

3 Risks of Leading Reformation

I'd like to encourage you to read **Piece of Cake**, which is a guide for those who are called to move into ministry—but are nervous and hesitant.

In the midst of writing from the prayer room, I found myself compelled to share some of my journey with you—the successes and failures, the joys and the troubles.

There will always be extreme pressure to adjust your vision, sometimes ever so slightly, to be more appealing to others, but it's this adjustment that will put your entire mission at jeopardy.

I'll just say it—when God gives you your mandate, you must be both humble and stubborn—and no matter how humble you are, your stubborn disposition will invite trouble. Convincing arguments from wonderful people can lead you to compromise. Don't do it. Love people in your stubborn, unmoving determination to obey God. In ministry, there are negotiables and non-negotiables. Never move on the non-negotiable vision God has called you to steward.

Risk

I believe there is a remnant, a very small army of prayer-devoted awakeners, who will respond to the mission God put into my spirit years ago.

So, what is the risk? Most would say, *“Just go for it! Develop a ministry that gathers together those end-times firebrands!”*

I absolutely agree, and we are attempting to do just that. But there is significant risk when we consider what we are talking about here.

The purpose of this article is to help you eliminate fears and compromises as you develop your ministry. A fulfilled mission is required!

1. Mission confusion. One of the most difficult barriers to overcome when developing a ministry according to a fresh but unfamiliar vision is the “supposed to’s.”

In our Western church culture, there are numerous focuses, ministries, attitudes and functions that are just “supposed to” be a significant part of the ministry. When attention isn’t given to what others presume are non-negotiable, discord and accusation can quickly enter the camp. Many leaders (most) will diplomatically, democratically attempt to avoid discord by entertaining these arguments in the name of unity. However, the result is false-unity around the desires of people instead of true unity around the mandates of God. How can you tell the difference? False unity is inclusive of all, true unity requires agreement that most are unwilling to adhere to.

Under Moses, there was accusation that he was most interested in his vision to enter the promised land, and that he wasn’t concerned for his people and their safety. Their arguments were convincing—and they won the argument—and then died in the desert.

I once went through a trying season that highlights this point very well.

Our mandate has always been unique. As a ministry of reformation, it is by design entertaining disruption and recalibration, and this will always cause trouble. I won’t go into the details, but suffice it to say that God gave me a very clear prophetic word when I was leading a ministry in Colorado to *transition from ministering to people to ministering to Him*. I was to vertically focus on God and draw others into that encounter with me. That vision is quite offensive as it takes the primary focus off of people and puts

it on God.

As a result, our ministry would not look like a typical one and would not focus on many of the expected ministries that you find in other churches and ministries. When we went through our trying time, there were some amazing friends who were wired a bit differently, and who were seeking some ministry focuses that were good, but not what we were to facilitate. There was confusion in the camp as I was running one way and they wanted to run in a *slightly* different direction.

It was presumed that our church, or any church, was “supposed to” be pastor-led with a focus on community. Revival Church was apostle-led with a focus on intercession. Mostly vertical with a little horizontal. Our friends saw a lack of focus on community, and the lack of pastoral ministry, as a problem while we saw it as intentional and central to our mission. I’m so blessed to have Barbara Yoder as our spiritual covering. She and her team have gone to great lengths to communicate that their church is not a “family church” but rather a regional equipping center. They are key in the reformation from one system to another. The family church is the expected norm today, and it does truly take quite an effort of vision casting to break through that expectation.

To see reformation, you will have to work hard to cast the vision, and then to stay true to it. Our culture of fiery intercession and equipping awakeners has resulted in a surprising and deep community of people that love one another and who are keeping their gaze upon the Lord together! We have burning ones who pray as their primary ministry, and enjoy doing it with friends and family around them.

At the *International House of Prayer* in Kansas City, you don’t see a lot of hanging out for the sake of hanging out, but you do see people in the prayer room together ministering to the Lord. That culture is a problem for those who don’t crave to

pray, but can you imagine IHOP bending to develop a culture that doesn't emphasize prayer? It's nonsensical. But it's only nonsensical now because they have gone through much trial and trouble to set their culture. They stayed true to the mandate even when it was confusing to more traditional Christians.

2. Resources. When you adhere to God's risky vision, you are at great risk of losing the resources of the majority. Since an apostolic spirit of reformation is initiating change to the status quo, the high majority of those who still value the status quo will not invest in your vision.

The cash flow of your church or ministry is absolutely at risk of slowing to a crawl. Are you OK with that? Pastors may have to surrender their security and salaries, get secular jobs and trust that God will truly provide—because many people will stop giving.

They will also not show up. They won't run with you. Are you OK with that or will you look for a happy medium that's appealing to the majority?

If you pray for a remnant, don't be surprised when a remnant shows up—and the majority leaves. I absolutely do want many to contend with us for revival, but I am willing to sacrifice their investment for the sake of staying true to our mission.

I have a lot of weaknesses. That's not false humility; it's true. Just ask my wife! However, I am convinced that I am skilled just enough to grow a church, with the right team, to possibly 250. We had a church consultant years ago that said we had what it took to grow a church to 300-400.

Why am I revealing this? I want to let you know how easy it might be to sacrifice the mission for the sake of personal satisfaction.

A church of 250 would ensure that I would have a great salary and the ability to pay other key staff members. We would also

have significant resources to grow and facilitate additional ministries. We'd have the people and the money to do much. It would feel great to be "successful" in the eyes of man.

In our recent trial, some friends were focused on church growth and on creating a vibrant, exciting atmosphere with people who were deeply connected to one another. This sounds great! And I actually want this too. However, this is very important—that goal is not *the* goal. It is actually more of a desire than a strategic focus.

Yes, a lot of people gathering together each week can be very good, but I had already made the decision that we would not compromise the vision for the sake of resources—be it money or people or an energetic environment. I'm willing to run with a remnant and keep investing outside of the ministry to help pay the bills.

The resources this ministry needs are burning, interceding prayer warriors who minister to God night and day. Any compromise of the vision would ensure those people won't show up. I've counted the cost, and that is my goal, no matter how great the challenge or how injurious it is to my ego, energy, time or ability to grow. In fact, the humility and challenge does me good.

3. Lack of momentum. Small numbers and minimal buy-in are extremely hard for many people to look past. Staying the course on the way to mission fulfillment will result in that small remnant running with you, and for some, small numbers look like failure. The momentum won't be there. That in itself can result in lost hope. This is not good! This is why unity around the vision is so critical. You must have buy in from those who are running with you.

Again, the vision is not a large group of people. It's a fulfilled mission! I have to communicate this so false expectations don't result in frustration.

At one point in our ministry, our worship team moved on, and this is when we decided to hold off on finding a new one. We decided to lead the services in prayer. I knew numbers would drop, and they did. I also knew that I had a job ahead of me of communicating the true vision. Our vision is not to add people, and I had to make that clear. Anybody, including myself, loves a big crowd. There's some sense of accomplishment when that happens. Momentum is addictive. However, it really is not the goal. I have led ministries that had decent-sized crowds and a sense of momentum, but I was grieved. We were growing with people who didn't fully buy into the mission.

Trust me, I'd rather function without visible momentum while running with a few who are all in than with a crowd of people who are mostly there because of the experience. This is a huge point!

That being said, I am looking forward to the day when many buy into the vision and we actually see stadiums filled with burning intercessors! Now, that's momentum! But I don't want to see a stadium filled with people who are only there for the experience. I'd rather buy a ticket to an NFL game at packed stadium and be legitimately entertained than attempt to spiritualize an electric quasi-worship-fest with an arena full of interested but noninvested people.

If we want momentum, we can create momentum. Just gather people around a self-satisfying, entertaining message and slap the name of Jesus on it. Or you can reveal the costly, deadly message of the cross and call people to a life of inconvenient intercession and spend years and decades creating a prayer movement. I choose the latter.

Stay tuned Friday for more of this article on risks involved in leading reformation. {eoa}

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over 20 years and is a sought-out teacher, prophetic messenger and revivalist. John has authored nine books, has appeared on Christian television and radio and directed one of the primary internships at the International House of Prayer (IHOP) in Kansas City. Additionally, he has planted two churches, has initiated two city prayer movements and is currently directing a prayer- and revival-focused ministry school in Detroit called the School of Prayer. John's mandate is to call the church in the nations to repentance from casual Christianity and to burn in a manner worthy of the King of kings. He is equipping people to confront the enemies of God (established religion, Jezebel and so on) that hinder an extreme, sold-out level of true worship.

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