

# The Importance of the Mission

## *Nine Reasons Why a Mission Is Important*

Pastor Larry Brown left the leadership conference convinced that he had to develop a dynamic mission for his church. What made that conference worth the \$150 fee? For one thing, the seminary professor who taught the seminar began with nine reasons why a mission was critical to the life of a church or parachurch ministry. For Pastor Brown that list supplied a major missing piece to his ministry puzzle.

Actually, numerous reasons exist why a mission is important to a ministry. There is no complete list for any of the vital ministry concepts. However, the seminar supplied nine major ones that grabbed and held Pastor Larry's attention. This chapter will provide you with all nine reasons and save you the cost and time of attending a leadership conference.

### 1. THE MISSION DETERMINES THE MINISTRY'S DIRECTION

It's reported that Peter Drucker said, '~If you don't know where you're going, any plan will do." It's also rumored that former New York Yankee catcher Yogi Berra once uttered, "If you don't know where you're going, you might end up somewhere else." In their own inimitable ways, both men are stressing the profound importance of having a direction in life. This is true not only for an individual but for an institution, whether it's the church or the parachurch.

If you desire to be a leader, it's essential that you know where you're going. A successful leader is a successful direction setter, and the key to the leader's direction is his or her mission. When all is said and done, it's the ministry's mission that determines the

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ministry's direction. The act of leadership is fundamentally the act of articulating a dynamic, core mission and then pursuing it. And it's the mission that provides the target toward which the ministry takes aim. A clear understanding of mission helps an organization answer the *direction* question: Where are we going? or Where do we want to go? If you don't know where you're going, then Yogi is correct, "You might end up somewhere else." However; another possibility is that you might end up nowhere.

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Leaders in the Bible demonstrated a strong sense of mission. Moses, once on track, pursued with a passion his mission to lead Israel out of Egyptian bondage (Exod. 3:10). The same is true of Joshua, Daniel, and Nehemiah. The Savior's ministry was directed by his mission (Mark 10:45), and Paul evidenced a passionate direction throughout his entire ministry (Rom. 15:20). I'll say more about these and others when I define mission in chapter 2.

I believe that a major reason why 80 to 85 percent of the churches in America are in trouble is because they don't have a clear, compelling mission—they don't know where they're going or should be going.

Either they've not asked the direction question, or they've asked it but not been able to answer it. Not to have a mission is not to have a direction or a target in life. For some this represents safety. It reminds me of the person who shoots the proverbial arrow at the wall, grabs a can of paint, runs up to the wall, and paints a bull's-eye around the embedded arrow. Not having a mission makes failure a lot easier to swallow—who can say you missed the mark? However, not having a mission in many ways ensures ministry failure.

A well-focused mission statement provides a target on the wall for the archer and all else who might launch the ministry arrow. It says to everyone that this is where we're going. A clear, dynamic mission serves a number of purposes. First, it helps people outside the ministry determine if they want to be a part of the ministry. If a church, for example, is moving in a different direction than a potential member or future staff person, then there is no mission match. It would be a mistake for the individual to become a part of the ministry. Both would be pulling in different directions, and, in time, they would pull apart.

Second, by painting a clear, well-defined target on the wall, everyone who is a part of the ministry organization knows where to direct their energies. The mission focuses people's energy on what they're attempting to accomplish. The absence of a mission, however, disperses the ministry's energy in numerous different directions and accomplishes little. Over time, people wise up to what is happening and put forth less and less energy. The result is a maintenance ministry where all expend just enough energy to keep the ministry alive.

Finally, the ministry that has a clear direction is likely to be significantly more effective because it begins with its end in mind. It's not simply shooting in the dark. It knows what it wants to accomplish and there's little reason not to pursue the same.

## 2. THE MISSION FORMULATES THE MINISTRY'S FUNCTION

Along with its direction, the mission helps a ministry formulate or precisely determine its biblical task. It answers the *unction* question: What are we supposed to be doing? What function does the organization exist to perform? What is the primary thing that God has called us to accomplish? What are we attempting to do for him and our people? It's an expression of intent. It summarizes and presents the church's primary biblical task. It determines the results that it seeks to obtain.

Note carefully that the function question isn't, *What are we doing?* Although that is an important question that leaders must ask, especially as they regularly plan and evaluate, it's not the key to formulating the ministry's function. Every ministry is doing something whether good, bad, or a combination thereof. The function question is, *What should we be doing?* That is a sobering question for any church or leadership team. It gets their attention; it causes them to stop and think theologically not only about what they're doing, but what they should be doing. It's also a dangerous question because it may surface the different agendas that people may have for a ministry's purpose.

The function question is a basic question for every ministry. It's foundational. It's part of the ministry ABCs and all ministries should be asking it periodically throughout their existence. When asked, it has a way of keeping a ministry on target. However, as I work with churches and various denominations, I find that most have not and are not asking the function question. This means that many don't know what they're doing or what they are supposed to be doing. The one exception is those who have invested their lives into church planting. To some degree they're forced to deal with their primary task. One of my functions at Dallas Seminary is to train church planters. I make sure that they all have asked and answered the function question for their prospective church plants because some may miss it in the planting process.

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In working with established churches, most of which range in size from eighty-five to two hundred people, I find that few can clearly answer the function question. If someone has asked it in the past or at the founding of the ministry, it has long since been forgotten. The function question generates much discussion and surfaces various opinions about what the function of the church should be. It's surprising to listen to a board of laymen discuss the biblical function of the church. Many don't have a clue. It's even more surprising and alarming when the pastor, or in some cases the pastoral staff, often seminary graduates, can add little to the discussion.

It's my opinion that not understanding the primary task or function is a major reason why so many churches are plateaued or in decline now at the end of the twentieth century. Some simply don't know where they're going. Some are moving in several different directions at the same time. Others are moving in a single direction, but it's the wrong direction. An example is the church who views its sole function as evangelism, or the church that sees its only purpose as teaching. When I meet with them and ask the basic function question, most are puzzled and struggle to come up with a clear answer. This is because the biblical function of many of these churches has long since been lost. Somewhere along the way, they've become so busy doing ministry that they've not taken the time to think about the ministry they should be doing.

There are several advantages for having a mission that formulates a ministry's function. One is that the mission serves to position the organization in the Christian and non-Christian community. People know what the church stands for. Another is that it infuses the ministry with meaning. It says that what we're doing is important and has value. A third is that a truly biblical mission forces the church to look outward at the church's neighboring community as well as inward at its believing community.

A fourth is that it determines how the ministry can make a difference in its community.

### 3. THE MISSION FOCUSES THE MINISTRY'S FUTURE

We've learned that every ministry must ask and answer two questions. One is the *direction* question: Where are we going? And the second is the *function* question: What are we supposed to be doing? Both address a ministry's future. That's because mission, like vision, has everything to do with the future. A clear, biblical mission serves to bring into focus the church or parachurch ministry's future.

In Philippians 3:13-14, Paul writes: "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Essentially, Paul is saying that we must look to the future, not live in the past. I believe that the biblical perspective is to learn from our past—both the good and the bad—but not to live in that past. Living in the past while trying to move forward is contradictory if not impossible. It's similar to driving a car forward while looking through the rearview mirror. It's difficult at best and dangerous for sure. Yet it's imperative that a ministry move toward the future.

But how can your ministry know the future? Outside of biblical prophecy, can anyone know what the future holds? The correct answer is that you can't predict the future, but you can predetermine your ministry's future. Someone has said that the best way to predict the future is to create it. And the way to create your ministry's future is to develop a dynamic, biblical ministry mission. It's the mission formulation that defines the church or parachurch's desired or preferred future state.

*The best way to predict the future is to create it*

What leaders must understand is that a ministry itself must invent its own future or someone or something

else will. When a ship leaves its port, it knows where it's going and thus can predict its future. However; if the engine malfunctions, then the ship may not reach its destination. At that point, the ship is most vulnerable and ceases to determine its future. Instead, the winds and the tides move the ship in various directions, which will result in the ultimate demise of the vessel. A ministry without a mission is much like that crippled ship. If the ministry doesn't define its future, then a powerful person in the congregation, a city council, the federal government, even Satan, sits in the ministry driving seat.

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 y pointing toward its preferred future, it calls upon everyone's God-given creative reserves. It reinforces the belief that all are engaged in the critical process of creating the ministry organization. People engaged in inventing and drafting the mission need to know their ministry not only as it exists in the present but as it must exist in the future. What *is*, is important, but what *can be* is even more important.

#### 4. THE MISSION PROVIDES A TEMPLATE FOR DECISION MAKING

A dynamic mission not only focuses the ministry's future, it sets important boundaries. It determines what the church or parachurch organization will and will not attempt to do; it helps it to say yes to some things and no to others. Mission is to the ministry what a compass is to an explorer; a map to a tourist, a rudder to a ship, a template to a machinist. It provides a framework for thinking; it's the standard or criterion that guides all decision making. On the one hand, it transcends today; on the other; it guides and informs today. If a church's mission is disciple making (Matt. 28:19-20), then everything it does must contribute in some significant way to the making of disciples. If it doesn't, then you don't do it. Every ministry will experience difficulty, trying time—it comes with the spiritual territory. Churches can rely on their mission statements to help them through these complex times when they have to make tough decisions. There will be little need to have long, possibly divisive discussions about how the ministry will handle each situation. The mission statement should tell you what decisions to make and how to act. The first thing to decide is, What is our mission? or What are we supposed to be doing? The second decision is, Does this (new program, ministry, etc.) enhance or detract from our mission?

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A clear; well-defined mission protects both a pastor and the church from getting involved in all kinds of tangential activities. You'll discover this when sincere, well-meaning people—even members of the board—suggest that the pastor or the church pursue this or that. They do this because certain people have their own agendas for the church and its leader. Regardless, there are numerous good activities and events that could be an important part of your church's ministry. However; you don't have the time or the people to do them all, nor does God expect you to. Churches or leaders that attempt too many activities usually wind up doing them poorly, if at all. You must determine how a particular activity or program squares with your mission statement. If a certain congregant questions your lack of involvement in a particular program or committee that you believe is not justified, then you point him or her to the mission statement. The mission serves as a guide not only for major activities and events but for the day-to-day decision making within your organization. It works like a filter to screen out the unessential. There is so much that

is happening every day in the average ministry that you can lose yourself in objectives and minutiae that are unrelated or only distantly related to the mission. They become distractions from the principal goal. Anything that doesn't contribute toward the ministry objective, no matter how insignificant, should be filtered out and questioned.

#### 5. THE MISSION INSPIRES MINISTRY UNITY

Scripture is emphatic about the importance of unity among Christians. In his prayer in John 17:2~23, the Savior prays that all believers would be one. The result of our complete unity is that the world will believe that the Father has truly sent the Son.

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me

Paul also stresses the importance of the unity of Christians within the local church. In Ephesians 4:3, he exhorts those in the church at Ephesus and subsequently all believers to do whatever it takes to maintain unity: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." He follows his exhortation in verses 4~ with an appeal to the seven elements of unity: "There is one body and one Spirit-just as you were called to one hope when you were called-one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

One key ingredient that strongly encourages unity is a dynamic, compelling mission statement. Clarifying your ministry mission will eliminate a great deal of unnecessary conflict in your work and will help direct all discussion and activity productively. A clear direction provides a unifying theme for the organization's members, and draws them together as a team or a community. It defines the arenas within which it will minister; and charts the future course. This results in a sense of teamwork that adds to the church or parachurch's ministry momentum. Indeed, it's doubtful that any organization will ever achieve excellence for Christ without a basic consensus among its leaders and members on its preferred future.

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A ministry with no single, consensual mission statement will end up splintered. When a congregation moves in different directions, it loses the focus and momentum that a single direction provides. Ultimately, it doesn't accomplish very much for Christ. One of the reasons why the parachurch movement flourished from the 1960s through the early 1980s is that it locked onto a single mission such as evangelism, discipleship, and so on. One reason why the church hasn't flourished is the lack of a clear, strategic direction. No one knows or understands what they are supposed to be doing. They don't know what to believe in, so people drift away from churches toward organizations that have a clear belief system and direction, such as the parachurch.

Make sure that people understand and agree with your mission as well as your core values and strategy before they become a part of your ministry. Every church has its own unique culture, and those who move to your church will bring much cultural baggage, both good and bad, that they've collected over the years from their former churches. If they join your church and don't agree with the church's mission, then you are guaranteed conflict.

Smaller churches tend to ignore this advice to their peril. Because they need members to survive, they

may look the other way when a potential member disagrees with their direction or core values. What they must understand is that these people will exert a greater influence in a small church than in a larger church. Why invite trouble to begin with? When those who desire to become a part of your ministry disagree with your direction, then you do them and yourself a service by pointing them toward another ministry that is moving in their direction.

## 6. THE MISSION WELCOMES HELPFUL CHANGE

Holding to a compelling sense of direction for your ministry isn't always easy. One reason is that everything in and around the organization is changing at breakneck speed. The fact is that we're living in an era of unprecedented change much like that of the early church. Like a performer balanced on a tight rope, all of Western civilization is precariously balanced between two eras. Futurist Alvin Toffler has labeled this period from 1950 to 2020 a "hinge of history," during which a major paradigm shift is occurring as a new order breaks away from the old, and society moves into a new epoch. Others describe the period as a "whitewater age" in which those who aren't prepared will find themselves dashed against the rocks of destruction.

These can prove to be times of great challenge and opportunity as well as dangerous times for the ministry. While many churches believe that all change is bad, nothing could be further from the truth. Some changes are good for a ministry and others are bad; some will help your church while others can hurt it. The key to success is the choices an institution and its leaders make. It must be able to quickly analyze and understand the various changes as they take place, and then determine what will or will not benefit the organization.

How does the leader know which changes will help the ministry and which ones will harm it? How can he or she know what to change and what to leave as is? Again, the key is a clear, decisive mission. The organization that has no direction will not be able to answer these questions and survive. Only the church or parachurch ministry that has a well-thought-through, consensual mission will survive this catastrophic time of intense change. That mission will serve to guide the church or ministry around the treacherous rocks and find the friendly currents that are always present in the whitewater of change. Once they've analyzed and understood the implications of a particular change, leaders must ask: Will this change help us in accomplishing our biblical function or will it hinder us? The mission will serve as the filter through which

change is poured. What you filter out is discarded. What gets through is kept.

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A good way to get a head start on how the new technology of the twenty-first century will affect our lives and ministries is to read Bill Gates' book *The Road Ahead*. In this important work, Gate—who built Microsoft into one of the most successful companies in the world—conducts us along the information highway and gives his vision of what he believes the future holds for us. He's convinced that we're on the brink of crossing a technology threshold that will forever change the way we buy, work, learn, and communicate. Just as the personal computer has revolutionized the late twentieth century, so the tools of the information age, which are rapidly becoming a present reality, will transform the way we make choices about almost everything.

The information highway can serve the church to advance the kingdom of God in this world. However; it would be absurd to assume that all this technology is for the good. Problems will surface with the information highway just as they have with the personal computer. How may we as leaders discern the

best way to take advantage of new technology? The answer is to travel up and down the highway, not with blinders over our eyes but with a biblical filter in front of our face. That filter is our mission statement, based on the unchanging Word of God.

#### 7. THE MISSION SHAPES A MINISTRY'S STRATEGY

The mission of an organization addresses its future direction and what it's supposed to accomplish. However; it's the organization's strategy that supplies the framework that actually gets it there. While both are mutually dependent, it's the mission that leads and shapes a ministry's strategy. Every strategy must begin with a succinct mission. The mission is always found at the front end of the strategy, and the strategy is only as good as the mission that drives and molds it. Again, if you don't know where you're going, then any road will get you there. The church's mission is the Great Commission mandate in Matthew 28:19-20. The strategy of the early church is found in Acts and includes three missionary journeys that begin in Acts 13.

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Peter Drucker writes: "Strategy determines what the key activities are in a given business. And strategy requires knowing 'what our business is and what it should be.'"~ The mission defines what our ministry business is and what it should be. It provides the context for the formulation of the strategy. However, a good strategy can't correct a flawed mission. For example, my experience is that a large number of people who serve in churches today, especially people over sixty-five, believe that both the pastor and the church exist to serve and take care of them. While the Reformation corrected a flawed soteriology (salvation by faith), it did little to correct a flawed ecclesiology (the unbiblical idea that the priest or pastor exists to do the work of the ministry). When churches devise their strategies around this unbiblical mission, and many have, they cease to function as a church. Instead, they've become retirement homes and shouldn't call themselves a church.

#### 8. THE MISSION ENHANCES A MINISTRY'S EFFECTIVENESS

I don't know of anyone besides the prophet Jeremiah who began his ministry expecting to fail. Of course this was God's plan, not Jeremiah's. If you investigate the ministries, whether large or small across North America that have proved effective and are having a powerful impact for the kingdom, you will discover that each has a significant, well-focused mission. All good performance starts with a clear direction. It was true of the early church, and it's true for the church today. Churches that have adopted and truly live out their:

mission statements are hands-down winners in making a difference for Christ in their communities.

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It comes as no surprise that Peter Drucker has observed much the same in the world of business. He writes the following:

That business purpose and business mission are so rarely given adequate thought is perhaps the most important single cause of business frustration and business failure. Conversely, in outstanding

businesses such as the Telephone Company or Sears, success always rests to a large extent on raising the question "What is our business?" clearly and deliberately, and on answering it thoughtfully and thoroughly.<sup>2</sup>

I suspect that a part of the explanation for this success lies in the fact that the mission expresses the ministry's or business's bottom line-what truly matters~nd people are willing to commit themselves to that which matters. This directly affects organizational or congregational integrity-the institution's willingness to live out its mission, even against odds.

If a new church has any hope of being effective spiritually, it must determine its mission right from the start. It's much easier to determine a church's mission at its inception than to wait and attempt it later. However, not everyone is a church planter or involved in starting a new work. Consequently, those who find themselves leading and ministering in a struggling established church should look for the church's mission. Most likely, there will be either no mission or a poorly defined one. The leader's job, then, is to lead the church in developing a well-defined biblical statement.

### 9. THE MISSION FACILITATES EVALUATION

Over the years, my church planting course at Dallas Seminary has garnered a good reputation among the student body. I am convinced that one reason for this is constant, constructive evaluation by the students who take the course. Because I'm a tenured faculty person, my students are only required to evaluate me once every few years. My personal policy is to ask my students to evaluate me and the course every semester. Why? It's the primary way that I can improve my teaching and the content of the course. I never cease to be amazed at some of the brilliant and creative ideas that students come up with.

I've pastored two churches and served as an interim in numerous others. Yet I don't ever recall anyone ever formally evaluating my leadership or evaluating the church's ministry as an organiza-tion. (I don't include in this the occasional beef of an unhappy parishioner; or those who have roast pastor for Sunday lunch.) The church that fails to evaluate its people and its effectiveness as a

ministry does itself a great injustice. That which is evaluated not only gets done, but it gets done well. While no person or institution enjoys being under the lens of careful scrutiny, in the long run it serves to improve and fortify.

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In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul instructs the church at Corinth: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves." Throughout 2 Corinthians, Paul subjected both himself and his ministry to close scrutiny. Now it was time for the Corinthians to do the same—did their lives match up to the faith they professed?

On what basis does one evaluate the church? I would argue that the mission is the standard criterion for that evaluation. When we articulate a compelling, biblical mission, it forces us to hold ourselves accountable for acting and ministering in a way that is congruent with that mission. Once we've created and communicated a mission to our people and the community around our ministry, it becomes a benchmark for evaluating all of our professions and actions. The power of the mission is in the way it forces accountability for all the organization's activities.



### QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. After reading this chapter, are you convinced that your ministry needs a compelling, dynamic mission? Why or why not? Of the nine reasons why a mission is important, which were the most important to you? Why?
2. Does your ministry have a clear direction? Has anyone written that direction down on paper or attempted to communicate it in any way? Do the people who are a part of your ministry know its direction? How many? How do you know?
3. What is your ministry's function, or what is it supposed to be doing? Does the leadership agree on its function? Is it doing what it's supposed to be doing? Explain.
4. What is your ministry's preferred future? Has it attempted to predetermine its future? Why or why not? What are the consequences of not developing a mission that defines the ministry's future?
5. Who makes the decisions that affect your ministry's present and future? How does your ministry make these decisions? Have there been any problems with this process? Explain.
6. Is your ministry characterized by unity? If your answer is yes, is that unity by consensus or compromise? Which would you prefer?
7. Does your ministry have a clear, effective strategy? If yes, do the people in the organization know and understand that strategy? Could they coherently explain it to a complete stranger?
8. Do you agree that North America is undergoing unprecedented change? If yes, what changes have you observed in the last five years? Have these changes affected your ministry? How? How well does your organization handle change?
9. Would you rate your ministry as effective? Why or why not? Would those who are a part of the ministry rate it as effective? Do the people in your ministry understand its bottom line?
10. Does your ministry regularly evaluate itself in any way? If yes, who does the evaluation? Do you believe that it has helped or hindered the ministry? Why?

## ENDNOTES

1. Peter F Drucker; *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973), 75. 2. *Ibid.*, 78.

# The Definition of a Mission

## *Part 1: What Are We Talking About Anyway?*

Pastor Larry Brown left the leadership conference convinced that his church needed a dynamic, biblical mission. He was excited and couldn't wait to tell his board what he had learned. As soon as he arrived home on Friday, he picked up the phone and called all of his board members, asking them to meet with him Sunday after church. He felt that he must persuade them of the importance of a mission while he still sensed it deep within his bones. He desperately needed their support if they were to turn things around in the church. And turn things around they must, or he knew that in time he would move on to more fertile ground.

His concern was that the board might not understand the need for a clear direction nor respond as intensively as he had. The brochure that advertised the conference recommended that pastors bring their board members with them. Too many pastors had attended past conferences alone and returned home only to have the board yawn, stretch, and wonder why they were so excited. The problem was that Pastor Larry decided to attend the conference at the last minute, and his board members had already made other plans. So the responsibility was his.

Let's assume that the board agrees with Pastor Larry and decides that they do need to develop a mission for the church. Precisely what is it that they need to develop? What is the definition of an organizational mission? Chapter 1 was designed to persuade you of the need to develop a mission for your ministry; and hopefully you, like Pastor Larry, are convinced. However, I didn't define what it is that I was talking about. First, this chapter will discuss what a mission isn't. This is important because so much confusion reigns over what should be included in the definition. Then it will define precisely what the mission is. Finally, it will present three different kinds of missions.

### WHAT A MISSION IS NOT

Trying to define an organization's mission, whether it's a church ministry, parachurch ministry; or a business, can be problematic. The major reason as cited in the introduction to this book is that other vital concepts like a ministry's values, vision, strategy, definition, and purpose are often confused with mission.

#### A Mission Is Not a Core Value

Many people confuse an organization's mission with its core values. In an article in *The Washington Post*, the writer confuses the pharmaceutical company Johnson & Johnson's mission with its organizational core values.<sup>1</sup> An organization's core values or credo answers the *why* question: Why do we do what we do? They are important because they drive a ministry or business. They dictate every decision that is made, every conflict that is resolved, and every dollar that is spent.

The mission answers the *what* question: What are we supposed to be doing? The core values supply the reasons for what we do. The mission follows the values in priority and development. It serves to channel our core values into the ministry; it's an expression of our deepest, driving values.

The mission for all churches is the Great Commission (Mark 16:15). The core values are different and will vary from church to church. For example, the core values for the Jerusalem Church are found in Acts 2:42-47 and consist of expository preaching, evangelism, prayer, fellowship, community, praise and worship, and others.

Every ministry will have core values. They may be good or bad values. However, not every ministry has a core mission. In fact, the problem with a number of churches all across North America is that they do not have and may never have had a mission.

#### A Mission Is Not a Vision

Another concept that many confuse with mission is vision. As I listen to conversations about vision, examine vision statements, and read articles on the concept, I believe that mission and vision are confused more than any other basic ministry concepts. This was the case in the *Leadership* article entitled "A Variety of Visions" that I referred to in the introduction to this book. Confusion arises because much of what people say about the Importance of a vision is also

true of the mission. Both are vital concepts that are key to any ministry and both deserve our attention. Consequently, a number of statements that leaders assume to be vision statements are actually mission statements, and mixing the two only confuses the distinct vital functions each perform for the organization.

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Untangling the two concepts raises two questions. First, what do a mission and a vision statement have in common? And second, how are the two different? These two questions are critical to understanding the concepts of vision and mission and their importance to a ministry organization. Therefore, I've set aside the next chapter of this book to answer both questions.

For now; my primary purpose is to show how a mission is different from a vision. A mission logically precedes a vision in its development. First, a mission is developed and then it is communicated with a vision. The vision is what the mission looks like when you parade it through your ministry's target community. However; actual experience is that either one may come first. Saying that one should logically come before the other doesn't make it true. Human nature and the creative processes don't always work the way we say they should, and various leaders will affirm that for them the vision came first.

#### A Mission Is Not a Strategy

A third concept that some confuse with a mission is a strategy. Again, the mission determines what the ministry is supposed to be doing. It is at the very heart of any ministry; it's what God has called the organization to accomplish. The strategy, however; is the actual process that determines how the ministry will accomplish its mission. The mission answers the question, What? while the strategy answers the question, How?

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*The strategy is the process that determines how  
the minist~ will accomplish its mission.*

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The mission is determinative in formulating the strategy. Thus, logically, it must come before the strategy. Without a mission, the strategy is mostly aimless and often wasted activity. Every ministry has a strategy whether or not it's aware of it. It may be a good strategy or a poor strategy. Regardless, some sort of strategy is in place to implement the activities of the organization no matter how strong or lethargic the organization is.

At this point, perhaps it would be helpful to pause and review what we have learned about the essential ministry elements and their relationships to one another. I began with the ministry's core organizational values. The values come first because they inform and affect all the other vital ministry elements (figure 2.1). They are followed by a church or parachurch's mission, which reflects those values. The mission, in turn, directs both the vision and the strategy. While in some cases the vision could come before the mission, this would never be true of the strategy. You cannot implement what you don't have. It's possible that the strategy could implement the vision, but that is an awkward process at best. It works much better when the strategy implements the mission because both are planning tools, whereas the vision is more for communication purposes. A mission with a bad strategy is impotent. A good strategy with a poor or absent mission is mindless activity.

### A Mission Is Not a Definition

Some have also confused the mission of a ministry with its definition. They may equate the mission of a church with the definition of a church. A definition defines what an organization such as the church is. It concerns its essence or being. For example, some have been very careful to point out that the church is not a building but people. Its very essence is a gathering or community of professing believers in Christ.

The mission defines what the organization has been established to accomplish. It concerns not what it is-its essence-but what it *does-its* function. Some definitions may include a statement of function as well as essence. For example, the church could be defined as a gathering of professing believers in Christ (essence) who exist to accomplish Christ's Great Commission (mission). However; a mission should not include a statement of definition as well as function. This only serves to confuse the mission.

### A Mission Is Not a Purpose

There aren't many books on organizational mission, and the few that exist or comment on the topic hold that an organization's mission and its purpose are the same. Most don't even attempt to argue the case, they simply assume it. For example, Peter Drucker writes, "Non-profit institutions exist for the sake of their mission. They exist to make a difference in society and the life of the individual. They exist for the sake of their mission, and this must never be forgotten."<sup>2</sup>

However; I see a number of differences between a ministry's mission and its purpose. First, the purpose for a Christian organization such as a church articulates why it exists, why the church is here. The mission of an organization identifies what it's supposed to be doing, not its reason for being. Purpose answers the *why* question; mission, the *what* question: What are we doing? What is our target as a ministry? What are we aiming at?

Second, the term *purpose* implies something more compelling, more fundamental to the ministry than its mission. The purpose isn't simply a target that the organization aims for or the direction in which the ministry is going-it's the organization's entire reason for being. The church or parachurch ministry isn't an end in itself; it serves a much greater purpose-to glorify God. The answer to, What are we supposed to be doing? is the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). That's the church's mission. The answer to, Why are we here? is much broader-it's to glorify God (Pss. 22:23; 50:15; Isa. 24:15; Rom. 15:6; 1 Cor. 6:20; 10:31). That's the church's purpose.

VVV

*When a church accomplishes its mission, to make disciples, it serves a broader purpose-it glorifies God.*

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Third, the core mission of a church or a parachurch ministry and its core values, vision, and strategy are all subsumed under its purpose. Our purpose on this earth is doxological. We're here to glorify and honor God in all that we do and say. When Christians are Christlike, they enhance the reputation of God and honor him because they are his representatives. When they aren't Christlike, they do damage to God's reputation. They dishonor him. Living Christlike lives is what it means to glorify God. When a church accomplishes its mission, to make disciples, it serves a broader purpose-it glorifies God. The same is true as it lives its core values, realizes its vision, and accomplishes its strategy.

### WHAT A MISSION IS

Knowing what the mission isn't helps in discovering what it is because it eliminates other potentially confusing elements. Now it's time to discover what it is. A mission is a broad, brief biblical statement of what the ministry is supposed to be doing. This definition has several key ingredients.

### A Mission Is Broad

The first key ingredient is expansiveness. A good mission is broad, overarching, and comprehensive. It's the all-embracing goal, mandate, or charge that takes precedence over all other goals or mandates within the organization. It's the umbrella over all the ministry's activities. It's the predominate thrust that directs all that the organization does. Whatever the ministry attempts must fit under its mission. The biblical mission statements found later in this chapter are broad and all-inclusive. If a parachurch ministry's mission is to evangelize college students,

then everything it does should involve evangelism of its target group. If it gets into such areas as discipleship or feeding the hungry, it has strayed beyond its stated mission.

This expansive quality is important because it allows for the flexibility and growth of the institution. In America, the smaller churches are dying and the larger churches are growing even bigger. We're experiencing a megachurch phenomenon. More large churches exist at the dawn of the third millennium than ever before in our nation's history. Lyle Schaller indicates that some four thousand Protestant megachurches have emerged over the past ten to fifteen years.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, when a church is planted today, no one can accurately predict its future. It may quickly plateau and die because of the high risk involved in entrepreneurial ventures, or it may eventually grow into a regional or megachurch. While there are certain principles and practices that aid the ultimate growth and success of a new church start, still no one knows for sure at the front end of the project.<sup>4</sup>

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*A good mission must be broad and flexible  
enough to allow for potential growth.*

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My point is that a good mission must be broad and flexible enough to allow for potential growth. With all the helpful information that the church growth movement has supplied over the past two decades, new congregations should plan and expect to grow. Also, plateaued ministries have the potential to redefine their mission and begin to grow as well. Broad missions promote and make room for future growth and versatility. Narrow missions are restrictive and confining. Like a small shoe on a growing child's foot, they inhibit a ministry's normal growth processes.

At the same time, the mission must be focused enough to be clear and set some boundaries for the ministry. It's possible to be so broad that you confuse people and ultimately say nothing. Mission statements that indicate that the church or parachurch ministry exists to glorify God are too broad. They are sound, both biblically and theologically, yet what does it mean to glorify God? Answering this question gets at the purpose of a church and not its mission. I would encourage ministries that insist on using this phrase in their mission statements to explain what it means to glorify God.<sup>5</sup>

#### A Mission Is Brief

The second key ingredient is brevity. The adjective *brief* is a reference to the size or length of the mission statement. I have heard of mission statements that are fifteen to twenty pages long. Some suggest that it should contain no more than one hundred words. A perusal of the mission statements that appear in Scripture reveals that all are very short. While there is no standard, fixed regulation for the length of such a statement, I would question whether a document that is twenty pages long, or even no more than one hundred words long, really is a mission statement.

How short is brief? A significant, dynamic mission statement need be no longer than a single sentence. As we shall see in the next section, biblical mission statements are approximately a sentence in length. No matter how complex the organization, its leadership should be able to summarize what it's supposed to accomplish in a single, succinct statement. That's not to say that achieving brevity is easy. It requires a careful, thorough understanding of the ministry.

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*No matter how complex the organization, its  
leadership should be able to summarize what it's  
supposed to accomplish in a single, succinct statement.*

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The reason for such brevity is that people will be able to remember a single, well-written sentence. It isn't likely, however; that they will make the effort to remember two or more sentences, much less several pages. The church administrator at Pantego Bible Church in Arlington, Texas, attended a meeting where Peter Drucker was the key speaker. He overheard another participant ask Drucker how long a mission statement should be. Drucker responded, "If you can get the mission statement on a T-shirt, then it's probably the appropriate length."~ Thus, the critical test for any mission statement is whether it passes the "T-shirt test." Not only is this test an aid to brevity, but should you

literally put it on a T-shirt, it would be an aid to communicating the mission statement as well.

#### A Mission Is Biblical

The third key ingredient is that a mission is based on the Scriptures. God determines what a ministry's mission is. He's the source of your mission, and he reveals this in his Word. Therefore, the precise mission for any ministry is biblically based. The only question is: What does God say that we're supposed to do? A number of missions are sprinkled throughout the Old and New Testament. These broad, brief statements prove to be instructive.

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*God determines what a ministry's mission is.*

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*Mission statements in the Old Testament.* A quick survey of the Old Testament surfaces four statements of mission. The first belongs to Adam and Eve. We find their mission statement in Genesis 1:28 which states: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" The text is very clear. There is no question that this overarching goal is from God. The first couple is to have dominion over God's newly formed creation.

The second is Moses' mission statement. God reveals his plans to Moses in Exodus 3:7-9, he then commissions him. Verse 10 records God's words to him: "So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." It's noteworthy that God's plan was to lead his people out of Egyptian slavery and into the Promised Land. However, he commissions Moses to accomplish only their deliverance. God in his wisdom knew that Moses would disobey him and never set foot in the Promised Land. That aspect of God's plan becomes Joshua's mission (Deut. 3:28; 31:7-8; Josh. 1:2).

It's interesting that on several occasions God raises up others to complete someone's mission. God used Joshua, not Moses, to complete his mission for Israel, that is, leading them into the Promised Land. Later in Israel's history, God raised up Elijah, whose mission was to prevail over the prophets and worshippers of Baal (1 Kings 17-18). However, he used Elisha to complete what Elijah had started (2 Kings 2).

The third is David's mission statement. We find it embedded in the Davidic Covenant. The writer of 2 Samuel refers to it in chapter 7, verse 8 where he says: "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel.'" The writer sheds additional light in 2 Samuel 5:2 where he says: "And the LORD said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.'" God commissioned David to rule and shepherd his people. This involved extending God's sovereign rule over them, their neighbors, and their enemies.

The fourth is Nehemiah's mandate. In Nehemiah 2:17, he says to the people: "Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." Here Nehemiah is telling the distraught remnant what God's mission is for them. The rebuilding of the wall was a physical act replete with spiritual meaning for the struggling nation.

*Mission statements in the New Testament.* The New Testament as well as the Old provides us with several exemplary mission statements. We'll look at two of the most important ones. The first is the Savior's. Mark 10:45 states: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." The same is recorded in Matthew 20:28. Jesus' broad, brief mission was to function as a servant to people, and this service would culminate in the ultimate sacrifice-his death. He was to be the ransom price for humankind as his death would pay the price for their sin.

The second is the mission of the church. It's critical to us because we make up the church; therefore, it's our mission statement. It's what we as Christ's church and body are supposed to be doing. Matthew 28:19 records Jesus' words to his eleven disciples: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." Mark 16:15 records the same where the Savior says to his disciples and to us: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."

## VVV

*Christ's Great Commission and thus our mission*

*as his church is to make disciples.*

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Christ's Great Commission and thus our mission as his church is to make disciples. This involves helping people move from prebirth to maturity. It's a brief, overarching, umbrella statement that includes pursuing lost people (Luke 19:1-10), evangelizing lost people (Mark 16:15), and helping them to move toward maturity or Christlikeness (Matt. 28:19-20). Each person is responsible to accept Christ and then become like him. And Christ has commissioned the church as his organization to help them in this process.<sup>7</sup>

#### **A Mission Is a Statement**

The fourth ingredient is that the mission is a statement. A ministry must articulate its comprehensive goal or mandate; otherwise, no one will know what it is much less understand it. This begins with a statement. While this includes a verbal statement, it is most powerful when written down on paper as a visual statement. It's instructive that we know the mission statements of Adam, Moses, and others above because they're visual. The biblical authors have written and recorded them in the pages of Scripture. This is important to mission developers; writing forces you to think and gather your thoughts together. When you record them on paper you should be very clear. If you can't write out your mission, then it's likely not a well-thought-through statement.

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*Writing out your mission in the form of a statement puts it into concrete form.*

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Writing out your mission in the form of a statement puts it into concrete form. The primary purpose of a written vision statement is to communicate an image of where the church or parachurch ministry is going. The primary purpose of a written mission statement is to communicate concretely where the church or parachurch ministry is going. The difference is that when people read the vision statement, they get an image in their minds of where the ministry is going, and this serves to motivate or inspire them to move in that direction. It's not as likely that the mission statement will accomplish this. Instead, people will have a clear, succinct statement of the organization's direction that's more for information than inspiration.

#### **A Mission Is What the Ministry Is Supposed to Be Doing**

The fifth ingredient is that the mission statement must express what the ministry is to accomplish. It is the ministry's primary task or aim—an expression of intent that informs and gives meaning to the organization. It's what God intends for the ministry to achieve—its basic, essential business.<sup>11</sup>

The key question is, What is our ministry supposed to be doing? Every ministry must begin with this question. Drucker writes: "We are mission-focused. What are we trying to do? Don't ever forget that first question. The mission must come first. This is the lesson of the last 5~100 years. The moment we lose sight of the mission we are gone."<sup>8</sup> This question is foundational for every church or parachurch organization. It is the *b* of the ministry's ABCs (the *a* is core values and the *c* is vision). We learned that the answer for the church is that it's supposed to be making disciples (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15). Its mission is to help people move from prebirth to maturity—to come to faith in Christ and mature in him.

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*Drucker proves most insightful when he says:  
~~The moment we lose sight of the mission  
we are gone."*

AAA

My impression is that not enough of the older, traditional churches born before the 1960s are asking the mission

question. Drucker proves most insightful when he says: "The moment we lose sight of the mission we are gone." Commenting on these older American churches, Schaller writes: "... two-thirds to three-fourths of all congregations founded before 1960 are either on a plateau or shrinking in numbers."<sup>9</sup>

The question: What is our ministry supposed to be doing? is both aspirational and diagnostic. It serves as an attempt to encourage church and parachurch organizations to consider what they might be missing. It's an excellent question that a potential leader should ask when considering a new ministry such as a pastor candidating at a church. However; this is only the first question. There are several similar diagnostic questions that leaders must ask along with the aspirational one.

*What are we doing?* It may be that we're a church that is supposed to make disciples. If we're not making disciples, then what are we doing? I've observed that some churches are teaching and becoming cognitive communities that function as mini-seminaries. Some are centers of evangelism the only focus of which is to win the lost. Others are retirement centers for older Christians who feel that they've done their part and now it's time for someone else to take care of them for a change.

*How well are we doing what we're doing?* Not only are some churches pursuing purposes other than making disciples, but they aren't doing a very good job at what they're doing. This is an issue of quality. They're doing other things and doing them poorly. Scripture teaches what I refer to as a theology of excellenc~that whatever we do, we must do it as to the Lord, whether it's our worship (Lev. 22:2~22; Num. 18:29-30) or our work (Eph. 6:7; Col. 3:23). Ultimately, we'll be judged according to the quality of our works (1 Cor. 3:13). This is also an issue of outreach. People are looking for ministries that do what they do well. They will be turned off by a ministry that does its work sloppily.

*Why aren't we doing what we're supposed to be doing?* If we're a church, this question is an attempt to get at the heart of why we aren't obeying Christ's clear command to make disciples. Numerous answers exist. As a church grows in size and adds a mortgage payment and staff salaries, it may focus inward and promptly forget the Great Commission. The pastor may be strong in some area such as preaching, emphasizing it over the other responsibilities of the Great Commission. Some additional answers are disobedience, ignorance, hidden agendas, power plays, laziness, and so on.

*What will it take for this ministry to do what it's supposed to be doing?* Next to the first question, this is the most important mission question an evangelical organization can ask. It's also vital to a person who is considering the leadership of a plateaued or declining ministry. The answer dictates whether the church will obey Christ. The answer will also dictate the future of the church. I'm inclined to believe that if a church knows what its biblical mission is but persists

in pursuing other interests, then over time God will not bless but discipline it. And long term disobedience may result in death (Rev.

2-3).

## **THE KINDS OF MISSIONS**

In an attempt to come up with a pragmatic, functional definition that will help guide our ministries we have discovered what a mission is as well as what it isn't. We can further enhance our understanding of this concept by looking at the different kinds of missions. We'll examine three: personal, organizational, and departmental.

### **The Personal Mission**

The personal mission is as important to the individual as the organizational mission is to a ministry. Your personal mission answers a similar question to an organizational mission: What am I supposed to be doing? or better: What does God want me to do with my life? It has much to do with what is most important in your life, or what you care about in your life as a whole. The value of a personal mission is that it can make the difference between being average for Christ and being exceptional for him. In the context of the business world, one person expresses it this way: "I believe it's true that the difference between great people and everyone else is that great people create their lives actively, while everyone else is created *by* their lives, passively waiting to see where life takes them next."<sup>10</sup> Developing your personal mission allows you to create your life actively.

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*The value of a personal mission is that it can make  
the difference between being average for Christ and  
being exceptional for him.*

I would encourage you to write a personal ministry mission statement. My personal mission is to prepare a new generation of leaders for significant, high impact ministry in the twenty-first century. The following are some important questions that will help you: What do you want to do with your life? If God gave you one wish for your life, what would you choose? What does God want you to do with your life? In light of your gifts and talents, how could you best serve the Savior? What legacy do you want to leave behind? If someone honored you with a testimonial dinner; what would people say about you? Long after you're gone, what will people such as your family and friends remember most about you?<sup>11</sup>

### **The Organizational Mission**

This book is all about organizational missions. You might also describe them as corporate, congregational, or institutional missions. They ask: What is the mission of a church or parachurch ministry? I intentionally discuss the missions of other organizations such as those found in the marketplace because they are instructive and tend to be anywhere from ten to twenty years ahead of the typical traditional church. They often prove most helpful but must be run through a biblical, theological grid.

In some situations such as the church, the organizational mission is supposed to help implement the individual mission statements of those who are a part of it. As cited above, the church's mission is to make disciples or assist its people as they do everything in the Spirit's power to become Christ's disciples. In some parachurch works, the organization's mission may be more focused than its members' personal missions. This would apply to a parachurch ministry that majors in evangelism. Certainly God wants his people to do evangelism, and their personal mission includes but goes beyond their ministry's mission.

### **The Departmental Mission**

Once your ministry has prepared its organizational mission, it should ask each department within to develop its own mission statement. The organizational mission serves as the broad umbrella for the entire ministry. The departmental missions must fit somewhere under that umbrella. It presents what each department is supposed to be doing that contributes to the effectiveness of the entire organization. This serves to bring the mission concept down to the grassroots level.

The following is a sample departmental mission statement developed by the physical plant at Dallas Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas:

The Physical Plant's mission is to serve the Dallas Theological Seminary community with a professional and personable attitude by providing a physical environment which is conducive to the DTS mission of preparing godly servantleaders in the body of Christ worldwide.

### **QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION**

1. Are you serving in a church or parachurch ministry? Does it have a mission statement? Why or why not?
2. What is your ministry actually doing? Does this line up with what it's supposed to be doing? Explain.
3. How well is your ministry doing what it's doing? Do the leaders believe that it's important to pursue excellence in whatever you're doing? Why or why not? Do your people believe that it's important to pursue excellence in ministry? Why or why not?
4. What will it take for your ministry to change and do what Christ wants it to do? Is the leadership willing to move in a new direction? Are the people willing to move in a new direction? Are you willing to do whatever it takes to move in a new direction?
5. Have you developed a personal mission statement? If not, are you convinced that you should do this? Why or why not? How might it help you at this point in your life and ministry?

### **ENDNOTES**

1. Jay Matthews, "Much Ado About Nothing?" *The Washington Post*, 8 January 1995.
2. Peter F. Drucker, *Alanaging the Non-Profit Organizatlon* (New York: Harper Business, 1990), 45.
3. Lyle E. Schaller; *The New Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995),

13.

4. These are found in my book *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992).
5. I spend some time discussing what this phrase means from a biblical perspective in chapter three of my book *Wision America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995).
6. Randy Frazee with Lyle E. Schaller; *The Comeback Congregation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 6.
7. I discuss the biblical concept of making disciples in *Strategy 2000* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996).
8. "The New Models," *NEXT* 1, no.2 (August 1995): 2.
9. Frazee with Schaller; *The Comeback Congregation*, 11.

~O. Michael Gerber; *The E-Myth* (New York: Harper Business, 1986), 85.

11. I have written *Maximizing Your Effectiveness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995) to help people think through these issues and more.

# 3

## The Definition of a Mission

### *Part 2: Is It a Vision or a Mission?*

AS a leader and pastor, Larry Brown has the awesome responsibility of leading Grace Community Church to discover and craft its mission. His ability to accomplish this task will probably mean the difference between the success or failure of this ministry over the next five to ten years. Perhaps in his tenure at Grace, he'll accomplish little more than helping the church articulate and own a compelling mission. However, if he does this and little more, his ministry will be a success.

While he was convinced, Pastor Larry wondered if he would be able to convince his board of the church's need for a mission. They must gain ownership, or it would not happen. He met with the board only to discover that they, like he, sensed that something vital was missing. When he pointed to the church's need for a mission, most responded warmly and enthusiastically. What he discovered was that most on the board shared some familiarity with modern day management concepts. Only they, like many other church board members, weren't sure if it was appropriate to apply some of these marketplace principles to the church. Pastor Larry took great pains to explain his understanding of the mission concept. As in chapter 2, he explained first what it isn't and then what it is.

The one sticking point in the entire meeting, however, was the difference between a mission and a vision. Two of the members worked for Fortune 500 firms that required its upper management to attend various leadership seminars. Both had recently attended the same seminar on vision, and they didn't understand how the two were different. Others on the board were somewhat familiar with the topic and voiced similar confusion.

The board of Grace Community Church is not alone in this quandary. We have already seen in the earlier chapters that some confusion does exist. The problem is that both an organizational mission and vision have some commonalities and some distinctives. This chapter will seek to sharpen the definition of a mission by examining the similarities and differences of an organizational mission and vision. How are they alike and how are they different?

#### THE SIMILARITIES OF A MISSION AND VISION

A mission and a vision are similar in four ways: Both are biblically based, direction oriented, goal directed, and future focused.

#### A Mission and a Vision Are Biblically Based

Both the leader's and the ministry's mission must come from God. For those whose hearts beat for Christ, no other source will do. While it's possible that God might reveal a mission in some unnatural, subjective way, most will find it in the Bible. The same is true of the vision. Consequently, both a mission and vision are biblically based.

I presented several biblical mission statements from both the Old and New Testament in chapter 2. One from the Old Testament was the mission that God gave to Moses for his people Israel. Moses' commission is recorded in Exodus 3:10 where God commands him:

"So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

In the same chapter, God is also the source of Moses' vision for Israel. He records it in Exodus 3:7~: "The LORD said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.'"

God repeats this vision periodically as Israel travels toward the Promised Land (Deut. 8:7-10; 11:9-12). This repetition serves to regularly remind the Israelites of the vision, to inspire them along the way as they face various obstacles, and to remind them that God is the source of their mission and vision.

### A Mission and a Vision Are Direction Oriented

A second factor that a mission and vision have in common is that they are both directional; they provide a direction for the ministry. As I survey the North American church scene, I have observed that most churches fall into three categories in terms of directional problems. The largest category is churches that are directionless. If you were to ask the board or the pastor the *direction* question, Where are you going? they wouldn't be able to give you a clear answer. Most of these are maintenance ministries that, like crippled ships at sea, are headed nowhere.

A second category is churches with multiple directions. Usually the pastor is pulling in one direction while the various people on the board are each pulling in a different direction. It's only a matter of time before they pull apart. They are like the tides and wind that push and pull a crippled ship at sea, constantly changing its course and moving it in different directions.

The last category is churches that are moving in the same direction only it's the wrong direction. These are churches that specialize in some area that fits under the umbrella of the Great Commission rather than the Commission itself, such as the teaching church or the soul-winning church. They are like a ship at sea that isn't crippled but moving full speed ahead. The only problem is that they're steaming toward the wrong port.

It's imperative that leaders know where they are taking their ministries. This means that they must know their own direction. I would define a Christian leader as (1) a godly servant who (2) knows where God wants him or her to go and (3) has followers. The first part of the definition reflects on the leader's character, the third on the leader's ability to influence people. The second has everything to do with his or her direction. You must have a clear sense of direction; you must know where you're going if you plan to lead people.

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*It's imperative that leaders know where  
they are taking their ministries.*

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As stated in chapter 1, the mission of a ministry organization answers the question: Where are we going? However, the vision also answers the directional question. Many would argue that churches and parachurch ministries are vision-driven. I believe that they are vision-focused and values-driven. The vision serves not to drive the organization but to bring its direction into focus. I demonstrate this function in the classroom by putting a transparency on an overhead projector that is out of focus to the point that no one can read it. Then I gradually adjust the projector until the transparency comes into focus. This is what the vision does for a ministry-it's all about focusing its direction. It's the values, however, not the vision, that drive the ministry in a particular direction. The core organizational values dictate every decision the organization makes, every dollar it spends, and many other vital areas.<sup>1</sup> Values are the engine that powers the ship to move toward its port.

### The Mission and Vision Are Goal Directed

In chapter 1, we found that the mission helps a church or parachurch ministry determine its biblical function. It answers the question: What are we supposed to be doing? In chapter 2, we discovered that for the church, the answer to this question is the Great Commission. Consequently, in planning terminology, the overarching, all-encompassing goal of the church is the Great Commission.

The same is true for a ministry's vision. The mission and the vision are not only directional, they are functional. Let's continue to use the church as an example. The vision of the church, like the mission, is the Great Commission, for God has predetermined both. He has provided the mission in Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47-8; and Acts 1:8. What the mission looks like when the church realizes it in the future is the vision. AS a mission, it's broad and brief as a vision, it's clear and challenging.

What, then, is the Great Commission? Matthew 28:19-20 says it's to go and make disciples. Mark 16:15 says that it's to go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone. Therefore, the Great Commission involves pursuing lost people, winning them, and then leading them to maturity or Christlikeness. Great Commission churches aren't evangelistic headhunter institutions. Their directing goal is to make disciple~to see ungodly pagans who are totally focused on themselves become godly committed Christians who are totally focused on the Savior. This umbrella mandate directs and informs all that the church does.

### A Mission and a Vision Are Future Focused

In chapter 1 we learned that a ministry's mission has everything to do with the future. While a ministry may learn from the past (its failures as well as its successes), it must not live in the past (Phil. 3:13~14). Whenever a ministry crafts its mission statement, it is inventing and defining its future. For you not to do so can mean two things: you may not have a future, or you may be allowing someone or something else to define your future for you. Both are frightening and unacceptable.

A ministry's vision also has everything to do with the future. A vision's impact is its length—it takes more time to unfold but allows the hearer to savor and participate more fully in the organization's preferred future.

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*The mission paints a broad brush stroke of the future,  
and the vision fills in the details.*

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I define a vision in several different ways. One that relates to the concept of mission and helps to better discern the differences between the mission and the vision is the following: The vision is what the ministry will look like as it accomplishes its mission in its unique ministry community. It's a snapshot or picture carried in your mental billfold or purse of what the ministry is supposed to be doing.

There are several definitional characteristics that distinguish the two. One is that the mission precedes the vision in order. If the vision is "what the mission looks like," then logically the mission must already be in existence. Second, the vision is a "seeing" concept, whereas the mission is a "doing" concept. Third, the mission won't change significantly, whereas the vision will change depending on the uniqueness of the "particular ministry's community." The following section will discuss some of these differing characteristics in more detail.

#### The Application of a Mission and a Vision

Another key difference between a ministry's mission and its vision is their application. I use the term *application* to mean what they do for the ministry. The application of the mission to the organization is in the area of planning. It's a planning tool. The mission comes first; it precedes the plan. They work together like an engine of a locomotive and its caboose. If you don't have a mission, then you can't have a plan. Some may throw something together and call it a plan, but without a mission that provides direction, a plan is anemic and impotent. A ship may steam all around the ocean, but without a port, it accomplishes little more than a nice view of a lot of salt water and some fantastic sunsets.

The application of the vision to the ministry is primarily in the area of communication. The mission is vital to an organization's planning, while the vision is vital to the articulation of its direction and future. How does a church or parachurch ministry communicate to its members and constituency where it's going in such a way that everyone has a mental snapshot before they arrive? The answer is by casting an ideal, unique vision. As we invent and define the future of our ministries, all need a mental picture of what it will look like as we begin the journey and as we move toward that mental image. This is why God gave Moses the vision for Israel before they began the long, arduous journey, and then continued to recast the vision while they were on that journey. It's true that Israel meandered all over the Sinai. However, that was because of the people's disobedience, not their lack of vision.

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*The mission is vital to an organization's planning,  
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its direction and future.*

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A church may communicate its vision in numerous ways.<sup>2</sup> The only limit to vision communication is the creative ability of the communicator. However, the primary form is verbal as when a pastor preaches a sermon. Much as Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech created a visual, mental picture in people's minds of what racial equality in America might look like, a pastor's sermon creates a visual, mental picture in people's minds of what the

church's future will look like.

### The Length of a Mission and a Vision

Every organization should be able to articulate its mission in a written statement. And that statement should be brief. Some companies have mission statements that are as long as ten to fifteen pages. And some advise that you limit your mission statement to one hundred words. In the last chapter, I suggested that brief means that it can pass the "T-shirt test." It should be short enough in length that it can fit on a T-shirt.

Any church or parachurch ministry, as well as any company that's competing in the marketplace, should be able to summarize its mission statement in a single sentence. This means that it will have to be a broad statement, but that is okay, for the mission statement is broad by definition. The reason for brevity is twofold. First, a single sentence mission statement is easy to remember. Second, the less that is said, the less confusion there will be over the organizational mission.

While you might communicate the vision more effectively in other ways, you should be able to write it down on a piece of paper in the form of a statement. However, it won't pass the "T-shirt test." And that is another major difference between the vision and the mission. The vision by nature will be longer. In fact, if your vision is only a couple of sentences long, then it's not a vision, it's a mission statement.

When consulting with denominations and churches in the area of vision, I ask them to write out their vision statements. This forces them to think carefully and specifically about the future of their ministries and how they want to communicate it to their people. I ask them to close their eyes and describe on paper what they see or want to see as they envision their ministries five, ten, or fifteen years from now. No one has ever accomplished this assignment with one sentence. It's usually from several sentences to as much as a page or two in length.

### The Purpose of a Mission and a Vision

A fourth difference is the mission's purpose. It's not the same as that of the vision. The purpose of a well-thought-through, dynamic mission is to inform. Again, it answers the *fi~nctional* question: What are we supposed to be doing? What is the primary task to which God has called us? Where do we want to focus our energies as a ministry? It expresses the task of the ministry organization. The mission of the church is to make disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). The mission of the evangelistic parachurch ministry is to win souls. The articulation of a ministry's mission is the way it informs people of its function or what its primary task is all about.

The purpose of a credible, attractive vision is to inspire. To some degree a vision, like the mission, informs people of the ministry's direction. And to some degree, a well-written mission statement can inspire people. But these aren't nor should they be the primary purposes of either concept. When a church or parachurch casts its vision, that process serves to inspire people to respond-to do what they're supposed to do. It captures the imagination and engages the spirit. A well-articulated, biblical vision has the power to inspire not only a decision to follow but, more important, a commitment to follow the direction of the leadership.

A vision has the power to motivate people to action, to produce the results that the mission calls for. It reaches out and touches the need within all of us for a sense of significance and meaning in life. We sincerely desire that what we do, our servanthood, will make a difference, that it will count for something special and important to the Savior. The vision helps to accomplish that purpose.

### The Activity of a Mission and a Vision

A fifth difference between a mission and a vision is activity. Activity is what actually happens when a ministry implements its mission or vision. The activity of the mission is doing or action. It is action that brings accomplishments or results. This is because the mission is tied so closely with planning and strategy, and it's the purpose of the strategy to accomplish the mission. The mission of the church is the Great Commission. It results in activity-moving people from prebirth to maturity. If the desired result isn't happening, then something is wrong with the mission.

The activity of the vision, however, isn't doing but seeing. When a leader casts the vision, people should be able to see the ideal, unique future of the ministry. As passion is a "feeling" concept, so vision is a "seeing" concept. It enables people to carry around a snapshot of the future of the ministry in their mental purses or billfolds. The process of articulating the vision should ultimately lead to doing, but that isn't what it's designed to accomplish. Over a period of vision casting, you want those in your ministry to respond with the words, "I see . . . I see what you're talking about." If your people cannot see it, it probably won't happen!

The vision development process, like the mission development process, involves writing the vision down on a piece of paper. In helping pastors and seminarians develop their visions, I ask them to close their eyes and write what they see when they think about their ministries in the future. I've found that what they write down initially isn't visual enough. Thus, I keep asking them: What does it look like?

### The Source of a Mission and a Vision

A sixth way that a mission is distinct from a vision is its source. The source of the mission is the head. Mission is something that's cognitive—you think about it. It concerns the ideas stored in your head; it involves cognition or comprehension. You must think, ask questions, and, if necessary, do some research. You should investigate the Scriptures to determine if they dictate the mission of your organization, whether it's ministry or marketplace oriented. The result of communicating your mission statement is understanding.

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*The source of the vision isn't the head  
but the heart. It touches not so much the intellect  
but the imagination.*

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The source of the vision isn't the head but the heart. It touches not so much the intellect but the imagination. While you may see it in your mind, it comes from your heart. This is the emotional side of the vision. You aren't likely to get emotional over your mission statement, but you should over your vision statement. In eliciting a mental picture of your preferred future, the vision should reach into your heart and touch your emotions. To a certain extent, the vision serves as a time machine to transport you into the future, and the result is that you both see and feel your future.

This underlines the importance of the vision statement for your ministry. When people not only understand where you're going, but see and feel it, then they are more likely to decide not only in favor of it but to commit to it. And commitment is crucial, because a decision is short term, lasting only for a few days at best; a commitment is long term and could last for one's lifetime.

### The Order of a Mission and a Vision

A seventh way in which a ministry's mission may be distinct from its vision is their order. The question is: Which came first, the mission or the vision? Essentially, it's the same question as: Which came first, the chicken or the egg? The definition that I used previously states that a vision is what the mission looks like as it's uniquely realized in the ministry's community. According to this definition, the mission logically and sequentially precedes the vision. The leader creates his or her mission first. Next, the vision is what you see as you consider the implementation of the mission. The mission is there first, and the vision serves to picture it, to flesh out its details.

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*The mission logically and  
sequentially precedes the vision.*

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However, the human creative processes don't always function according to our definitions or the way we think they should. Sometimes God gives a leader a vision first and provides a mission later, especially if that leader is a strong visionary. A visionary regularly sees things in his or her mind; visionaries carry ideas and images around in their imaginations. Consequently, it's very possible that the vision might precede the mission.

### The Coherence of a Mission and a Vision

The eighth way that a mission is different from a vision is coherence. A church's mission will remain consistent over a long period of time. Essentially it hasn't changed since Christ gave it in Matthew 28:19-20. Its wording may be different and should vary from church to church, but the core is the same—to make disciples. The reason some churches have inconsistent missions is because they have the wrong missions. They are like those ships that are steaming at full speed toward the wrong port.

The church's vision, however, will vary from institution to institution. Since the vision is what you see as the church uniquely realizes its mission in a particular ministry community, each church will have a different vision. This is because no community is alike. Each community represents a unique culture that has certain values, norms, heroes, symbols, traditions, and so on. As a church envisions winning and discipling various people from rich to poor and of all nationalities, the vision couldn't possibly be consistent from one to another.

### The Focus of a Mission and a Vision

A ninth distinction between the mission and the vision is focus. The focus of the mission is broad and general. It presents the over-all, comprehensive goal of the ministry. It should not present any details or ministry minutiae. You get none of the particulars. If you wanted to make a film of the ministry's mission, the camera would have to back off and shoot from a distance. Because the mission is broad, every other goal and every potential goal should fall under it as the overarching goal of the ministry. If something doesn't fit, then it should be discarded. This expansiveness of the mission makes the ministry flexible to allow for positive, beneficial change and growth.

The focus of the vision is narrow. This helps leaders clearly see their target. If you filmed a ministry's vision, the camera would move up close to capture the details. In his book, *Hey, Wait a Minute*, former football coach John Madden presents Vince Lombardi's answer to the question: What's the difference between a good and a bad coach? Lombardi's reply: "The best coaches know what the end result looks like, whether it's an offensive play, a defensive play, a defensive coverage, or just some area of the organization. If you don't know what the end result is supposed to look like, you can't get there."<sup>3</sup> The vision provides the necessary focus so that good leaders as well as good football coaches know what the end result looks like.

The vision may provide a more detailed picture of the people you intend to reach, such as collegians, older adults, or children; the ministry community such as African Americans, Hispanics, Anglos, or a mixture of the same; the geographical area like wooded, mountainous, ocean front, inner city; people relating to one another, for example, people coming to faith, families being reunited, the restoration of broken relationships; and the facilities such as a school, storefront, YMCA, house, or a church building.

### The Effect of the Mission and the Vision

A tenth distinction is the effect of the mission and the vision. The effect of the mission is to clarify what the ministry is supposed to be doing. Formulating a mission forces the leadership and the constituency of a church to carefully examine what the ministry is doing in light of what it's supposed to be doing. The primary tool of the process is questions, like those raised at the end of chapter 2: What are we supposed to be doing? What are we doing? Why aren't we doing what we're supposed to be doing? What will it take to do what we're supposed to be doing?

It also forces the leadership and constituency of the parachurch ministry to clarify its mission. The Savior has already predetermined the church's mission. This isn't the case for the parachurch. Consequently, the latter has several different missions to choose from. If it's evangelistic in nature, then whom will it evangelize? The mission will force it to make what may be some difficult but necessary choices that will clarify what the ministry is all about.

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*The mission helps us to determine what we're  
to be doing, and the vision challenges us  
to see ourselves doing it*

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The effect of the vision isn't to clarify but to challenge. Rather than clarify what it is our ministry is supposed to do, the vision challenges us to see what we're supposed to do. I also define a vision as a clear, challenging picture of the future of our ministry as we believe it can and must be.<sup>4</sup> The mission helps us to determine what we're to be doing, and the vision challenges us to see ourselves doing it. In this sense, it serves to probe and prod us to action. Leaders and vision casters use the vision to "throw down" the proverbial gauntlet in front of their people, challenging them to activity.

### The Development of a Mission and a Vision

The eleventh difference between a mission and a vision is the development of each. The question is, How do you develop a mission and a vision? The development of a dynamic, compelling ministry mission is like a science. Thus, it's more taught than caught. The mission statement is rational, straightforward, objective, and concrete; therefore, it's much easier to teach. Once you've seen a few samples, you have a good feel for how to develop and articulate a mission statement for your ministry, and the process doesn't consume a lot of your time.

The development of the ministry vision, however, is more like an art. That means that it's more caught than taught. The development of a clear, challenging vision is intuitive. It seems to come from nowhere and simply "pops" into one's head. It's a subjective, abstract concept. This means that it's more difficult to develop and

articulate. It also takes longer to develop—it's wrapped in the foil of creativity and baked in the oven of time. Consequently, visionary people will have an easier time developing a vision for their ministries, whereas less visionary people have a difficult time catching the process.

#### The Communication of a Mission and a Vision

A final distinctive is how a ministry communicates its mission and vision. This distinctive assumes that leaders need to communicate both concepts. The question is, What's the most effective way to communicate each?

The primary way to communicate your ministry mission is in a concrete written form. Some good ways to propagate your mission statement is to place it on a T-shirt; print it on an attractive wall plaque that you place in a highly visible location such as the foyer, elevator, doors, or office walls; publish it in the bulletin, a brochure, or the ministry's newsletter. More on this in chapter 6.

The chief way to cast your ministry vision is verbal. The end is visual (a vision), but the means to that end is verbal. You may attempt to write it out as you would the mission statement, but this isn't as easy as verbalizing it. It's most effective when it's spoken or preached. That's why the pulpit is such a good platform from which pastors and leaders may cast a ministry's vision. When a new American president communicates his vision to the nation, he does so initially at his inaugural in the form of a speech. Next, he reports on the progress that he's made in implementing the vision in his yearly State of the Union message. This event also provides an opportunity to regularly recast his vision. He chooses to communicate his vision in spoken words, regardless of all the technology that's available to him.

### QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. As you think about your ministry's present mission and vision or a potential mission and vision, are they both from God? How do you know? Can you support them from the Scriptures? If yes, what passages? If no, why not?
2. Do your mission and vision provide a direction for your ministry? If yes, what is that direction. If no, why not? Is the pastor or ministry leader moving in the direction of the mission and vision? Why or why not? Is the board doing the same? Why or why not?



3. Do the mission and vision provide a clear, preferred future for your ministry? If yes, what is that future? If no, why not, and does the ministry have a future if it doesn't have a mission and/ or a vision?
4. Does your mission provide a dynamic statement of what your ministry is supposed to be doing? Why or why not? Does your vision provide a snapshot of what your mission looks like as it's realized in your ministry community? Why or why not?
5. Does your ministry use the mission to lead in all its planning? Why or why not? Does the ministry use the vision as a means of communicating its direction and its future? Why or why not?
6. Is your mission statement shorter or longer than your vision statement? Which do you believe should be longer? Why? Is the purpose of your mission to inform your people what you're supposed to be doing? Why or why not? Is the purpose of your vision statement to inspire your people to do what they're supposed to be doing? Why or why not?
7. There are several potential missions for any ministry. Does your mission clarify for your people what your particular mission is? If no, why not? Does your vision challenge your people to implement the mission of the ministry? Why or why not? How do you know?
8. As you've thought about and developed your mission, has the process been difficult? Why or why not? As you've done the same with your vision, has the process been difficult? Why or why not? Which has been easiest to understand and develop, the mission or the vision? Why? Would you agree or disagree with the statement: "The vision is more caught than taught." Explain.
9. As you've attempted to communicate your mission to people, has it been more verbal or visual? What are some of the methods that you've used to communicate your mission? As you've articulated your vision, has it been more verbal or visual? What are some of the methods that you've used to communicate your vision? Would you agree that the communication of the mission lends itself more to a concrete written approach, and the vision to a spoken approach?

#### ENDNOTES

1. See Aubrey Maiphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), chap. 2.
2. I provide a number of examples in chapter 5 of *Developing a Vision for Ministry in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992).
3. John Madden with D. Anderson, *Hey, Wait a Minute: I Wrote a Book* (New York: Ballentine, 1985), 225-26.
4. Aubrey Maiphurs, *Developing a Vision for Ministry in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992).

# 4

## The Development of the Mission

### *Part 1: Four Steps for Writing Your Own Mission Statement*

Pastor Larry Brown was surprised and delighted at his board's response to the need for a dynamic ministry mission. He had anticipated some resistance, especially from two of the older leaders. As he thought about it later he realized that his perception of them had been unfair. He had assumed that because they were older, they would be resistant to new ideas. While sometimes that is the case, it's not always the case. He had misjudged these individuals. Later, he found them to be two of his staunchest supporters in the church.

After some discussion, the board agreed that the mission concept wasn't only a marketplace idea, but that it was biblical and appropriate for the church. Pastor Larry had taken some notes at the leadership seminar that established the biblical basis for developing a ministry mission. He provided copies of the material for the board that helped the members think through the issue theologically. You can peek over their shoulders if you review the information in chapter 2. While they didn't completely understand the difference between a mission and a vision, they grasped enough to see the importance of developing both for their ministry and agreed to pursue the same quickly.

How did they go about developing a mission statement? Mission development consists of the four ps: preparation, personnel, process, and product. This chapter will help you think through the first three. You will discover the importance of preparing for the process, who should be involved in the process, and finally what the process itself consists of. Chapter 5 deals with the fourth "P" = the product.

#### THE PREPARATION FOR DEVELOPING A MISSION

The process of formulating the mission statement for a ministry is critical. Thus, it would be a major mistake to jump immediately into the mission development process without first preparing those leaders who will be a part of that process. At Grace Community Church, the leaders are Pastor Larry and the board. Their preparation consists of five elements.

##### 1. The Need for a Mission

One of the first questions the board must ask as it prepares to develop its mission is, Do we sincerely believe that we need a core organizational mission? If they aren't convinced of the need, then they're wasting everyone's time. Even if they develop an excellent mission, they will virtually ignore it, and no one will benefit from it. The mission will experience an early ministry retirement, and a secretary will eventually bury it somewhere under "M" in the church's filing cabinet.

This isn't the problem at Grace Community Church. The entire board sees the need for a ministry mission. However, they are not representative of many churches sprinkled all across North America. How do you help people see their need for a mission? How do you convince them of such a need? A good way is to conduct a mission audit. The following vital questions will help ministry leaders understand their need for a dynamic mission (see appendix A for a working copy).

##### *The Mission Audit*

- According to the Scriptures or the founding mission, what is this ministry supposed to be doing?
- What is it really doing?
- If your answers to 1 and 2 are different, then how do you explain the discrepancy?  
If the ministry ship continues on its present course, where will it dock in the next few years? Is this good or bad?  
Do your key leaders know where the ministry is going? Do all agree on that direction?

- Assuming the ministry is off course, what would it take for it to change course and begin doing what it's supposed to be doing?
- Do you believe this will happen? Why or why not? If so, when?
- Are you and all key leaders willing to do whatever it takes to move in a different direction? If not, why?

The most important time to design and develop a dynamic mission statement is either at the very beginning of your ministry or while it is successful. However, success can be a major hindrance to seeing the need for a core organizational mission. When a ministry is successful, people are least convinced of the need for any kind of change, whether it's the development of a mission statement or something else. So asking the mission question is difficult. Everyone in the church or parachurch thinks that the answer is so obvious as not to merit discussion. It's not popular to argue with success. As the old saying goes, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" But success is a poor teacher at best. It seduces leaders into thinking they can't fail strategically or morally. And it's an unrealistic guide to the future, for present success is no guarantee of future success.

However, to wait until the ministry is in trouble to articulate a mission is to play Russian roulette with God's work. To wait until the ministry ship is badly listing or sinking may be too late. But another old saying, "better late than never" applies here. While a mission is no genie in a bottle, the development of a ministry direction has bailed out some failing church and parachurch ministries.

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*To wait until the ministry is in trouble  
to articulate a mission is to play  
Russian roulette with God's work.*

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## 2. The Readiness for a Mission

Once a ministry sees its need for a mission, then most often it's ready to develop the same. However, this isn't always the case. At least three major barriers exist to developing a succinct mission.

*Leaders think their ministry situation is an exception.* Leaders in this category believe and even argue that their ministry is too old, too small, too rural, or too anything (you fill in the blank) to develop a dynamic mission, even if they see the need for one. A parallel example is people who smoke. If you ask them why they take up smoking or continue to smoke after all the warnings and negative statistics from the Surgeon General, you'll discover that most think they're invincible—they'll be the exception.

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*Once a ministry sees its need for a mission,  
then most often it's ready to develop the same.*

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I believe that those who somehow see their ministries as the exceptions to the norm need a mission the most. Often their reluctance is a veiled attempt to mask their fear of the new, the future, and the unknown, or to cover their feelings of incompetence and failure whether perceived or actual.

*Procrastination.* Some leaders put off the development of a core ministry mission because of their workload. They already have more work or ministry to accomplish than is possible. Thus, the idea of another project such as a mission statement, though important, becomes the proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back.

Other leaders procrastinate because of the fear of failure. To cultivate an organizational mission is to establish its overarching goal. In most good planning, evaluation takes place, and the basis for evaluating the organization is the accomplishment of the mission or goal. Consequently, the leader may ask, What if we don't accomplish the mission? Instead of looking like a failure, the leader simply delays the process until everyone forgets about it.

*Inactivity.* Leaders simply do nothing. They feel so overwhelmed by it all that they shift into ministry neutral. Leaders may think their contributions can accomplish so little. Leaders then wonder Why do anything at all? Pastors may feel this way because they don't have the power or the influence to implement a mission. The board or powerful people on the board are in charge and may not respect nor value the opinions of their pastors.

### 3. The Time for a Mission

A characteristic of life today is excessive busyness. Life seems to be passing at breakneck speed, and few believe that they have much discretionary time. Therefore, a valid question is, How much time will it take to develop a mission for your ministry? How much time should you set aside for the crafting process? I have good news for you. When you calculate the time that it takes to develop the "ministry basics" (core values, mission, vision, and strategy) you should discover that the mission consumes the least amount of time.

The reason the mission requires less time than the values, vision, or strategy is because it's shorter and the Scriptures provide the core content for the statement. For example, the Bible dictates the church's mission statement (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15). All that's left for the developers is the wording. However, the process of writing and editing the mission statement and achieving a consensus for its ministry-wide adoption rarely happens in a single session. It's a process that most often takes place over three to five sessions, lasting several hours each, and requires some reflective time between sessions.

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*The process of developing the mission statement most often takes place over three to five sessions, lasting several hours each, and requires some reflective time between session*

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Much depends on the development team and how well they agree on such things as the other ministry basics, particularly the core values that will dictate most of their decisions. If there are problems, most of them will not be theological but philosophical and relational. For some teams, it could become an extremely difficult and time consuming task where the choice of a single word may arouse intense controversy. I suspect, however, that this would be the exception, not the norm. Regardless, the development of a biblical, functional mission statement is well worth the time and effort because it will serve the organization as an enormously helpful leadership tool with long term positive impact.

### 4. The Place for a Mission

Where is the best place to meet when developing a mission statement? The crafting of a significant, biblical mission statement most likely will take several sessions consisting of two to four hours per session. Much depends on prior "think time" and the times of reflection between the major sessions. This means that the team may not find it necessary to use a retreat format at some outside facility. Their own facilities may prove sufficient. There are several advantages to remaining close to home. One is that most believe they don't spend enough time with their families as is. Another is that your own bed provides a better night's sleep.

There are a few disadvantages to this approach. When you remain on-site, the chances that someone will interrupt you are far greater. A zealous secretary or a family member will more quickly interrupt you when you're accessible geographically. Also, there's something emotionally refreshing about new or different surroundings that promotes the creative processes.

Another option is to go away for the day and attempt to complete as much of the process as possible. This would allow for no interruptions and a large chunk of time for intense, creative reflection. In addition, it's more relaxing and refreshing emotionally. One of the departments at Dallas Seminary retreats to a nearby health facility that has rooms available for meetings. After a good day of meeting and work, the team members relax in the sauna, go for a swim, or use the equipment to workout before heading for home.

### 5. The Cost for a Mission

Next to the time requirements, the most frequent inquiry is the cost of developing a mission statement. If the mission development team uses its present facility, then it incurs no additional expenses. For some, this may be the only option at a time when they are experiencing a shortage of funds.

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*The development of a compelling, clear mission*

*statement is too important to let minor costs  
get in the way.*

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If the team decides to retreat to another facility nearby it will incur some additional expenses. Most find, however, that they are minimal. Such added expenses are the cost of renting a room, a meal or two, coffee and refreshments, and any travel expenses such as gasoline. Even these costs can be kept to a minimum (a club sandwich instead of a filet mignon) and should not be allowed to detract from a one day "getaway." The development of a compelling, clear mission statement is too important to let minor costs get in the way.

#### THE PERSONNEL FOR DEVELOPING A MISSION

Not only must there be the proper preparation for the development of the core mission, but the right people need to be involved in the process. The primary question that I'll address is, Who should write it?

There are several different approaches to developing and writing a mission statement. In some situations, one person develops the entire statement. In other situations, a group may use a team approach. Still others will bring in outside assistance in the process.

Finally, there is a top-down approach where the ministry head, such as a pastor or a seminary president, writes the entire mission and passes it on to the team as unquestioned dogma.

While there is no consensus as to which way works best, someone has to initiate the process. My advice as a leader and ministry consultant is for the senior or point leader to develop and write the initial mission statement, then present it to the board and other staff and lay leaders for review and input, giving the team permission to add to, delete from, or leave it as is. This way everyone gets their "fingerprints" on the mission and, thus, experiences a sense of ownership. This serves to get people on board and to stake a claim in the mission's fulfillment.

The fundamental decisions about such ministry basics as the core mission can be made only at the highest level. This is the responsibility of those who lead at this level-it comes with the territory. The leadership in general and the point person in particular most often is the one with the time, the training, and the desire to define and articulate the ministry's mission. While most people want to have a say in the process, they also want to be led by leaders who they believe are competent and gifted. People want to know that the mission is fully supported by those at the top. If the mission doesn't have leadership support, then it's not likely to materialize.

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At the same time, the most effective mission statements come from within the heart of the institution-its people. Peter Drucker wisely points out that people determine the performance capacity of an organization. More important, the New Testament teaches the same (Eph. 4; 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12). Your ministry will be no better than the gifted people who choose to be a part of it. A mission has to be something that both the leaders and the people can share. As many people as possible should participate meaningfully in the process. Let them get their "fingerprints" all over the initial product, especially those in leadership positions within the ministry.

The process is as important as the product. A mission statement created by someone else never possesses the power to inspire commitment and involvement even when you agree with what it says. There's something very important about being a part of the process that makes a world of difference in committing to the product. When you aren't involved in the process but have good leaders, you may vote for the product. But voting in favor of the product and voting to be personally involved aren't the same: you vote with your feet, not with your hands.

In spite of this, there may be some necessary limitations. The size of the ministry will affect people's involvement. The larger a ministry in numbers, the less involvement there will be on a grassroots level. It would be most difficult in a church of several thousand people for the typical member and/or attendee to have much, if any, input. Such an attempt might prove to be more harmful than helpful. It could serve only to neuter a significant, biblical statement. Large churches will rely on the senior pastor, the pastoral staff, the board, and key leaders

throughout the church to draft the mission. However, organizations such as large churches will need to have "town hall" meetings at which they present and receive input from the people. In addition, regardless of its polity, a church would be wise to have the congregation vote on something as important as the mission statement.

The smaller church could and probably should solicit input from its members and even its attendees. The downside of this is that it allows the "squeaky wheels" to voice their opinions as well. At the same time, those who are unhappy with the concept or the results will likely acknowledge that they have been heard whether or not their objections or distractions become a part of the final document.

Some ministries will struggle with mission subjectivity. They will discover, on the one hand, that they are too close to their situation to be objective. On the other hand, they know best their ministry situation. A wise move is to develop and write the mission in-house, but use the skills and abilities of an outside consultant. A consultant brings much knowledge and expertise to the process as well as the fresh objectivity of an outsider. The time the consultant will save you and the quality of the final product will more than offset any expenses you might incur. It will also send a strong message about the importance of having a clear, dynamic mission for the ministry.

### THE PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING A MISSION

The definition of a mission provided in chapter 2—a broad, brief, biblical statement of what your ministry is supposed to be doing—provides a foundation for the development of your ministry's mission statement and a test for the final product.

The development of your mission statement involves working through each element in the definition as a distinct step in the process. If you remember the definition of the mission and the elements in particular, then you'll know the process for developing your mission by heart. This section will walk you through the four mission developing steps beginning with the last element and working forward. Each will take the form of a question. I have provided a summary of the process in appendix B to serve both as a guide in the development process and as a test of the final product.

Step 1: What are we supposed to be doing according to the Bible?

We begin with the very last element in the definition. Our definition tells us that a mission is what our ministry is supposed to be doing. In order to figure out what we are supposed to be doing, and thus begin constructing our mission statement, we must combine the last element with the third, which states that the mission is biblical. We must turn to the Scriptures to answer the question: What are we supposed to be doing? No other source will do. God determines our ministry mission, and he reveals this in his Word. In order to complete step number one, you must determine what kind of ministry you are in, who you are trying to serve, and how you are going to serve them.

*What kind of ministry are you involved in?*

You can separate *all* Christian ministries into church and parachurch. If you serve in a church ministry, Christ has predetermined your mission. According to Matthew 28:19, Christ's mission for the church is:

"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations." According to Mark 16:15, Christ's mission is: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." The church's mission has everything to do with pursuing lost people, evangelizing lost people, and then leading them to maturity or Christlikeness. In short—making disciples!

If you serve in a parachurch ministry, Scripture may address what you're supposed to be doing either directly or indirectly. If your ministry centers on evangelism, then you should discover what the Bible teaches about evangelism. If it focuses on moving Christians toward maturity, then you need to know what Scripture teaches about maturity. The same is true for missions' agencies, Christian schools, colleges, seminaries, as well as all the other parachurch ministries.

*Whom are you trying to serve?*

A ministry's mission is directed at people, not things such as programs. This is because biblical ministry is people-directed. Therefore, we must determine who the recipient of our ministry is to be, who our target audience is. Ultimately, who benefits when we do what we're supposed to be doing?

YYv

*A ministry's mission is directed at people,  
not things such as programs.*

## AAA

There are a number of potential recipients. They might be the downtrodden and disenfranchised. They could be churched or unchurched lost people. They might be seekers, Christians, worshippers, students, children, teens, college students, adults, or a certain profession such as teachers, airline pilots, or medical doctors. The target audience could consist of a combination of these people. This would characterize the local church that seeks to win the lost and bring the saved to maturity.

*How will your ministry serve people?*

A number of businesses have learned that there is a difference between selling a commodity and selling a product. A commodity is usually what the customer walks out with in his or her hand; the product is what he or she feels as they walk out the door. Revlon knows that its not in the cosmetics business. It sells hope. Chanel isn't selling perfume; it's selling fantasy. McDonald's knows that it's not in the fast food business. Its business is entertaining kids and giving their parents a break. Maids, a division of ServiceMaster, doesn't offer its customers a clean house; it offers them peace of mind. The former is a commodity while the latter is a product. The church's commodity-what the customer walks out the door with-is the gospel. The product is transformation-a changed life.

Unlike businesses, churches don't provide commodities, but they do provide a product. What does our ministry offer those within and outside the church? Is it peace of mind, love, closeness to God, compassion, friendship, forgiveness, authentic biblical community, hope, a whole new way of life?

## YYY

*Unlike businesses, churches don't provide commodities,  
but they do provide a product.*

## A~A

Far too many ministries have not carefully thought through this issue and are focused on things rather than people. They are focused on the means rather than the ends. Christian schools and seminaries focus on teaching biblical facts and content more than on nurturing Christians who can apply the Scriptures to their lives. Somehow in the emphasis to preach the Word, people get left out. While the proclamation of the Word is of paramount importance, it is a means to an end. Some worship leaders work hard at producing good worship rather than good worshippers. Again, worship is important but is the means to the end, not the end in itself. Often Christian publishers focus more on producing good books than on producing biblically literate readers. Biblically literate people who apply the Scriptures to their lives and are worshippers of God are the end. The communication of biblical facts, inspiring worship, and the production of quality Christian literature are all the means to the end, the process to the product, the activities that produce the result, the methods that accomplish the goal.

Pastor Larry Brown and his board settled on a mission statement that satisfies all the above criteria: *The mission of Grace Community Church is to turn both unchurched and churched people into completely committed Christians.* First, it incorporates what the Bible says the church is supposed to be doing-making disciples or "completely committed Christians." Second, it identifies whom the church desires to serve both lost people and its own saved people. Third, it states specifically what it will do to serve these people-to turn them into "completely committed Christians."

Step 2: Can you articulate your mission in a written statement?

Another element in the definition of a mission is that it is a statement-"a statement of what the ministry is supposed to be doing." It's a written not a verbal statement, so the second step in the mission development process is to write the mission down. The effectiveness of a mission is that when it's written down people can see it, whereas the effectiveness of a vision is in its verbal communication.

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*Writing your mission statement  
on a piece of paper forces you to be*

## *disciplined in your thinking.*

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In his excellent book *Learning to Lead*, Fred Smith writes: "In my view nothing is properly defined until you write it down. Writing forces you to be specific; it takes the fuzz off your thinking." Writing your mission statement on a piece of paper forces you to be disciplined in your thinking. It helps to clarify and focus your thoughts. The only reason that you wouldn't be able to write it down is if you didn't know it. When you know and understand your mission, then you'll be able to articulate it in written form.

This usually involves constantly thinking and rethinking, shaping and reshaping, and drafting and redrafting the mission statement. This is how the leader personalizes his church's mission statement to his congregation. It's highly unusual that anyone articulates the final statement at the first attempt-so be patient with the process.

There are a few things to keep in mind as you begin. You should think about your choice of words, which ones communicate best with your target group. Are they a more traditional group who prefer the old, familiar cliches, or are they a younger, more contemporary group who prefer creative, contemporary terms?

You should also think about clarity to make sure people understand what you're saying. For example, a number of mission statements have substituted words like "fully devoted followers" in place of the term disciples because they believe the former communicates better their concept of discipleship. I'll say more about clarity in the last step.

You must also decide on a format that best conveys your mission. The only limit is your creative ability, but at the risk of stifling that creativity, here are three suggestions. The first looks like this:

The mission of (name of ministry) is to \_\_\_\_\_

The advantage of this format is that it's simple and straightforward. However, it is more formal and less personal.

A more personal approach is to place the name of the ministry somewhere above the statement and then express it in the following manner:

Name of Your Ministry

Our mission is to \_\_\_\_\_

A third recurring approach is to begin with the name of your ministry and follow it with the words "seeks to."

(Name of your ministry) seeks to \_\_\_\_\_

All three examples use the form of an infinitive. If you choose to use this format, then your choice of the exact infinitive depends on what you do for your target audience. Your answer to the question in step 1-How will your ministry serve people?-is the key to the exact infinitive you will use. The following is a list of infinitives others have used that might appear in your mission statement:

to produce	to energize
to equip	to help
to develop	to establish
to assist	to supply
to win	to evangelize
to turn	to encourage
to promote	to transform
to prepare	to create
to provide	to lead
to empower	

Pastor Larry Brown and his board used the first format and the infinitive "to turn": *The mission of Grace Community Church is to turn both unchurched and churched people into completely committed Christians.* They feel that this statement best summarizes how they hope to serve their ministry community. They discussed the choice of the term *committed* because it's such a strong word; they felt it might scare some people away. However, all agreed that they were tired of a maintenance ministry and wanted to call their people to the highest of commitments for Christ.

Step 3: Is the mission statement brief and simple?

The third step in the mission development process is brevity. A mission statement must be brief; this is the second element of the original definition.

The fundamental error most ministries make in mission development is packing too much information into the statement. Mission developers must realize that most people can't effectively process large streams of information and new data. In *The Charismatic Leader*, lay Conger writes that the average person can handle only six to seven pieces of new data in their short term memory. Consequently, the more information that you include in the mission statement, the greater the likelihood that a person will not comprehend it or remember it. You must resist the temptation to overload your mission statement. The secret to helping people understand and own your mission is brevity and simplicity.

There are several ways that mission developers commit information overload. One is to include the definition of the ministry with the mission statement. Here is an example:

The Ozark Baptist Association

The mission of the Ozark Baptist Association, a community of area churches gathered together under the headship of Christ, is to win the lost and mature the saved.

The statement "a community of area churches gathered under the headship of Christ" defines who the Ozark Baptist Association is. This may or may not be an important statement. However, to include it in the mission statement only serves to detract from the mission. If it's that important, then make it a separate statement.

The Ozark Baptist Association

The Ozark Baptist Association is a community of area churches gathered together under the headship of Christ.

Our mission is to win the lost and mature the saved.

Another way to overload your constituency is to include the strategy for accomplishing the mission along with the mission. Here's an example:

The mission of the Rose Hill Christian Businessmen's Committee is to extend God's kingdom through recruiting Christian business people in the marketplace, training them to share their faith with their business associates, and hosting a non-threatening weekly meeting where this can take place.

The mission of this fictional organization is found in the first two lines but isn't very clear. The strategy for accomplishing the mission makes up the rest of the statement beginning with the preposition "through." The problem is that the reader will probably miss the mission due to interest in or possible confusion over the strategy.

The statement of strategy is far too important to the ministry to be placed at the end of the mission statement. It deserves a separate statement that is fully developed so that the reader understands precisely how the church or parachurch ministry plans to accomplish the mission. I'll say more about the relationship of the mission and the strategy in chapter 7.

A third way to confuse people is to include the identification of your organization with the statement of mission. Here's an example:

Oakdale Community Church, a church plant of People's Community Church in Richardson, Texas, desires to transform its people into fully functioning followers of Christ.

Including the identification of the church along with the mission statement isn't a major error, depending on its length. However, note how it breaks up what is an excellent statement and somewhat distracts the reader. This information is necessary as people should know who is involved in planting the church. As in the other examples above, this information should be placed elsewhere in your ministry proposal.

The worst thing that you could do in the mission development process, besides missing the mission entirely or adopting an unbiblical statement, is to combine some or all these errors in one mission statement. We'll look at more

of these possible combinations and distractions in the next chapter as we learn how to assess good and poor statements of mission.

The power of your mission statement is found in its brevity and simplicity. Once you have developed the statement, see if it passes the "T-shirt test." If you limit it to a short and simple sentence then you should have no problem fitting it on a T-shirt, no matter how large or small.

In addition, the simpler and shorter the statement, the greater the likelihood that it will be retained. The goal is to provide a mission statement that your people not only understand but remember. The moment you go from one sentence to two or more, you lose the majority of people. The mass of words and sentences overwhelms them. When people see a lot of verbiage, they sense that they'll have to commit too much time to reading and comprehending all the words to make it worthwhile, so they move on to something else. The inclusion of definitions, strategies, identifications, and other words and statements only detract from your mission and ensure that people will not remember it.

#### Step 4: Is your mission statement broad but clear?

This is the first element of a mission's definition, that it must be broad, and it makes up the fourth step in developing it as a mission statement. In determining what you're supposed to be doing, make sure your answer is the primary, overarching goal of the ministry. It must be central, comprehensive, or all-embracing of what you do to serve people. Therefore, you are looking for an umbrella statement that covers all your ministry bases.

Most organizations have multiple functions. The church, for example, worships, evangelizes, educates, and communicates. The core mission is the task that is at the top of the priority hierarchy. As you write the mission, ask: Is this statement broad enough to cover all that this ministry does or plans to do in the future? What fits under it and what doesn't? On the one hand, if some ministry doesn't fit? then the mission might not be expansive enough. On the other hand, the mission may be correct, and the particular ministry is beyond the scope of the mission. A Christian publishing house, for example, might be operating a soup kitchen somewhere in the inner city. In this case, jettison the ministry-turn it over to another ministry. Otherwise, additional ministries that are outside your mission will diffuse your focus and confuse your constituency.

As you seek breadth in your mission statement, make sure that it remains clear and, thus, understandable. The danger is that the statement can become so broad that it doesn't say or mean anything. The key *clarity* question that you must ask repeatedly of your statement is: What does this mean?

Some mission statements may be regional, that is, they communicate clearly within a certain geographical region but not outside that part of the country. For example, a mission statement in New England might include such terms as *commonwealth*, *constitution*, and *heritage* that people in other regions might not understand. This is okay as long as you don't attempt to use it in another region that's not as familiar with colonial New England and its early history.

Some churches like to use a statement that includes the term *glory* such as "the glory of God," or "to glorify Christ." While these statements are very biblical, they are so broad that they mask clarity. For the sake of clarity, substitute what glorifying God really means or what your ministry is doing specifically that glorifies God. The same is true for such other words and statements as "to honor God," "to exalt Christ," "to pursue the kingdom of God," and so on-give specifics! Paul reminds us of the importance of clear communication in 1 Corinthians 14:8: "Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?"

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### *The crucial test of mission clarity is the "people-test"*

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The crucial test of mission clarity is the "people-test." As you develop your mission statement, ask various people what it means to them. Quiz people within your organization. If it's a church, then ask board members, secretaries, even visitors to tell you what the statement communicates to them. Though the mission statement is primarily "in house"-for the people who have committed to your ministry-consider quizzing people outside the organization. If they don't understand it, then it may be too broad. If all understand it, then you have a broad but clear mission statement that communicates.

The board of Grace Community Church knew that their new mission statement was broad and clear-it had passed the "people-test." They had quizzed a number of their congregates from attendees to lay leaders, and found that most seemed to grasp and like their final statement. They had cleared a crucial hurdle because other matters in the past had been met with opposition. The board sensed that God was working with their people, and there now existed a new spirit within the congregation.

They also knew that they had a lot of work ahead in bringing their ministry in-line with the new mission. While it was broad enough to cover a number of their ministries, approximately a third didn't fit. The church had been in existence for thirty years and had added a number of programs, many of which were now defunct and clearly beyond the mission of the church. However, no one had the heart to discontinue them. They were like numerous coats of paint, and the bottom layer had begun to peel, affecting the rest. All this would change it was time to scrape off the excess paint.

#### QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Is the leadership convinced that your ministry needs a clear, dynamic mission? If yes, how do you know? If no, why? Who is convinced, and who isn't?
2. Would the mission audit help convince your ministry leaders of the need for a mission? If no, why not? Would you use the audit with your people? Why or why not?
3. Is your ministry ready to develop a mission? If your answer is no, is it because of any of the three barriers (exception, procrastination, inactivity) mentioned in this chapter? If yes, which one(s)? If no, then why?
4. How much time should you set aside for the mission development process? How much time have you set aside? Do you anticipate any problems that might delay the process? If yes, what are they?
5. Have you decided where the mission development team will meet? How much do you estimate that the process will cost? Do you have the necessary funds?
6. Who will and who should write your mission statement? Who is responsible for initiating and pursuing the process? Who will be allowed to get their "fingerprints" all over the mission statement? Who decides who's involved?
7. How many people are involved in your ministry? How will the size of your ministry affect who is involved in the development process? Do you believe that the process is as important as the product? Explain.
8. Do you believe that the information on mission development is or will be helpful to you and your mission development team? Why or why not? Is there anything that you didn't find helpful or would add to the process?
9. If you've already developed a mission statement, did you use the mission development process as a test of a good mission statement? If yes, did it prove helpful?

#### ENDNOTE

1. Fred Smith, *Learning to Lead* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1986), 34.