

The Power of the Next Step: Building Vision in a Stagnant Church

Most churches begin with a vision for something – reaching a community or a nation, helping families, or sending missionaries. But what happens when the initial vision fades, when goals are not reached, and disillusionment sets in? How does a pastor re-ignite the vision and turn a stagnant church around?

Jay Mosser has served in pastoral roles for nearly 40 years – about 20 years in various assistant pastor capacities and the rest as senior pastor. Through those years he has served in three churches ranging from smaller (less than 50) to larger (about 1,000). Along the way he has worked with children, teens, worship ministry, pastoral care, preaching and leadership. Jay has an M.Div from Western (Conservative Baptist) Seminary and a D.Min from Corban University in Oregon, where his doctoral thesis was titled “How a Pastor’s Theology of Shepherding Affects the Health & Growth of a Church.” He is married to Kathy and has three daughters and three grandchildren. In his spare time, he loves to read, hike, travel, watch sports, and spend time with his family.

I. My Introduction to This Topic

- A. Experience in both smaller and larger churches, experience with rapid growth and a stagnant situation.

- B. What I learned from a visit with Nehemiah...

II. So, Where Do We Start?

- A. Diligent prayer

- B. Honest evaluation of our motives

- C. Dream! “What if God allowed us to...?” or “What would happen if we...?”
(Allow dreams to percolate without being assaulted by all the reasons why it won’t work)

- D. Preach well! Honor God’s Word – study, preach, and pray with the same fervency you would if you were in a larger setting; your main audience is always God Himself. ***Preach biblical vision!***

- E. Renew vision for biblical, God-honoring ministry *without shaming people for what the church is NOT*. You will not make progress by “beating or shaming the sheep.” You must lead them! (Remember Nehemiah and the “we”?)
- F. DO SOMETHING! Starting with you as the leader *and even a few people*: Update a bulletin board, repair something that’s broken, re-arrange the chairs, add a few *more* chairs – like you expect new people, teach people how to greet guests, paint a wall or a room or the building, cut the grass, clean up messy things, trim the bushes, pull weeds, throw a party, visit the neighbors...you get the idea! DO SOMETHING! Then celebrate the progress and take the “Next Step.”

THEN WHAT? Train leaders, introduce strategic (and often small) changes, repeat and clarify and grow the vision, care for dissenters, teach enthusiastically, lead humbly. Take the “Next Step.”

III. How Does “Next-Step” Thinking Help?

- A. Lethargy breeds lethargy. Do something! Get unstuck!
- B. Set small, achievable goals and get them done! Even a small goal, when accomplished, shows forward movement. Success does breed success.
- C. Momentum begins with a single action. Don’t wait until you have the “big picture” all figured out.
- D. Celebrate whenever possible. Show pictures. Thank people. (Think like a parent with a toddler!)
- E. Develop a “let’s try it” mindset. A new idea may not work. No one may come to your new & very cool program. So what? Learn from it and try something else! Keep a positive attitude.

IV. The Literature!

- A. Some ideas:
 1. “Leading Turnaround Churches,” by Gene Wood
 2. “Breakout Churches,” by Thom Rainer
 3. “Overcoming Barriers to Growth,” by Michael Fletcher

4. Books by Gary McIntosh
5. www.turnaroundpastor.com

Let's TALK: What creative things have YOU tried in your ministry context?