There are several other suggested steps for pursuing God's ways as a leader and as an organization:

- Examine your why - Ask yourself, "Why do we do [activity/process] the way we do? Could there be a way that better matches God's ways?"
- Read critically - While reading, listening to a podcast, or at a conference, pause to ask yourself, "Is this really what the Bible says?"
- Invite different perspectives - Hearing from people with a wide variety of cultural perspectives is really helpful in examining assumptions and separating cultural norms from biblical truth.

Pause now to add reminders on your phone, events to your calendar, tasks with deadlines to your to-do list, a note on your bookmark...whatever will help you to take concrete steps in pursuing God's ways in your daily work life.

Considering the actions necessary to pursue God's ways—in both small daily tasks and big-picture decisions and organizational cultural—what scares you most? In what areas will it be hardest to make changes? Bring it before the Lord.



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