

***THE POUND
FOR POUND
PRINCIPLE***

**HOW TO INCREASE YOUR
GOD-GIVEN CAPACITY**

MIKE KAI

The Pound for Pound Principle: How to Increase Your God-Given Capacity
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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------------|
| 1. UNDERDOG | 5 |
| 2. CONTENTMENT | 19 |
| 3. WHO'S IN MY CORNER? | 33 |
| 4. THE MAKING OF A PRIZEFIGHTER | 47 |
| 5. MOVING UP IN WEIGHT CLASS | 63 |
| 6. LET GO OF THE RING | 77 |
| 7. IT'S SMALLER THAN YOU THINK | 97 |
| 8. THE CULTURE OF CONTENDERS | 109 |
| 9. YOU GET WHAT YOU GET | 123 |
| 10. THE ART OF THE START | 137 |
| 11. EQUIPPING A CONTENDER | 149 |
| 12. HARDWORKING HYBRIDS | 161 |
| 13. BRING IT! | 175 |
| 14. MOMENTUM | 187 |
| 15. THE FIGHT OF OUR LIVES | 195 |
| 16. THE BEST IS YET TO COME | 211 |
| EPILOGUE | 225 |
| ENDNOTES | 229 |

CHAPTER 1

UNDERDOG

DOING THE BEST YOU CAN WITH WHAT YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’”

—Matthew 25:21

I am still in love with my first love. She was always good to me. As we grew older, she would aim for goals and always bounce back. Always. I loved the way I could take her everywhere without anyone getting jealous and asking, “What’s she doing here?” Sure, she was round, but that’s the way she was supposed to be. Besides, she loved me unconditionally.

There was nothing like my first love: basketball. When I grew up in rural Hawaii, the “big city” on our island only

6 THE POUND FOR POUND PRINCIPLE

had 25,000 people—and was an hour away. We often had nothing better to do. My dad put up a hoop in the driveway when we were young kids. If we weren't otherwise occupied, we'd be in the driveway shooting hoops. We loved playing one-on-one or HORSE, where we sought to outdo one another with trick shots. We were (and remain) very competitive.

However, despite my love for the game, I fought a major handicap every time I stepped onto the court: my height. As a youngster, I was the “little guy,” which meant developing an underdog complex. Whether I was struggling in a basketball game, the classroom, or against some bully, I always felt like the low man on the totem pole.

These feelings were helped along by my identification with my older brother, Keoni, who was also a late bloomer. In the late 1970s, Keoni was away for his junior high years at a boarding school in Honolulu. His arrival there coincided with the release of Randy Newman's hit tune, “Short People.” Keoni told my parents how bigger kids always teased him about it. If it came on the radio, I'd turn it off. It reminded me of Keoni and how much I missed him. My height, that stupid song, and my love for my brother all contributed to my underdog

mentality. As an underdog, I searched for heroes who had also been underdogs.

A PARABLE PERSONIFIED

My life's overriding message is summarized in Jesus's parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30). The story contains life-changing principles for everyone. Though I included this passage earlier, I want to retell it in my own words to emphasize three things. First, notice that the master gives something to everyone. Second, the servants are expected to multiply what they receive. Third, each is held accountable for what they do—or do not do—with it.

The parable starts with the master leaving for a long journey. He called his servants to distribute his wealth, but not evenly; he gave according to each servant's abilities. The servant with two bags of gold did what was expected and wound up with four bags. The servant with five bags doubled them to ten. When the master returned to settle accounts, these servants had passed the test of faithfulness.

The servant who received one bag must have felt like the proverbial underdog. Trouble is, he did nothing. He didn't understand what I call the "Pound-for-Pound principle." Namely, doing the best you can with what you have. To the master's chagrin, the suspect-servant reported: "Listen, I

8 THE POUND FOR POUND PRINCIPLE

know you're a tough guy and was afraid of your reaction if I failed. So, instead of investing the gold, I buried it—for safe-keeping.” Then, in a lame attempt to excuse his poor judgment and lackadaisical attitude, he added, “See? I’m giving back what you gave me.”

Well, that hardly satisfied the master. Calling the servant wicked and lazy, he declared, “You have misjudged me. If that is the way you see me then you should have at the very least put it in a certificate of deposit where it could have earned some interest.”

Never one to waste an opportunity for a teachable moment, the master told the servants to let this serve as a lesson: those who use their resources well will receive more, but those who take them for granted or squander them will lose what they have. He concluded: “And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (v. 30).

WORKING WITH WHAT YOU’VE GOT

Have you noticed that around the world, especially in developed nations, people place a premium on bigness? In almost any endeavor, we measure size. In athletics, height and weight matter. Athletes looking for an edge often take illegal steroids or human growth hormones. The ministry

is not immune to this focus. Pastors and church members alike face the temptation to find fulfillment in church size, how many attended our conference, or the money in the offering. Conversely, we can also feel defeated by a lack of numbers.

Perhaps you've felt similar elation or frustration. At first glance, your accomplishments didn't quite measure up to others. But what numbers cannot measure is potential. Though we are now a megachurch, we started out with forty people. In those early days I remember being envious when I'd visit a larger church or hear about a fast-growing one. Yet these feelings began stirring something in me. I began wrestling with what I was going to do with what I had been given.

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah . . .” —Micah 5:2

As short stuff, during elementary school recess I often got picked in the lower half when captains chose up sides for teams. Plus, I was a sensitive kid—maybe even a mama's boy. This helped make me fodder for opportunistic bullies. I eventually became a vigilante type of self-seeker of justice and defender of underdogs. Little came easy for me. In class I had to struggle to get A's and B's.

Even though I loved basketball, I got cut from the ninth-grade junior varsity team and two years later from the varsity. After each cut, though, I worked hard and made the team the next season. To my surprise, the major highlight of my short-lived athletic career came in football. I went out for football for the first time as a senior. I made starting wide receiver and the all-conference team to boot. Just five-nine and 130 pounds, I had to be crafty and quick. When I caught the ball, I would run as fast as the wind for fear of getting knocked out.

WHO SAID LIFE WAS UNFAIR?

In the parable of the talents, the master owned everything and gave the three individuals all they possessed. That principle is simple: God owns it all—gifts, abilities, money, relationships, and church. It's also important to understand the master didn't provide the servants any instruction. He abruptly left and then surprised the servants with his return. Thankfully, we don't face such surprises. You and I have the greatest instruction book of all time: the Bible.

Still, the element of this story that resonates with me is that what the servants had is *all they had*. Today it's common to hear the phrase, "It is what it is." In Jesus's parable,

it was what it was. The servants had no say in what they received, just the choice of doing what they could with what they had. It is interesting to note that he gave each servant a designated amount of talent according “to his own ability.” This tells me the master knew how much each person could manage and distributed their talents accordingly.

What I have been given is all up to me.

In American society, some might say, “Wait a minute. That’s unfair! Shouldn’t each person be given an equal amount of talents? Each should get 2.67 talents!” I understand that. And wouldn’t it be great if every sixteen-year-old basketball player was only six feet tall? Then we could say, “Let the best man win!” Of course, in life all is not fair. At least, not at first glance.

But I see two lessons in this parable that counteract the “fairness” philosophy: Everything comes from God, and what I do with what I have is up to me. This stirs several reactions. For one, I am motivated to see how much I can do with what I have been given. Another side of me wonders why I didn’t receive as the guy with five talents. And yet another part of me scoffs at the guy who buried

his single talent. I cannot help but think, *There is no way I'm letting the master return and discover I let the two other dudes beat me!*

Now that I am older and proving myself in athletics or the classroom is behind me, I realize I have always been a two-talent guy. Some see five-talent guys as Microsoft's Bill Gates, the late evangelist Billy Graham, Hillsong leader Brian Houston, or pastors of megachurches. Five-talent women can be such examples as adventurer Amelia Earhart, Bible teacher Lisa Bevere, or golf prodigy Michelle Wie. It's so easy to think, "Oh, I could never be like them." But that's the problem. We begin diminishing what we have when we evaluate it in the light of someone else's lamp.

It's good to remember that five-talent people work hard to earn that status, sacrificing and often suffering heartache or pain. While a missionary in China, Sister Aimee—pregnant with her first child—lost her husband of less than a year. Throughout Michelle Wie's childhood and teenage years, she put in long hours at the driving range. Basketball star Jeremy Lin became the first Asian American to play for an NBA championship team (the Toronto Raptors) in 2019 before signing a contract with a team in China. But his journey included getting cut twice by NBA teams and

laboring in a developmental league before finally becoming a household name with the New York Knicks.

Although these individuals had to work to fulfill their God-given potential, from birth they were each “graced to do what they were called to do,”¹ as my friend and author John Bevere describes it. They still had to work hard to achieve their assigned destinies, but God enabled them to be tenacious, dedicated, and committed. I too learned I have been called and blessed.

What matters most is that you are using what God has given you to the best of your ability.

While some assume I am a five-talent guy (FTG) because of the size of our church, I’m pretty sure I started as a two-talent guy with five-talent potential. Some might say that my wife, Lisa, and I pastor a five-talent church (FTC). They may be right; that’s not for me to say. But we sure didn’t start that way. I believe many FTGs and FTCs are not necessarily born, they are made. Over time, they have proven themselves worthy of receiving what God has given them.

14 THE POUND FOR POUND PRINCIPLE

How? Through dedication, hard work, and a tenacious spirit that translates into rewards. How do we become five-talent people? While I used to ask that, instead I think we should ask, “Am I doing everything I can with what I’ve been given? In what areas of my life can I prove myself faithful so that I can receive all the Lord has planned for me and bring glory to him?”

Did I complain about being shorter than some of the kids in my class? Sure. When we started the church, did I ever ask God why I hadn’t received as many “talents” as others? More than once. But I finally had to stop looking over the fence (or basketball hoop) and focusing on what others had. I needed to quit whining about what I didn’t have and thank God for what I did have. Each of us needs to do the same and ask ourselves: *What am I doing with what I’ve been given?*

THE WEIGH-IN IS THE WAY UP

I’m not a boxing expert but consider myself a fan of good boxing. During my high school years in the 1980s, the matches for supremacy in the sport seemed to involve three fighters: Marvin Hagler, Thomas Hearns, and “Sugar” Ray Leonard.

“Marvelous” Marvin Hagler, the bald-headed, goatee-sporting fighter with a menacing look and a right

cross hook to equal his appearance, dominated the welterweight division. Around the same time a lanky left-handed boxer from Detroit came along, named Thomas “Hitman” Hearns (don’t you love the nicknames?). Hearns faced Hagler in 1985. What a fight! In the end, Hagler got the better of Hearns.

Their epic fight set the stage for the rise of the popular “Sugar” Ray Leonard, one of the smoothest boxers of all time. Sugar Ray would taunt his opponents with a mesmerizing, right-handed windmill, then follow up with a quick left-handed jab that stunned opponents. He would do a shuffle-step dance that wowed crowds, who went go crazy whenever Sugar Ray gathered momentum. What a showman! I remember the pandemonium of watching a Leonard–Hagler bout in 1986 on satellite screens at the Honolulu Blaisdell Center. Leonard came back in the twelfth round from what seemed to be a sure Hagler win. No boxers captured my imagination like that trio, even though heavyweights like Muhammad Ali, Evander Holyfield, and Mike Tyson drew more media attention.

No matter their weight class, though, boxers are judged by wins and losses. It gets interesting trying to determine the best all-time fighters, especially if they competed

in different weight classes and never fought each other. Experts and fans alike argue over a fighter's pound-for-pound (P4P) value, based on things championship belts, knockouts, and opponents' records. You might be thinking, Okay, Mike, where are you headed with the boxing illustrations? My point: *The size of a fighter isn't as important as his effectiveness.*

In recent years, many have considered Filipino Emmanuel "Manny" Pacquiao boxing's best. Some believe "Pacman" is the best P4P fighter in history. I think at the least this five-foot-six-inch, 150-pounder is worthy of the title of this generation's best. Forty-one years old when he entered a welterweight championship fight in the spring of 2020, he had compiled a record of sixty-two wins, seven losses, and two draws. Consider he's the size of the average (short) Filipino male. If you saw Manny walking down the street and did not recognize him, you would never know he is one of the greatest boxers of all time.

If you read enough about Manny Pacquiao, you'll see a different "stat" mentioned over and over. What people admire—but can't measure—is the size of his heart. Not the size of the organ that pumps blood to his fists, nor

does his heart have anything to do with good intentions. The only thing that matters when the bell rings and the referee yells, “Box!” is the size of his dedication, hard work, and tenacity.

Whatever the talent level or motivation, what it boils down to is summarized in a statement I first heard as a kid: “It’s not the size of the dog in the fight that matters, but the size of the fight in the dog.” That statement holds a lot of truth. It can be applied to almost anything. One of the great measurements of any pastor, CEO, or other leader is their P4P value. What you do with what you’ve got—the size of your heart—that’s the Pound-for-Pound Principle.



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

Time for reflection. If it helps, sit down with a mentor or small group to discuss what you have just learned. If you can’t shoehorn anything else into your day, write the following on a paper or electronic notepad.

Start with the leading leadership lesson you gleaned from this chapter. It may be that you have allowed the

18 THE POUND FOR POUND PRINCIPLE

past—including childhood setbacks that once plagued the author—to hold you back.

Maybe you have a habit of complaining about shortcomings instead of appreciating what you have. Write down three specific blessings and how they helped you move forward.

Finally, answer this question: What are two things God is asking me to do with my skills and talents?

CHAPTER 2

CONTENTMENT

FINDING IT IN YOUR POUND-FOR-POUND VALUE

“And the Lord said, ‘Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household...?’”

—Luke 12:42 ESV

“Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.”

—Proverbs 22:29 NASB

In Luke 12:48, Jesus taught to whom much is given, much is required. In Luke 16:10, He says that whoever is faithful with little can be trusted with a lot. These two verses naturally lead to the same question I asked in chapter 1: What are you doing with what you’ve been given? Take to heart the message that God is calling us

to bear fruit (John 15:5). That is, tangible evidence of faithfulness with what the Master has given us.

You and I have this responsibility no matter what the size of our church, our education or training (or lack of it), or whether we think we're not this, that, or the other thing. Again, it boils down to: *What are you and I doing with what we've been given?*

WHAT IS P4P ABOUT?

The P4P church does the best it can with what it has. The same is true of the P4P business leader. Regardless of circumstances, they aren't escaping into a terrified shell, whether that involves pandemic-restricted worship services, an economic recession, or a Payroll Protection Program mess. They aren't making excuses but moving forward with courage—and faith in the God who makes things happen.

On the topic of churches, I come across pastors who feel bad because their numbers hadn't grown as much as they hoped prior to early 2020. They had either plateaued or couldn't seem to close the "back door," or both. Some started off with more than they had seen prior to the crisis. Some had served for years and never went above a certain number in attendance and felt like a "feeder" church to larger ones.

I remember that feeling. Before we moved into our new building, I struggled to generate enough momentum to keep growing. You might know the maxim, “Feed the sheep and God will build the church.” That’s a great saying, but it’s incomplete.

We have a part to play that is more than just great Bible teaching.

We have a part to play that is larger than great Bible teaching. I remember the struggle to be viewed as legitimate next to churches with heftier budgets, more engaging programs, nicer facilities, and . . . air conditioning! For our first eight years we met in a school cafeteria. It would get so hot from April through October it felt like having church in a sauna. Those who launched their business out of a janitorial-sized closet in mid-summer can relate.

I used to ask, *How can we compete?* Of course, that was the wrong question, stemming from secretly envying others and seeing them as competition instead of complementary to us. Thankfully, I came to realize the devil is our competition. Worst of all, I used to set my eyes on what could be harvested rather than what was

22 *THE POUND FOR POUND PRINCIPLE*

already in the barn. I needed to steward what had been given to me.

When it comes to the P4P value of a church or business, I can empathize with those who struggle. It doesn't matter whether that is a pastor wondering when the growth will come or the start-up entrepreneur who struggles to scale it to the next level, the way I did during my multi-level marketing days.

For pastors, that inner battle may have subsided a bit during the onset of online-only sermons, but the pandemic won't last forever. When I think about the discouragement that may be affecting their psyche, I think about those who have been faithfully serving for five, ten, or twenty years and not seeing growth. Pastors who have felt defeated at conferences or denominational gatherings when they were reminded of what they didn't have. It's the same way entrepreneurs have felt when they attended an industry gathering and heard about rousing successes they haven't seen.

It's not that anyone was intentionally putting them down for a lack of growth; it just reflected their frustrations. Whenever we begin to compare ourselves to the "five talent" guy, our labor can diminish in our own eyes. Comparison is a dangerous activity.

If you have been in a similar situation, please do not lose heart. If you've been a faithful steward of the talents God has given you, one day you'll hear the words (to paraphrase Matthew 25:21), "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord!"

I think of the pastor in a small town who's serving as a bi-vocational pastor. That means he has two full-time jobs: one at the factory and the other at church. His wife works outside the home too. The church can't sustain a full-time salary and pays only a modest monthly stipend that covers few bills. Plus, he likely has less time for sermon preparation and ministry while operating on less sleep than most folks. Still, he remains faithful to the congregation and equally faithful to the Lord's calling. In the final reckoning, that's all that matters.

BY THE NUMBERS

I'm a numbers guy. I like pie charts and graphs better than plain documents. You can visualize trends by comparing data over weeks, months, even years. Even though the job has become quite challenging of late, at our church we have typically counted every child, teenager, and adult who makes a decision to surrender to the Lord. That number is precious, so we make sure we get it right.

24 THE POUND FOR POUND PRINCIPLE

Before the COVID-19 crisis, we counted attendance, tithes, and offerings, and will again in the future. We counted because we are accountable. Jesus counted when He explained how the shepherd left the ninety-nine sheep to go after the one that wandered off. After the pandemic struck, we sought to keep in touch with people to let them they matter. The new metric became the number of engagements with people on smartphones and laptops.

Whether it's in person or electronically, we celebrate church attendance and growth because it is worth commemorating! Whenever we hit a new benchmark, we always pause and throw a party (even if it's only a Zoom meeting). Then we move on as if to say, *Thank you, Lord. What's next?* When you're growing, everything is great! But if growth plateaus, or worse, numbers decline, it can be quite frustrating. Hopefully, though, it causes the leader to become motivated and innovative. Motivation and inspiration go hand in hand. In fact, *I believe inspiration is the fuel of motivation.*

This is where numbers have helped motivate me. Reviewing them lets me know how we are doing. There's nothing wrong with that. I compare it to my car's dashboard, which tells me how fast I'm going, if my fuel is low,

and whether my engine is overheating. I believe counting is equally important to leading a church or managing a business. When our “gauges” showed numbers had leveled off or were declining, sometimes the frustration motivated me to pray harder and be open me to new ideas. That can be a good kind of (sanctified) frustration.

Having a type of dissatisfaction with things while tempering your heart is good. I’ve had a saying that has been reshaped over time: *“I’m always content but never complacent.”* What I mean is I’m grateful for what the Lord has blessed us with. As Psalm 16:5 (NASB) says, “The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You support my lot.” No matter what, I can rest in my contentment, His blessings, and in who I am in Christ.

Yet one might be tempted to think: *I do feel content, so shouldn’t I just take it as a sign to kick back, relax, and let God do all the work?* If this were true, we should all close our doors, resign, become monks in a desert monastery, and be content while the rest of the world literally goes to hell.

No, godly contentment is a gift; as Paul wrote, it is considered great gain (see 1 Timothy 6:6). Yet we must not allow ourselves to become complacent and think, *This is*

good enough, don't you think? We've already exceeded expectations, so why work harder?

I never want to hit that level of complacency. I want to do more. I believe God wants to bless us with more. But becoming *more* and reaching *more* isn't all about us. It's about impacting others' lives, especially in the perilous times in which we operate. In fact, it's much bigger—it encompasses lives beyond those you directly impact. Just think who can be changed if we press on and remain faithful. Lately, I found myself saying to my team, “In this economy, you cannot afford to become complacent.”

THE TRAP OF COMPLACENCY

Contentment is being thankful for what I currently have. Certainly I would love to have “more.” And, I intend on getting better and becoming more, but I am not going to make the mistake of overreaching.

To overreach would be like an out of shape, forty-five-year old who dreams of playing pro basketball, holds a press conference in his driveway, and announces that he's looking for an agent so he can enter the NBA draft. He'll get lonely waiting for his phone to ring. That's serious overreaching!

On the other hand, we can allow complacency to settle in and lead to underachievement. Guard against it. Avoid it

religiously (pun intended). Sometimes I feel like I have this sanctified frustration, knowing that we can do and become more for the Lord. I get frustrated when I feel as though we are not living up to our potential.

No matter how much we've grown, I'm content but never complacent. Why content? Because Jesus is my Lord, I'm saved, my wife and children love and respect me, and we pastor an awesome church. I am thankful and therefore content, *but the moment I allow myself to cruise into complacency will be the moment the church joins me there.*

I'm content but never complacent.

Complacency will lull you to sleep. Mediocrity is a picture of someone uninvolved, disengaged, or who has abdicated leadership. Complacency keeps us from doing our best as it stifles excellence. It could stem from arrogance or pride. Or, it could mask itself in stubbornness to stick to the way you've always done things—digging in your heels and refusing to change.

We all must ask ourselves: “Have I been faithful to steward well what God has entrusted to me?” Hopefully there are seasons when we are motivated and inspired to diligently

serve. Discipline can be leveraged and used to multiply our talents. Yet, there are bound to be times when we are less than enthusiastic. We might be tempted to go through the motions and act without full engagement.

You and I have been entrusted with time, relationships, people, and resources. God expects us to steward them well. Don't allow fear, discouragement, laziness, or indecision ("analysis paralysis") to stop you. It is unacceptable to the Master and should be to you as well.

USE IT OR LOSE IT

When it comes to the P4P principle, if we do nothing with what is given to us, we risk losing it! In our two decades at Inspire Church, I'm sure I have lost people who felt they were not led well. They might not have articulated that, but we have had our share of people leave—and I don't mean "church shoppers." Sometimes you have no control over that, especially when people are trying to find the right "fit." That's not a problem. Sooner or later, they will discover whether they are called to our church.

However, if we fail to steward and lead those entrusted to our care, we must ask, "What can we do *within our control* to ensure it doesn't happen again?" If there are things to change, we need to do that. If *we as leaders* have to change,

we should adjust. Not changing when necessary is similar to burying our talent. Like the slothful servant, we become fearful of losing what we have and kick into self-preservation mode. Generosity declines and our influence diminishes.

Complacency will cause even a “five-talent” person to bury what they have.

If this happens, you may hear yourself (or people around you) repeat such phrases as, “We can’t afford to do that” or “With a church of our size, we have to really be careful. . . .” If someone hears me say such things, I hope they ask, “What happened to the guy who took risks in spite of his fears?”

I am not a reckless renegade. I understand the concept of making wise, prayerful decisions. This is sound advice. But who said that we would have to slow down when we get older? That’s not how Paul operated. He went as hard as he could for as long as he could. The only thing that slowed him down was a Roman cell and eventual death.

You don’t have to be older to slow down; it can happen to the young. Previous failed attempts or temporary setbacks can cause us to become overly cautious. When

we are more concerned about personal preferences or styles and aren't flexible to make course corrections, we are in danger of losing our talent. If we shrink back from seeking big dreams and visions because of fear, we may lose what we already have and see it go to a wise and faithful steward.

IT'S IN YOUR HEAD

While blessed with three beautiful daughters, I've always said were I to have a son, I would name him Caleb. He didn't receive as much attention as Joshua, even though Caleb was the other spy who displayed great faith (see Numbers 13). But what I love about Caleb is his *different spirit*. When he arrived in the Promised Land, Caleb told Joshua (to paraphrase Joshua 14:10–12): “I was with you when we saw the land but got stopped by the crybabies. I've been with you the last forty years. But I'm still young despite my age. Plus, I've got experience to back up my muscle. I can still take 'em! So, give me my land! I'll drive 'em out!”

I want to have the same spirit and take new ground when others are retiring. I want to keep doubling the talents He's entrusted to me. And what you do with what you've been given makes all the difference.



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

As the pandemic of 2020 has shown us, leadership is not for the faint of heart. People are looking to pastors and other leaders for reassurance, hope, and a steady hand at a time when many people may be panicked about the future. As you reflect on the times in which we find ourselves, list two ways you have allowed complacency to blunt your leadership. Then, list two steps you can take to address the situation.

Finally, think of a way to strive for excellence. What is the first step you can take during the coming week to develop your potential?

CHAPTER 3

WHO'S IN MY CORNER?

TRUSTING IN KEY PEOPLE TO GET YOU GOING

*“Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”*

—Ecclesiastes 4:12

Every great fighter needs a great team. No fighter will ever reach top billing without the help and support of those who are for him or her. Prizefighters are made, not born. And behind every prizefighter is a story of his relationship with those in his corner.

Growing up, I never imagined becoming a pastor. I never met one and couldn't tell you what one did. When I took a vocational test in high school, the profession wasn't even listed (and likely still isn't). I am thankful for my upbringing in the Catholic church. I was an altar

boy for seven years and confirmed in the faith at Our Lady of Lourdes. But a pastor? A Pentecostal?

I grew up in Honoka'a, a town of two thousand on the Big Island of Hawai'i. This gorgeous island is home to several microclimates. In one day, you can drive to the summit of Mauna Kea (elevation 13,796 feet) where it snows, back down to walk on ancient, desert-like lava flows, and then explore a tropical rain forest. And, end your day watching the sunset on a black or white sand beach (take your pick). It's where my heart is.

**Without my family in my corner, I
would not be here today.**

In addition to elementary, intermediate, and high school in Honoka'a, I did a two-year stint at Pahala Elementary from 1975 to 1977. Those dates are seared in my mind because in the middle of them, during our nation's bicentennial, our family took a trip to Disneyland. All four Kai kids and our parents, John and Esther Kai.

Mom was mostly a stay-at-home-mom until we started eating more. One of the finest police officers around, Dad also coached high school baseball. (Unfortunately,

he stopped by the time I got to high school.) He was even offered a free-agent contract in the Milwaukee Braves farm system before the franchise moved and became the Atlanta Braves. He turned it down due to his love for my mother. That was an excellent choice; had he accepted, I might not be here!

Mom and Dad did a fine job of raising my oldest brother, Keoni; my younger sister, Elissa; my youngest brother, Len; and myself, each of us spaced two years apart. I got Keoni's hand-me-downs, which I loved because he had great taste. I am proud of my siblings and love and honor my parents. I am glad they are still together after fifty-five-years-plus together. Without my family in my corner, I would not be here today.

Coming from a strong Buddhist background, my wife Lisa never thought she would become a Christian, let alone marry a pastor. Her childhood home included a wall dedicated to Buddhism: portraits, figurines, and paintings of smiley-faced Chinese children. As a baby, her parents dedicated her to become a monk. Fortunately, she had other plans.

CHURCH ROOTS

Although my roots were in the Catholic faith, Hope Chapel is the only contemporary church I had ever known

to that point. In 1989 in Kaneohe, Hawai'i, I gave my life to Jesus at a Hope Chapel—an international movement of approximately 2,500 churches.

LISA

Lisa and I have had the privilege of pastoring Inspire Church (formerly Hope Chapel West) since 2001. My mentor, Ralph Moore, mentored me because he wanted to make sure that Lisa Lum (with whom I'd become smitten) was not dating an ax murderer.

When she and I met, I was a divorced single dad. We dated, got serious, broke up, and were “just friends” for a year. We agreed to not talk to one another to see if love would rekindle. But I realized that I did not want to live without her. So, three months after we finally reunited, we married.

Before meeting Lisa, I asked God that if I were to remarry, to please lead a five-foot-seven, drop-dead gorgeous Asian woman my way. Yes, Asian. Listening to renowned Pastor Jack Hayford on the radio one day, I heard him say we should be specific in our prayers. So I did, also asking for someone who loved Jesus more than me. That way, I would know for sure that we could survive any crisis. Boy, did He deliver! People who know

Lisa notice an innocence and a regalness about her. She carries herself with an inner confidence that comes from spending time with God.

We met after I had been attending Hope Chapel for about a year. Because I had to wake up early to take care of two-year-old Courtney, I went to the 8:00 a.m. service on Sundays. I never felt up for the Friday night singles service. Besides, I usually worked Friday nights as a valet, earning about a hundred dollars in tips, big money in those days.

After a while, my best friend, Brandon, convinced me to sign up for Hope's singles Christmas party. I was reluctant. I wasn't ready for Christian dating and embraced a stereotype that Christian women weren't that good-looking (duh!). However, before I could thank Brandon for getting this "old codger" to the party, my eyes landed on a fine, young woman. Lisa was signing in guests at the registration table. I tried playing it cool but sensed unspoken chemistry between us. Afterwards, we ran into Lisa and her friends at a restaurant named Zippy's.

The following day my phone rang.

"Hi. This is Lisa. Remember me?"

"Sure," I said. "How are you?"

Then she proceeded to ask me out. She wanted me to accompany her to best friend's wedding. One catch: she was in the wedding party, so I'd have to sit with her friends. I was a little taken aback. *This girl doesn't waste any time.* Plus, I had never been on a date where I would not be sitting with my date. And, I was usually the one doing the asking. After the shock wore off, I was excited. She fit my prayer to a T!

He must have been thinking, Who is this player? What a loser.

No sooner had I arrived at the church on Saturday than the clutch on my plain-Jane, 1982 Datsun B-210 broke. What terrible timing. Pastor Ralph, who happened to be standing outside, noticed my trouble. I imagined him thinking, *What a loser.* I forget what happened to that car, or how I made it to the reception.

When Lisa and I started dating, she was working part-time for Hope Chapel Kaneohe as a young adult ministry administrator and at the makeup counter of a department store. In addition to my restaurant valet job, I worked on the ramp at American Airlines and had a multi-level marketing business.

After our on-again, off-again routine, Pastor Ralph married Lisa and me on September 25, 1993. Though I had clearly passed the “Ralph Test,” I had no idea of the role this man would play in my life.

NOT YOUR TYPICAL WEDDING

Once married, we wanted to begin our future—me, Lisa, and Courtney. An instant blended family. After the life I had before, I was (and still am) amazed at God’s grace.

However, something happened moments after we said, “I do.” As the last guests filtered out, I was about to leave with Lisa when the unthinkable occurred. Pastor Ralph walked up, poked me, and said, “You ought to be a pastor!” That almost ruined my honeymoon. I did not want to be a pastor; I wanted to be a millionaire! I reasoned that a pastorate would ruin my dream. Even more disturbing, deep down inside, I knew that God was calling me. Ralph confirmed that it would eventually happen. I guess he had heard me singing and joking at the podium. Perhaps he had also heard about the fruit God was producing in me as a volunteer at Hope Chapel Kaneohe. Not to mention, I was marrying the woman many considered to be

“Miss Hope Chapel.” By our wedding day, Lisa had become the children’s ministry director.

Today, as I look back and remember the days leading up to my proposal, I am convinced it was an arranged marriage. Not where a picture-bride from the mother country comes to a young man in America. No, it's as though God arranged this marriage for a greater purpose than just a loving marriage. That becomes evident with each passing year. Lisa has always been—next to Jesus—the most important person in my corner.

God was arranging this marriage for something greater than I understood at the time.

Naturally, we endured early struggles as a couple and the stresses of a blended family. While we waited a while for more children, a few years later the Lord blessed us with Rebekah, and later, Charis.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR “CORNER PEOPLE”

I am so grateful for the people in my corner. Boxing fans know about a boxer's trainer and cut-man. The trainer is the main guy in the fighter's corner, yelling encouragement and caution, and sometimes ranting to motivate him. He is involved at every step, from practice to conditioning to

sparring. He oversees the fighter's diet and sleep. He is a guardian. Without him, a fighter's days are numbered.

There are times when a trainer has to push and bring correction. Years ago, when still on staff at Hope Chapel Kaneohe Bay, a department leader asked two other junior staff members and me to do a task for him—but we were outside his department. As we were trained to understand it, delegation worked from the top down. You build a team and delegate responsibilities to them. I argued he was delegating laterally.

“You need to build your own team,” I protested. “I’m not going to wake up at five in the morning to set up the bookstore. Besides, I already wake up at four, four days a week to work my other job at American Airlines, so you are crazy if you think. . . .” My mouth runneth over. Bad enough if this happened in private, but it took place in a sandwich shop, in front of numerous other staff members, including Pastor Ralph (aka my “trainer” and mentor).

How I wish I could have stopped in time. As Ralph leaned over from his booth, everyone leaned away. A hush fell over the shop. He said quietly, “You’re going to set that bookstore up until Jesus returns.” I’m sure some of what happened will go down in Hope Chapel folklore, but I needed correction

and discipline. Years later at Inspire, Ralph publicly recalled the incident. We all laughed, but then he added seriously, “The reason I did that was because the Michael Kai I knew, who would drive in a leaky old Jeep Cherokee and do anything, was in danger of losing his way. He was not living up to the Michael I knew and hired—he was operating below it. I needed to get his attention.”

Thank God for trainers.

Who do you have in your corner that examines your condition and patches you up?

Another person you'll need in your corner is a cut-man, who patches up a fighter between rounds. Throughout a match, the fighter is subject to a varying array of punches that land on the head, ribs, and groin. By the fifth round, a boxer is beat and bloodied, his chest heaving. But when the bell rings, the cut-man launches the boxer back into the ring. Not only do you need a trainer (mentor), you also need a cut-man. Who are your cut-men (or cut-women)? Who in your corner examines you and patches you up? A cut-man will not let you nurse your wounds. He won't let you quit.

He will pat you on the back, kick you out of the corner, and say, “Go!”

Key people in my corner have filled that role at various times. Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, “Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Christian brothers and sisters are better together; we need each other for wise counsel and encouragement. In early years, my family was in my corner. The most painful years of my life happened prior to Jesus. Were it not for the sacrifices of my parents, I shudder to think where Courtney and I would be today. Indeed, my entire family readjusted their lives to help us survive pain and abandonment.

I am thankful for the people in my corner. Who’s in yours? If you have what I just described, you know how good that is. If you don’t, let me offer some advice. First, make sure you bring in the right people. One of the best things we can do to assemble trusted corner people is to first be a friend (Proverbs 18:24). Choose those with the right chemistry, people you “click” with. Additionally, they need character: their private life must reflect their public life. If they will speak into your life, make sure what they impart is of substance.

Pray for the right people. Also, it's important to note that different seasons will bring you different people. Those who were in my corner ten years ago are not the same today. So it will be for you. Some will be there for a long time, like the prophet Samuel was for David (1 Samuel 16:1–13, 19:18–24). Samuel officiated over David's first anointing service in David's teens.

**When one person leaves your corner,
the Lord often provides another who
will take his or her place.**

Samuel was also present into David's early adulthood and a confidante until his death (1 Samuel 25:1). When one person leaves, the Lord often provides another. Nathan, another prophet, filled that role later in David's adulthood after he was crowned king (2 Samuel 7:1–17, 2 Samuel 12:1–14). Additionally, priests Zadok and Abiathar and the prophet Gad played similar roles.

Most important of all, remember that the Lord knows who you'll need when you need it. Keep praying and keep your eyes open, and you'll discover them.



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

Who's in your corner? Who helped launch your career, offered counsel along the way, and helped steady you when you faltered? Write down the names of at least three people who helped you get to where you are today. If you can see them, take them to lunch. If they live too far away now, give them a call (and send them a gift card). If they're on the other side of the world, arrange a Facetime conversation. Or, think of other creative ways of thanking them.

If you're like me, you spent a lot of time in the first quarter of 2020 with those closest to you. As the pandemic eases, as surely it will, don't let those stronger relationships fade. When the pressure's on, only those in your corner will step in to keep you from going down for the count.

CHAPTER 4

THE MAKING OF A PRIZEFIGHTER

THE EARLY LESSONS OF FAITHFULNESS

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.”

—Matthew 25:14–15

Trust is an important element in our relationship with Jesus. We’ve been entrusted with talents, finances, relationships, and the like. Jesus has entrusted Lisa and me with His Bride, the Church—and more specifically, Hope Chapel West O’ahu (now Inspire Church). We are responsible for overseeing lives, the health of His flock, finances,

and people's goals and dreams. And as Luke 12:48 teaches, to whom much is given, much is required. Since I've been given much, much is required. You will face a similar accounting for what you have done with what God entrusted to you.

If you've been given, if you've been entrusted, more is required.

If you're in a position of leadership, you've been *entrusted* with leading your people, business, or organization with fairness and integrity. If you're on a worship team, you've been entrusted with a gift to lead people into God's presence and are required to steward this gift with integrity of heart and skillfulness of hands (Psalm 78:72). If you've been blessed with entrepreneurial skills or the ability to build a business and earn a profit, you've been *entrusted* with a gift that allows you to enjoy the fruits of your labor. But you are *required* to extend a helping hand financially, practice generosity, or teach others so that God's kingdom can be expanded in the marketplace. In Luke 12:48, Jesus said, "When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted

with much, even more will be required” (NLT). There’s a cause-and-effect. If you’ve been given and entrusted, more is required.

There is a difference between what we are given and what is entrusted to us. For example, God has given us our bodies—a gift that requires stewardship. If we quit taking care of it, there will be consequences (health issues). When we are entrusted with something, it appears to be something dear to the Lord’s heart. For example, relationships. If we quit investing in them, we could lose them. If you are entrusted with His Church, you must steward it well. If not, it could be taken from you and given to another. The same principles apply to business.

Take a good look around you and you will see all that you have been given. Got children? A job? A bus pass? Food on the table? Then you have been given something! Then there is grace and salvation. They have nothing to do with your track record or performance. As Paul puts it, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23 NLT). You can’t earn something you’ve been freely given.

You might be thinking, *I’ve had to hustle to attain everything I have*. You might think you are self-made, but without

God, you could not have done anything. As Deuteronomy 8:18 says: “But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.”

Once you’re able to do what you have done, God raises the stakes, going from “given” to “entrust.” Because of your trustworthiness, God entrusts you with things near to His heart. At this moment, you are proving whether you are reliable.

We are not entrusted with something until we have proven that we can be.

For example, before my dad allowed me to drive the family car on weekends, I had to first prove I knew how to drive safely. Second, that I would return the car in good condition and help with maintenance. Because I treated the car as if it were my own, he didn’t restrict my usage. If I had brought it back with an empty gas tank, or dirty and scratched, Dad would not have found me trustworthy and prevented me from driving it for a while.

It’s like Jesus doesn’t just say, “To whom much is given, much is required.” He raises the stakes and says, “To whom much has been entrusted, *even more* will be required.” The

Greek word for “given” is *didomi*. *Didomi* is translated as to *give something to someone of one’s own accord, to bestow or furnish*. Something has been provided to and *for you* so that something might be put to use *through you*. We have been provided with *didomi*.

When we have been entrusted with something, we must realize it belongs to someone else. I have been given much, and much has been bestowed on me. *Didomi*. And because much has been *didomi* to Michael, much will be required of me. The next work in the New King James Version is translated as “more,” which you and I can agree is greater than “much.” “More” in the Greek is *perissoteros*, or “*over and above, more than is necessary, superadded, exceeding abundantly, supremely.*”

In other words, if you have entrusted with much, me-ga-more will be required! Furthermore, the word “required” is also translated as *demanded*. To whom much is given, much is demanded. There’s more. The operative, deal-breaker word in this verse is the word “whom.” That’s me. And you.

In my humble estimation, Jesus is placing all the responsibility on us for everything He has given and entrusted to us. Whether a mustard seed-sized amount, adequate, or

much, we must steward it wisely. And if we have the privilege of being “entrusted” with something (leadership, money, people), mega-more will be demanded in return. Wow. Let that one sink in for a minute.

So let me ask you this question yet again: What are you doing with what you’ve got?

ON THE WAY FROM SELF-MADE TO GOD-MADE

Early on, I learned two lessons as a kid: money doesn’t grow on trees and faithfulness is vital. Each time I received my allowance, I thought, *This isn’t going to last long*. Fierce competition in my home meant the same amount of work didn’t necessarily mean the same pay. Similar to the parable of the talents, we didn’t necessarily receive what we thought we deserved. Case in point: Keoni was two years older, but we did essentially the same amount of chores, whether mowing the lawn or washing the cars. But when we lined up for our allowance, Keoni got twenty dollars and me, only ten.

Fair or not, that launched me on a journey of earning my own money, especially so I could buy my own Air Jordans. We were not wealthy. I had heard my parents’ discussions about stretching a dollar, so I never asked them for more because I didn’t want to burden them. If I were to satisfy my desire to look good, I would have to get a job.

I had all kinds growing up. Like picking macadamia nuts for twenty-five cents per five-gallon bucket (for two weeks). Then I tried babysitting. I was pretty good with compliant kids, and as word got around, I got calls. It was exciting starting a cottage industry at the age of eleven! Until one day, a couple with a two-year-old and a four-year-old heard about my highly rated babysitting services. After Mom dropped me off at their house, off they went. I expected an evening of easy money—like taking candy from, well, a baby.

What's an eleven-year-old boy doing babysitting little kids anyway?

Boy, was I wrong! Those little boys were out of control. Looking at the clock every ten minutes, I was on the verge of a mental breakdown. That's when it hit me: I didn't need this. What's an eleven-year-old boy doing babysitting little kids anyway? *Girls are supposed to be better at this*, I thought to myself.

A couple of jobs later, Keoni wanted a break from his paper route. I stepped in and learned how to fold papers and stuff them into the canvas bag. Thirty dollars for one

month's work. It may have been big money, but it was grueling work. Every afternoon, I picked up that bag stuffed with 150 newspapers and rode a mile down a hazardous, two-lane highway. I lasted about a month before Keoni took back his route.

Although none of these jobs were long-term commitments, they taught me the value of a dollar. More importantly, these formative years helped forge the spiritual values of faithfulness and fruitfulness. The lessons I learned carried me during the years of my separation and the season of my life before I gave my life to Christ.

STEPPING INTO THE RING

However, my early experiences in earning my way gave me a false impression of having my way. When you feel you earned what you have, you can think you are entitled to having things your way. I did. The tenacity I had developed as a strength was now in danger of becoming my weakness. I can only imagine what kind of life I would be living if I hadn't obeyed the Lord's call on my life. Obedience has its advantages.

Lisa and I had been married for less than a year when I felt a strong pull toward leaving behind my ideas of what I wanted to do. As I mentioned earlier, in addition to two

jobs I was also involved in a multi-level marketing business. Despite how others may feel about MLM, this experience proved invaluable. For one thing, I learned the value of reading, public speaking, and the go-getter attitude that still helps me.

The tenacity I had developed as a strength was now in danger of becoming my weakness.

Yet, when I tried to put my plans on the altar, I still had a problem. While the Lord led me in one direction, I leaned in another. I couldn't break free of business. I spent five years striving to make it work, and honestly thought I should have had more success. I would look around and blame anything and anyone for my lack of progress—my wife, my family, even my dog!

In frustration I would cry out to God, "Why am I not moving forward? I'm doing everything everyone else is doing and more!" I tried to keep a positive outlook, but was stuck in the same place, running on a treadmill called "The Fast Track to Success." Ironically, during

this time, my heart began growing for ministry. I was in a tug-of-war between my desires and His plans.

Eventually, I discovered it's useless fighting against God. The most frustrated Christians are those who know God is calling them to a new level but run away. It is called disobedience. In His mercy and grace, God continued to bless me in some ways, but I still tried to have things my way. C.S. Lewis once said, "There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'All right, then, have it your way.'"² I was in the latter group, praying, "Oh, and Lord, please bless my plans!" The Lord would have none of it.

Leaving it all behind was not easy. Within that period of soul searching, it became increasingly evident that my business had come to an end. Although the thought of leaving was painful at first, making the decision to leave proved quite simple. I experienced withdrawal symptoms. I felt insecure about what people still in the business were thinking of me. Although executing the decision came quickly, making the transition took longer than I bargained for. In hindsight, I could see that the Lord allowed these circumstances to force me to make a decision. I drew closer to the Lord during this time like I had not done in a while.

Later, I realized the difficulty I experienced came from wrapping up my identity in work.

If there is anything in your life that keeps you from answering the call of God and you won't part with it, it has become your master. Whatever dominates your time, thinking, money, or heart is your master.

It's simple. If you have a boyfriend or girlfriend you can't break up with and you know you should, you are in bondage. If you are spending money on pornography and it affects your intimacy with your spouse, you are in bondage. This can also be a profession, a business, or a mindset. Whatever it is, if you can't quit, you are enslaved. God calls this sin. Whatever is *opposed to God* must an end. You will have withdrawals, but if you can get past that sticking point, you will have victory.

The happiest, most fulfilled people on earth are answering God's call. They are joyful because they are experiencing God's favor. Are you in this category? Or have you run away? When I left my plans behind, God began working in my life in greater ways.

THE HONEYMOONERS

When I first joined the staff at Hope Chapel Kane'ohe Bay (hereafter HCKB), I reported directly to Rob McWilliams,

who is still a close friend. Ralph hired me, but Rob spent time with me daily. Ralph discipled me, but Rob mentored me. The Lord called me while I was busy doing *something*—faithfully ushering on weekends and serving as a small group (we called them MiniChurch) shepherd. My fruitfulness caught the eye of church leaders.

When I joined the staff, HCKB gave me the chance to create The Honeymooners, a new ministry for young marrieds. Working alongside my new bride, Lisa, I went to work building this ministry by organizing camps and dances. I also formed two MiniChurches, which doubled and redoubled in number. By the time the Lord called me out of The Honeymooners, we had ten of them.

Not only did I have a lot of fun, Lisa and I would later weave small group multiplication into the DNA of Inspire Church. Things were going well and everyone was happy. Then, I took a walk that would change my life.

A SHORT WALK IN A LONG DIRECTION

After The Honeymooners, Ralph approached me one Sunday between services: “Let’s take a walk.” That made me nervous. I wondered why. Finally, he said, “I need you to take over the youth ministry,” he said. I had a feeling this was coming. Not because I wanted it. I thought teens

were immature, selfish, and annoying. But God had been stirring thoughts of becoming a senior pastor while showing me I needed to be faithful to whatever He gave me to do. So, I accepted.

Looking back, I enjoyed every minute of it. I loved preaching to youth and the fruit that resulted from retreats and seeing students give their hearts to Jesus. Being a youth pastor was like running a church, but without all the responsibilities of a senior pastor. I learned so much in those four years. Pastor Ralph *entrusted* me with the lives of the next generation.

There are things that go through your mind when your boss says he wants to go for a walk with you.

The ministry I wasn't fond of leading initially became a great passion. When I took over, I poured myself into equipping and empowering the next generation. Though hard, it was rewarding. Then, in the midst of my faithfulness, God did something: threw me a curve ball that would leave me wondering what would happen next.

A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE

Until 1999, I had never met a prophet, nor did I want a prophetic word, since I had a limited understanding of the gift of prophecy. Although I come from a Pentecostal denomination, at the time I wasn't as savvy in this area as I am today.

It wouldn't be fair to say that I never saw it happen because I had seen it at a convention—from afar. I had experienced great words of encouragement, and sometimes someone would have a word of knowledge for me, usually Pastor Ralph. But no prophecy.

Then Lisa and I flew to the Big Island, along with some HCKB staff, for an International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (ICFG) district conference. ICFG was founded by one of the most influential women in the history of the US—including a mention in a March 2020 *Time* magazine cover story—the late Aimee Semple McPherson. “Sister Aimee” was a powerful evangelist in the 1920s who traveled the nation conducting tent revivals. Thousands surrendered their lives to Christ at these sessions. Eventually, she settled in Los Angeles. Then in 1925, four years before we entered the Great Depression, Sister Aimee opened the famed,

five-thousand-seat Angeles Temple. Her messages were so innovative that Hollywood insiders would sneak in to witness her illustrated sermons to get ideas.

At the conference we attended was a prophet named Jean Darnall (who died in January of 2020). We were invited to sit with Sister Jean in a room with five other couples. To one side sat a secretary with a tape recorder. Before she spoke, I was afraid of what she would say, yet curious and excited. And a bit skeptical. However, soon I realized I had no reason to fear. Who could feel threatened by some sweet old lady?

Who could feel threatened by some sweet old lady?

She looked at me and said words to the effect, “You can sell ice cream to the Eskimos,” and, “I see you standing on a soapbox in a busy intersection with a megaphone in your hand. The word I’m getting is ‘amplified or broadcast.’” Then she added, “Tell me, are you on TV or radio?” Now, she had no idea our youth ministry aired on a public access channel. Or that we had been on the radio ever since starting the church. She not only confirmed some things

already in place, she spoke of things in the future. We left that room delighted we had been there.

When Lisa and I returned home from the conference we rejoiced over her words. We wondered if this was what Mary felt like when the angel visited her. Like Mary, we treasured what was said in our hearts.



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

On a scale of one to ten, with ten the highest, how would you rate your stewardship of the people who follow you or whom you influence as you exercise your gift? Is there a little thing you are doing now that could lead to greater things in the future?

As you contemplate your future, think about something—a side business, a sports obsession, or a hobby—that is more distraction than devotion. Write a plan for shedding that which may be preventing you from following God's best for your leadership.

CHAPTER 5

MOVING UP IN WEIGHT CLASS

INCREASING YOUR GOD-GIVEN CAPACITY

*“For not from the east nor from the west nor from the south
come promotion and lifting up.*

But God is the Judge! He puts down one and lifts up another.”

—Psalm 75:6–7 AMPC

To me, *faithful* brings to mind the husband who marries the sweetheart of his youth. There has never been another woman. They will celebrate all the seasons of life together as they raise children, spoil grandchildren, and celebrate their fiftieth anniversary with friends and family.

It also brings to mind the salesperson who works four decades at the same company, always doing their best to remain a top producer. They pass along trade secrets and wisdom to up-and-comers. At their retirement party, all the employees chip in to buy an expensive gold watch, inscribed on the back with: *You Were Faithful*.

Faithfulness is often found in overlooked places. We see the championship game but not the hours of blood, sweat, and tears a winning athlete shed in private. We see the A+ student giving a valedictory speech at graduation, but not the tutoring she received along the way while saying, “No” to distractions. We see the big church with its array of buildings, technology, and conferences, but not the years of labor required to establish that church. We see the six NBA championship rings on Michael Jordan’s hands and fingers, but we don’t understand the hustle to maintain that level of excellence until we watch “The Last Dance” on ESPN.

That’s faithfulness, which always has a little brother close behind named “fruitfulness.” This brings to mind the mango tree. In Hawai’i, it seems almost every home I’ve lived in has had a mango tree. I love this sweet, succulent fruit. Peel away skin and bite into it, while juice runs down your chin. Delicious! But before it is harvested, it begins as a blossom.

In life and ministry, we can become discouraged when we fail to see fruit in the early stages. But if you look closely, you'll be able to identify blossoms. You can expect fruit to follow. Faithfulness precedes fruitfulness.

**Faithfulness is always followed,
eventually, by fruitfulness.**

Some seasons bring a higher yield; sometimes mango trees bear more fruit in one season than previously. We must keep in mind that we are not in charge of the amount of fruit we bear. We can control our *faithfulness*, but not our yield. Keep being faithful to what God called you to do *and you will bear fruit*.

In this particular season of our lives, little buds of faithfulness began to appear on the tree. The new millennium marked a great year of fruitfulness. Lisa was hitting her stride in children's ministry as she did a great job recruiting and equipping leaders and delegating major tasks to a gifted team. Her ministry hummed like a well-oiled machine. Pastor Ralph used to joke that Lisa had become so adept that each day by noon, she would sit at her desk and file her nails because everything was running along so smoothly.

“Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” —Isaiah 43:19 (ESV)

As for me, I was in the midst of my best year in youth ministry. Our leadership team had a fascinating combination of character and skill. Graduates were heading off to college, camp numbers were at a record high, and the Holy Spirit was moving like never before. A secret desire to be a national speaker with a youth workers’ equipping ministry took hold in my heart. However, HCBK was oriented toward church planting.

DASHBOARD CONFESSIONALS

One Sunday afternoon as I parked my car at church, I heard the Holy Spirit speaking—not audibly, but inside my head: “You won’t be here very long.” Wow! That had never happened before with such clarity. I paused and considered what had just happened. Although initially I intended to keep this private, I knew I just *had to* tell Ralph.

Ralph and Ruby Moore were not only great examples in church planting and pastoring, they became our family outside our parents. After my mom and dad moved to Oregon, their huge role in our lives included acting as surrogate parents. Once as young marrieds, we even vacationed with them. My two oldest daughters, Courtney and

Rebekah, learned how to swim in their pool. We'd spend every Fourth of July at their home and many a Sunday afternoon swimming and barbecuing. Ralph even taught me how to change the oil in my car. We rarely sat down for one-on-ones. Most discipleship and mentoring took place in weekly staff meetings or impromptu meetings in the pool or under a car's hood. As we talked shop constantly, I was like a sponge, soaking it all up.

We talked shop constantly, and I was a sponge soaking it all up.

One thing I respected about Ralph was he never hid his intentions or plans. Even if upset or disappointed (mainly over something I said), I always knew where he stood. If you were in the doghouse, you knew your name was Fido. When you have a boss and mentor like that, you feel great security and freedom. I'm sure some envied the role the Moores played in our lives and our access to them, but it was more than that. It was a patriarchal friendship that took time to build, and we were grateful for it.

So, when I got out of the car that afternoon, I looked for Ralph—even though it was a Sunday evening, when he

was rarely around—and found him. When I was able to get his attention, we spent about a minute talking about it.

“Ralph, I think the Lord spoke to me coming up the driveway tonight,” I started.

“Really? What’d He say?”

“He said that I won’t be here for very long. Now I don’t know what that means. I’m not sure if I’m going somewhere or if I’m moving into the young adults like you thought of doing. But I needed to tell you. Can you do me a favor and not make any plans for me?”

“Don’t worry,” he replied. “Let’s just take it slow and we’ll see what the Lord does.”

That was it.

JUST WHEN I WAS HAVING FUN

Before I heard “The Voice,” I was having a ball. Everything we had worked for in youth ministry was happening. In addition to a great ministry, students were serving in many ministries of the church, such as going to Japan on missions trips to share the gospel in a nation where fewer than 1 percent call Jesus their Lord and Savior.

Yet, while those were some of the most fruitful years of my life, God had other plans. He was about to lead us into a new level of faithfulness and fruitfulness.

I didn't rush to make anything happen. After all, I loved my job, the people, and being a youth pastor. I used to say I had the best job in Hawai'i. I was having the season of my life! It was July of 2001.

At first I didn't want to be a youth pastor. How silly!

FAITHFULNESS ISN'T JUST ABOUT SHOWING UP

Faithfulness isn't just about showing up, punching in, and punching out. It's more than standing guard over a half-built wall, making sure nothing happens while you're on the clock and someone comes to relieve you. That's not faithfulness; that's being a watchdog. The average German Shepherd can do that. That's what I call a waste of time, or in our case, "sitting on the talent."

To illustrate this point, imagine an old man handing the keys of a church to a young pastor and saying, "Here you go, Sonny. Don't mess it up. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Don't change a thing, don't rock the boat, and don't make the old guard mad. If you heed my warning, it will all work out and then you can hand the keys off to the next guy."

That's not in me. Mediocrity frustrates me. I think of it as the best of the worst and the worst of the best. I don't think any of us said one day, "Hmmm. When I grow up, I want to just squeak by." But of course, I could be wrong.

Faithfulness is more than just showing up, punching in, and punching out.

In fact, where did it go wrong? When did we see being faithful as being just "on time"? The famed geyser at Yellowstone National Park's always releases its sulfuric gasses on time. That's why it's called Old Faithful. Is it possible that we see our duties as Christians as simply being on time for service, work, and everything else? I'm all about being on time. I want our team to show up for everything five minutes early. But faithfulness is about much more.

The Greek word for "faithful," as used in the context of our main Scripture, is the word *pistos*. Translated into the English vernacular, *pistos* is defined as someone who shows themselves faithful in transacting business, executing commands, or discharging official duties.

The transaction of business is in the areas of profit and loss. Every enterprise must show how much profit they made and their losses. For a business to succeed, profits must outweigh losses. A successful business requires a faithful operator or it won't be around long.

As for execution of commands, at Inspire Church we are honored to have members of the armed forces in our congregation. In light of *pistos*, is there anyone more qualified to fill this description? Granted, professions like the police and fire departments are important, but not many involve life and death and the welfare of other lives as much as the military. Good soldiers are faithful.

Then there is the discharge of official duties, which gives a picture of someone similar to an ambassador. This person represents another, speaks on their behalf, and is capable of receiving, delegating, and carrying out their wishes. We are ambassadors for Jesus, carrying out His commands, representing His Kingdom, serving and speaking on behalf of the One we love. This is a huge privilege and a serious responsibility.

Can you see how one who is faithful is more than a “show-up-and-hold-down-the-fort” person? Faithfulness in the life of a student means the person

goes to class, is always on time, takes notes, and studies during free time. They are studying for an exam in advance, not just cramming the night before. Consistency in the little things means performing remarkably well in the big things (exams and finals).

When it comes to being faithful in ministry, the workplace, athletics or academics, this principle holds true in every aspect of life: You can either operate from inner conviction or external pressure.

You can either operate from inner conviction or you can be operated by external pressure.

You can do things for various reasons—excellence of effort, a personal conviction, or a desire to please the one you serve. The person motivated by inner conviction is the kind of person I want to work with. They have the character qualities every employer is looking to hire. I don't know about you, but if I have to babysit an employee to see if (a) he's at work; (b) he's doing his job; (c) he's being productive with the time he is paid for; or (d) he's carrying the culture we have curated,

then I've got the wrong person. However, if this person is ringing the bell on all four and making others better because of what they bring to the esprit de corps, this individual will continue moving up the charts.

However, if you constantly require external pressure, you become a burden. Your overseers have to watch to make sure you complete the outcomes and expectations of your position. Proverbs 22:29 (NASB) says, "Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men." Here are a couple of interesting things I've noticed. The NASB uses the phrase, "obscure men," while the God's Word Translation calls it "unknown men." The reward of someone operating out of a personal conviction is one who will rise up to serve in higher levels, with people they never expected to partner with!

Also, in Proverbs 22:29, the NASB terms this person a skilled worker. Lest we think this is reserved for a "gifted" person, the New Living Translation calls him a "truly competent worker" while the King James refers to him as a "man diligent in his business."

Sometimes I am amazed over all the great people the Lord has led Lisa and me to be associated with. To be

trained by one of the most fruitful church planters in this generation was a blessing. God has brought us many other beneficial relationships. Lest I deceive you into thinking that I've been the perfect student in faithfulness and stewardship, I confess at times I have failed. But during the seasons I was less than my best, I needed to get out of that funk right away. Because if I "buried the talent," I would be in danger of losing it.

God is calling us to become those in the workplace, marketplace, ministry, and other areas who do the best we can with what we have. The man or woman who works hard and makes sacrifices beyond the ordinary is the kind of person the Lord elevates. Although it is a "human" (boss, company, division) who carries out the plan, ultimately it is the Lord who promotes you (Psalm 75:6–7). He knows and sees the effort you are putting forth. Nothing that you do is done in vain. Remember, He is a good and just Rewarder.



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

Ponder the benefits of faithfulness. Name three rewards you are seeing in your business, church, or family life that

have only resulted because you have hung in there for a long time. List a couple negative impacts that could have occurred had you thrown in the towel before now.

Now, think of two blossoms in your business, church, or family that indicate fruitfulness is just around the corner. What are a couple steps you can take to find encouragement to continue for just a while longer so you can see the fruit?

CHAPTER 6

LET GO OF THE RING

BIDDING 'ALOHA' TO WHAT IS COMFORTABLE

“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.” —Mark 8:35

There was something going on in my head. Perhaps it was the cabin pressure in coach at 35,000 feet, the euphoria of being used by God, and seeing a great response at a youth retreat in Eugene, Oregon, all rolled together. Or the nifty honorarium. I had never been paid that much for ministering at a retreat. Sweet! I felt like I was in “the zone.”

I was faithful to my calling to be a youth pastor. Yet, I was about to challenge the next call of God on my life. I knew that obedience brought blessing and disobedience, frustration. If I rebelled, my efforts as a youth pastor would be met

with frustration and futility. I could have argued, *But I was faithful. I was doing what He called me to do.* Psalm 37:4 says, “*Delight yourself in the LORD, AND HE WILL GIVE YOU THE DESIRES OF YOUR HEART*” (ESV, emphasis added). I remember the first time I did that and the Lord tricked me. I “delighted” in my time with God, and my desires morphed into His!

What’s considered a promotion to some may seem like a demotion to you.

Now, here I was again, on a roller coaster of emotions between delight and desire. Joy and delight in Him. On the opposite side, “desire.” My desire to stay, doing what I wanted to do. What I had been faithful and fruitful at had become my desire. Isn’t that the way it’s supposed to be?

WHAT SEEMS LIKE A STEP DOWN IS OFTEN A STEP UP

I’ve heard it said that God will call you out of your faithful duty to Him. As you do what you’re called to do, the Master calls you to a new thing to promote you. When I was called to leave HCKB, I initially felt it was a step down. The kind my friend, Matt, made. A vice president

of a successful commercial real estate firm, he left to start his own company for one-third the income.

He felt the Lord calling him to do that. It's rare to start at the top. You may take over from someone and be in line because of faithfulness, but that isn't offered to everyone.

Abraham had to "leave your land, your relatives, and your father's home." There weren't a lot of promised incentives. No Abrahamic covenant, just "leave." Not even on a direction on the compass. Just "go to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1 GW). Pioneering can be scary!

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH . . .

I arrived at work the second day after returning. One of the first to greet me was Rob McWilliams. "Hey, how you doing? By the way, there's a church that wants you as its pastor. It's in Waialeale. They asked me first. I turned them down. They want to know if you want it. Bye."

Whoa, I thought, No, "Hi, how was your time away?" That's it? My immediate reaction was, "I'm not interested either." I'm not going to be someone's consolation prize.

Pastor Ralph mentioned the position later, saying, "I'd like you to pray about it." I replied, "No. I don't want to go to Waialeale. Besides, it's hot there." For most of the year, that was very true.

The community used to be part of a larger town called Waipahu, known for its sugarcane fields. In 1995, the Waipahu sugar mill closed.³ Then a large landowner decided to develop several hundred acres into a bedroom community of suburban Honolulu. They built a large strip mall with homes and townhouses around it and re-named it Waikele.

“No, seriously. Pray about it,” Ralph said.

“Okay, I’ll pray.”

Later, in my smart-aleck way, I said, “Okay. I prayed about it. The answer is still no.”

“No, I’m serious, Mike,” Ralph replied. “This could be a great opportunity. In fact, I was thinking about going and leaving the church here to you. I want you to consider it.”

I explained that I didn’t have time to pray. Camp was next week, I had just returned from Oregon, and I had a lot to do. Out of deference to him, I said I’d pray again. But I didn’t want to go. Then the greatest conflict I had ever experienced erupted, which didn’t thrill me.

Psalm 92:12–13 says, “The righteous will flourish . . . planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God.” I had been at HCKB for twelve years and a staff member for about seven. I was flourishing. I

gave my life to Jesus there, received my theological training there, and met and married Lisa there. We had our second daughter, Rebekah, there. I was rooted there. Why would we want to leave *there*?

There comes a point when every son has to eventually leave the house.

Through this experience, I learned what fatherhood meant. There comes a point when every son must leave home. It's a joy for a father to equip his son for life, help him determine the way to success, and send him on his way. As a father to daughters and those who I am training for ministry, I feel the same way. Some will leave to plant churches; some won't. Some will stay and take on an elder-type role, like that of a coach. Leveraging their influence, they reinforce values and offer a fresh perspective.

THORNS

A mother eagle trains her eaglets to fly at a young age, taking one on her wings before flying out on a training mission. When at the appropriate altitude, she'll suddenly drop the eaglet into thin air. Instinct must kick in—the

eagle must start flapping its wings or have a violent introduction to terra firma.

Of course, the eaglet won't learn on its first attempt, so Momma will swoop down and catch the eaglet and repeat the process. Afterward, she'll return the freaked out bird to the nest and grab another eaglet for the same lesson. They are quickly prepared to leave the nest.

But the lesson doesn't end there. She trains them to hunt and receive food she brings to the nest. One of the most important lessons comes after a test flight, when the eaglet discovers thorns in its nest, placed there to keep it from returning to roost. The eaglet has become too big, eats too much and knows too much to remain. It could become too dependent on its mother. Suddenly, the eaglet must face the fact it's on its own. Talk about sending a message!

I can honestly say that I felt as if Ralph was placing thorns in my nest. I also wondered if he was making room for his son, Carl. Coincidentally, Carl was scheduled to speak at my youth camp the next week. After graduating from Life Bible College in San Dimas, California, Carl and his wife, Kanani, became youth pastors in nearby Huntington Beach. He was handsome, an incredible

surfer, and a great youth pastor. Now, I understood that Pastor Ralph could make any moves he wanted to make. I knew he sought the Lord on every major decision and he was the boss. Besides, he had pioneered the church and Carl was one of many great leaders Ralph had sent out over the years.

**It looked like a thorn was being placed
in the nest.**

Yet I also knew that if I didn't hear from the Lord, Ralph would never force me out sooner than needed. During this time, I became more familiar with the sovereignty of God—that even if I had to leave sooner than I liked, God would still have my back and work all things together for my good (Romans 8:28).

Camp was approaching. The next Sunday I hung out with students in the courtyard prior to the start of our youth service. I never liked preparing a sermon before the week of camp, since it added too much stress to the preparations. I decided to have a friend, Jeff MacKay, speak that evening. A pastor in Osaka, Japan, Jeff is one of the craziest church

planters I know and one of the funniest. Since he was in town, I invited him to speak.

When Jeff arrived, he didn't come alone. One guy I had met, but the other was a stranger. After Jeff and I exchanged brief greetings, he left me alone with the stranger. I sat down and introduced myself.

"Hi, my name's Mike."

"I'm Ray."

"Okay . . . so what do you do, Ray?"

"I'm a pastor."

"Really? Where?"

"Waikele."

"Oh. What's the name of your church?"

"Hope Chapel Waikele."

"Come again?" I replied.

"Hope Chapel Waikele," he said.

Now I was irritated. It looked like Jeff had joined the conspiracy of getting me to leave. In retrospect, it felt somebody was secretly manipulating the situation, pulling strings and calling shots designed to make me think this was divine providence.

This was precisely what I did not want. I didn't want to do something that seemed strategic, convenient, logical,

or—worst of all—being “pushed upstairs.” Like a great player who is too old, so they make him an assistant coach. I didn’t want to become a senior pastor yet.

When I met Ray, it was as if all my suspicions were being confirmed. My insecurities and self-preservation instincts began working during our dialogue and, like a trained CIA interrogator, I went to work.

Leaning over, I said, “You’re leaving, aren’t you?”

“How do you know? That’s supposed to be confidential.”

“Never mind how. I just know. Who brought you here? Who put you up to this?”

“Jeff brought me.”

“Yeah, right. I’m sure Ralph told him to talk to you and bring you so you could convince me to take your place, making me think this is ‘so God’ to make it happen.”

“Nobody told me to come,” Ray insisted. “Jeff doesn’t know anything. We’ve just been good friends since the days we went to his old church.”

He looked sincere.

“You should take it. You’d be good,” he continued.

“How do you know? You’ve never heard me preach.”

“I just know. Besides, I’ve heard of you.”

I thought to myself, *Yeah, right. Butter me up and go for the ego. Typical pastor.*

“You have to hurry and make a decision,” he added. “I’m leaving soon.”

“If it’s such a good church, why are you leaving?”

“Because I’ve burned out. I’ve been bi-vocational for five years and it’s taken a toll. The church needs someone with fresh vision to take it to the next level. Hey, maybe you can stop by and preach this weekend or next.”

“Burnout? I’m sorry to hear that. No, I wouldn’t want to preach there. I think it’s unethical, preaching at a church without them knowing I’m a candidate.”

But Ray persisted, saying I should at least stop by and visit the church the following weekend.

HI HO, HI HO, IT’S OFF TO CAMP . . .

In the meantime, off to camp we went. It was amazing. I prayed every morning for direction as I walked. Being high up on the mountains of O’ahu, I was hoping for a sign (maybe some lightning). A voice from the clouds saying, “You, Anointed One! Before the foundations of the earth were set, I set you apart to take this church and reach untold millions for My glory.” Who could blame me?

Truthfully, I was deathly afraid of leaving Hope Chapel Kane’ohe. I wasn’t secure in my leadership ability or knowledge of the Word. I felt unworthy. For six days, every morning I’d go to a lookout with a cup of coffee, sit on a big rock, and look out over the ocean. I’d pray and look toward the community in question, asking if that was the place.

As camp pastor, I thought about the students and how much I loved them. I didn’t feel ready to move on. I recalled once having no desire to be a youth pastor and how all that quickly changed. They were easy to speak to once they knew you loved and respected them—especially our leadership team. Yet each day, I felt a slow detachment taking place in my heart, like a countdown clock had begun.

Truthfully, I as deathly afraid of leaving Hope Chapel Kane’ohe.

It reminded me of the walk Jesus took with Peter and John in John 21. At the campfire Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me more than these?” (v. 15). He was asking me the same question. For me, “these” represented the students, leadership opportunities, or even my own security. Then I recalled Matthew 6:33 when Jesus said, “But seek first the

kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (NKJV). God was asking me to trust Him with a whole new set of “these” things.

LEAVE BEHIND WHAT GOT YOU HERE

Whatever you’re called to do, take an inventory of the “these things” and thank the Lord for them. Chances are you had to say goodbye to some things before the Lord promoted you to a new level. Take time to look back and it’s likely they were difficult to part with because you had become so attached to them.

However, we must say goodbye to things that were once critical to our development. Then, from a safe distance, often defined by time and miles, we can look back and say, “I’m so glad I let go of what was good at the time, in order to receive what was great in the future.”

WHAT GOT YOU HERE WON’T TAKE YOU THERE

While on a trip to Israel, I watched a *National Geographic* special on the Space Shuttle. I was fascinated by the shuttle exerting incredible amounts of fuel through two solid fuel rocket boosters. They explode with 7.8 million pounds of thrust to push the shuttle further from the launch pad and into the atmosphere.⁴

During this critical phase, immense pressure is placed on the housing of the shuttle. The fuel in the boosters burns up at a rate of 4.5 tons per second. The purpose of the boosters is to launch the shuttle to its highest altitude. But the rocket boosters, which are used to get the shuttle safely into orbit, are no longer useful.⁵

What was once critical to the mission has to be left behind or it will endanger the mission: pioneering new frontiers. If the solid rocket boosters are not jettisoned, the shuttle will be pulled back to earth's atmosphere and plunge into the sea at a tremendous loss of technology and lives. This proves the widely held theory that what got you "here" won't take you "there." God was about to show me "there."

What got you here won't take you there. God was about to show me the "there."

Halfway through camp, Lisa called me, telling me about a thank-you card from a couple in our church. It included a gift certificate to a Waikiki hotel for three days and two nights! I so missed her I couldn't wait until she and the girls came to camp. So, the good news about a Waikiki

getaway thrilled me. Until Lisa said, “Isn’t that great? Now we can go and fast and pray about this church.” Fast and pray? I replied, “Nobody goes to Waikiki to fast and pray. Especially about a church. People go there to eat and enjoy one another’s company, you know what I mean? Babe, it’s been a long time since we’ve been together. . . .”

My Proverbs 31 woman would not be deterred.

“This is the Lord giving us an opportunity for us to seek Him, Mike. We have to take this seriously. I’m feeling more and more like this might be His will for us.”

She was right. This was God’s way of giving us some uninterrupted time to seek His will. I was beginning to wonder if the Lord was once again orchestrating things like the “chance” meeting with Ray Arney. Who could argue with Lisa’s logic?

FASTING IN THE LAND OF PLENTY

Waikiki was fabulous. We prayed, walked, talked, and prayed some more. What sticks out was our last day. We packed our bags and prepared to check out. But first, Lisa and I needed to be on the same page.

One thing I’ve learned through the years is to trust my wife’s wisdom. Taking her hands in mine, I asked: “So, what do you think? What’s the Lord saying?”

Lisa replied, “I remember a while ago when you thought we were called to plant a church in Portland. You thought you were ready, but I knew in my heart you weren’t. We knew we needed more time. This is different. Now, I look at you and you look like Moses when he came down from the mountain—you glow. You’re ready.”

I went from an attitude of self-preservation (holding onto position) and self-interest (what was familiar and comfortable) to one of total surrender.

Those words meant so much. Knowing Lisa was behind me would help me to do anything the Lord called us to do.

Still, I struggled. I had heard that answering God’s call was much more exciting, like Moses and the burning bush, or David’s visit from Samuel. I was hoping for some kind of “Bam!” from heaven—something more concrete, like Abraham being told to go to a new country. Yet something had happened. I had gone from an attitude of self-preservation and self-interest to total surrender. I only wanted to do what Jesus wanted me to do, including leaving behind

the familiar. If He was calling me to Waikele, I was willing to go. And that's what happened. I began thinking about all the possibilities. It was Jesus, calling me to leave the safety of the boat and step into the unknown.

I reflected on Jean Darnall's prophecy a year prior, the voice of the Lord as I drove to the youth service, and my chance encounter with Ray before camp. Adding everything up, I deduced that this was indeed the Lord calling me to a new level of faith. The proof was my heart change. After Lisa's words, we decided to make a covenant before the Lord. We prayed and left that hotel room with a commitment to head for new territory.

In the Hawaiian language, *aloha* is widely used in several scenarios, such as a tourist on vacation or a college student returning home for the holidays. Its simple translation: "Hello." But it has two other meanings. It expresses your love for someone. The final translation means farewell or goodbye, often used at airports when parting with someone dear to our hearts. In this case, I would be saying aloha to a people (HCKB) and a calling I had treasured.

A DEFINING MOMENT

Defining moments often tie to a significant event. For my parents, it was President John F. Kennedy's assassination

in 1963. For me, it was the 1986 explosion of the Space Shuttle Discovery and the deaths of astronaut Ellison Onizuka and six others. I had once dreamed of being an astronaut; months earlier Onizuka spoke at an assembly, inspiring me to follow through on one childhood dream of being a fighter pilot. Another generation would call September 11, 2001, their defining moment.

While often tragic, these moments can also be attached to celebrations: a first kiss, a graduation ceremony, or a wedding day. One aspect of defining moments is you remember them like they happened yesterday. Right then, I was in the midst of one. As Lisa and I drove home from Waikiki, I called Ralph, asking if I could stop and see him. After dropping Lisa off at home, I headed to the office. Once with Ralph, I asked two important questions I needed answers to before I said, “Yes” to the new pastorate.

“Ralph, I need to know: Why wouldn’t you want to send me to Honolulu? Why all the way out to Waialeale (a thirty-minute drive from downtown Honolulu)?”

The population of O’ahu was close to a million, with most people concentrated in Honolulu or surrounding suburbs. My logic: send me where the most people live. If we planted a new church in urban Honolulu instead of taking over a

fifteen-year-old church a half hour away, we might be able to achieve similar results.

“I thought about that,” he replied. “But I recall Pastor Jack Hayford moving out to the valley in Southern California and although the church was located farther away from downtown L.A., the growth came to them (Church on the Way in Van Nuys). Younger families began buying homes further away from the city and his church serves people of those growing suburbs. I see the same happening for you.”

With pain on his face and softness in his eyes, he said, “You are my son.”

Although fully developed, the next few phases of home developments occurred west and north of Waialeale. When I asked a Realtor friend for demographics, he said 150,000 people lived within a three-mile radius! The potential for a great harvest was huge.

“You know the students who were once in your ministry?” Ralph said. “One day they’re going to get married and they’ll move out to your end. That’s the most likely place that they can afford. They’ll start coming to your church and begin raising their families there.”

That's exactly what happened.

The next question was the toughest. I didn't want to disrespect Ralph, but I needed to settle this. I shuddered before asking it. Finally, I said, "Are you trying to graciously get rid of me to make it a perceived win-win? Actually, I guess what I'm really trying to ask is . . . are you trying to make room for your son, Carl?" He looked at me and his face reddened. I wasn't sure if I had upset him. With pain on his face and softness in his eyes, he said, "You are my son."

Wow. That was a defining moment. I wanted to jump out of my chair and hug him and tell him, "Yes! Yes! I am your son and you are my father. You only want the best for me, don't you? Yes, you do!" But of course, I didn't.

I don't fully recall what happened next, but I do know I was emotional. After composing ourselves, we began planning my exit. I only had two weeks before my first service in Waikale. We had no time to lose.



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

Think of a defining moment in your life. Not necessarily one tied to a national news event or global tragedy, but

something that affected your life personally and professionally. How has it helped shape your destiny? Reflect and write a paragraph or two on why this moment meant so much to you, how it affected your outlook at the time, and how it is shaping your goals for the future.

CHAPTER 7

IT'S SMALLER THAN YOU THINK

SIZING UP YOUR CHALLENGE WITH FRESH PERSPECTIVE

“Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.” —1 Corinthians 9:26

Looking back, I can say the fear of failure loomed in my mind. I wanted the new church to grow larger than my youth ministry. While it may sound vain, I knew there was an influential church in me; I believed God had equipped me to lead something greater. Under Pastor Ralph's leadership, I had seen the possibilities of shepherding a large flock and reaching thousands for Christ. It's not prideful to I say that I expected to lead more people. Yet I also

feared not reaching my potential. What if they don't like me? What if people aren't willing to be led by a young pastor? What if the church doesn't grow?

It didn't take long to realize what would help me overcome this nonsense—faith in God's calling. Yet, I needed to reconcile in my heart if I could pastor a church of less than a hundred for the rest of my life. It took some soul-searching, but I resolved to God and myself, "Yes, I can and will, if that's what the future holds."

IT IS WHAT IT IS

Pastors across the globe who are faithful are my heroes. I never judge them by the size of their church. Why? Because I don't appreciate being judged myself. Imagine if a pecking order exists, where God ranks the pastor of a large church higher than the pastor of a small one. The Pound-for-Pound principle is a reminder that it's not the size of a church, a business, or a boxer, that matters. It is whether you are making a difference.

Not everyone has been given the same tools or opportunities. Not all can attend seminary or Bible college or attain other advantages. Again, the servants in Jesus's parable received talents "according to what he was capable of." Our "talents" will never be equal.

You can't change your starting point. As a kid, did you ever wish your parents were rich? Okay, maybe I'm the only one. The point I'm making is that no one can change their biological parents or how much talent they've been given. What you get is what you've got, whether one, two, or five talents. Every one of Christ's followers will be rewarded and disciplined for what we do, regardless. It is what it is.

You can't change your starting point.

I have already talked about numbers in ministry. They don't reflect everything, but they do measure growth. Other factors can reflect growth, such as the congregation's spiritual maturity. We examine the "condition of our flocks" based on their biblical knowledge and prayer life. We also measure their relational maturity—their ability to get along with one another. For me, a big indicator of spiritual growth is how they are doing in witnessing to non-believers and whether they take the Great Commission seriously.

The truth of the matter is a mature believer in Jesus Christ is doing "all of the above." They're in the Word, discipling other believers, praying, sharing their faith, and leading (or

at least attempting to lead) others to Jesus. So if a church is healthy, there should be growth.

MEDIOCRITY IS NEVER THE GOAL

When people think about venturing out on their own, they don't stand there like a superhero and declare, "When I get my chance and God gives me a shot, I will strive to become . . . (drum roll, please) mediocre!" No one goes to college believing they will be terrible at meeting their aspirations. When someone starts a family, who plans to raise rebellious children or cheat on their spouse? Failure, let alone mediocrity, is never the goal.

So, let's eliminate failure from this discussion. But we should address "mediocrity." *Webster's Dictionary* defines the word as an adjective: "Of moderate or low quality, value, ability, or performance: ordinary, so-so."

Who wants to be described as mediocre? It gives off the air of a faithless individual—the slacker in the parable who buried his talent. He wasn't mediocre because he was given less. He didn't receive two or five talents, but he had *something*.

Even so, let me take creative license and look at the result of burying his talent. Why would someone bury what he's been given despite his master's clear instructions? Maybe

he thought, "One talent? If that's what you think I'm capable of, then why try? I'll give you what you expect."

We also see some fear and misconceptions of the master's wishes. I've faced this on several occasions. I've had leaders basically tell me, "I wasn't clear about your instructions, so I did nothing." No asking for clarification, yet blaming me for their faithlessness? My response was something like: "With that attitude and perception, your place on the team is an NFL." That stands for "Not For Long."

Like the man with one talent, those are diversionary tactics and lame excuses. But what was the man in the parable thinking? I think he was content to be average. Average describes something or someone who is common or ordinary. Which is where the problem lies.

VISION

There is a shortage of a crucial commodity in the world today: vision. One reason we lack vision is that we sometimes succumb to being average and then feeling contented.

My personal opinion is that most of us start out with high hopes and aspirations. But when our plans do not materialize, we dumb down our vision. You may not be where you expected to be in this stage of life and are afraid to *dream of what could be*. Your marriage may not be what you want it

to be, and after years of trying to change, the temptation is to settle for less—mediocrity.

There is a shortage of one of the most important and crucial commodities in the world today: vision.

Even more tragic is seeing others who started out wanting to be extraordinary but convincing themselves they were called to be average. We sometimes use tired clichés: “Oh, I guess it’s not meant to be,” or, “I’m not super-gifted so that must not be for me.” Some pastors have less confidence today than when they first started off—feeling more confident in their ability to lead a church in their first two years than in year eight, nine, or ten. Well, friend, do not believe you are called to be average. You are a child of the King! The Pound-for-Pound principle is all about becoming the best you can be, no matter where you are or what you do.

SOURCES OF MEDIOCRITY

Let us expose two sources of mediocrity: The first is culture; the other is conformity. Now, in many circles,

conformity is viewed as good. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit commands us through Paul the apostle: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2). But the definition I want to run with in terms of conformity has to do with someone who blends into uniformity.

In Japan, a country I love, a cultural axiom keeps many mired in mediocrity: “The nail that stands out gets pounded down.” Can you imagine how this idea affects people who want to rise above? However, ride the trains or go to places where young people hang out and you’ll see those who stand out. They dress with flair, apparently okay with being a nail. It’s not conformist behavior.

For years, people have said it is impossible to build a growing church in Japan. It’s not true. Some friends moved there despite the statistics that give it a reputation as a “graveyard for missionaries.” Against such well-intentioned opinions, they now pastor one of Tokyo’s most vibrant and influential churches. Attendance exceeds several thousand and the average age is twenty-five! My friend said they decided to not receive pessimistic reports and were naïve enough to pull it off!

When I was young, I struggled with conformity. A prime example is when I was eleven. The University of Hawai'i at Hilo won the 1977-78 NAIA championship. Our elementary school hosted two of their stars, Jay "The Bird" Bartholomew and Bill O'Rear. A huge hoops fan, I liked O'Rear because he was small and could handle the ball like Houdini with a deck of cards. During our assembly, Bill asked for two volunteers. Friends "volunteered" me and another boy. He was taller, smoother, and far more popular.

For years, people have said it is impossible to build a growing and prevailing church in Japan. It's not true.

As Bill called us up, the kids cheered. I was proud to represent my friends' hopes. Bill showed us a drill that had us face one another and bend over at a slight angle, hands behind our back. When he dropped the ball, we were to wait for the third bounce and then grab it. The first to do it would be the winner. Two out of three and we would be champion of the universe. With my fast twitch forearm and shoulder muscles, and quick hands, I won the first

round. He took the second. Suspense rose. Every guy who understood playground politics knew supremacy hung in the balance. But suddenly the crowd started chanting my opponent's name! Any voices supporting me got drowned out. I immediately started rationalizing not giving it my all.

"I'm not supposed to win," I thought. "I'm not expected to win, nor do I want to win." So I conformed and intentionally gave away the final round before congratulating him and acting like that's how it was supposed to be. Pity.

**I always wanted to understand the
"why" of a of a decision so I could fully
support the how."**

In retrospect, I thought it best if I met expectations. I know this is sixth-grade stuff, but don't we do this as adults—sell ourselves short because we are afraid of sticking out? If I continued with such faulty thinking, our church would likely not be in the position we are in today. Conformity keeps us dreaming small, holding us back from what God wants us to be.

Hawaiian culture is a bit like Japan's. We tend to want to blend in so we don't stick out. Perhaps that's true in your

context. Something in our psyche tells us we don't deserve success, so we "dumb down" our dreams. That's why prevailing and breaking away from the pack brings criticism—and freedom.

As a boy, I used to break toys on Christmas so I could inspect their workings. I had no idea how to reassemble them, but I enjoyed trying to figure out how they worked. I carried this into adulthood. While on staff at HCKB, if I didn't understand a decision, I asked about it. Near the end of my time, we reorganized the staff and church structure. I respectfully asked why it was being done a certain way and voiced another option. I understood it wasn't the direction the senior staff wanted. In that instance (and a few others), I could tell some peers were irritated. I spotted a few rolling their eyes, thinking, *There he goes again.*

My pushback never reached a rebellious level, but I wanted to understand the "why" of a decision so I could support the "how." I understood biblical authority and if push came to shove—even if I didn't understand the why—I carried out the leaders' vision. Even if I didn't agree with the decision, at least I knew the reasoning behind it and could take "ownership." Had I simply succumbed to peer pressure and conformed without questioning anything, I'm not sure how

things would have turned out for Lisa and me. It pays to ask questions.



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

How have fear of failure, fear of disappointment, or fear of opposition held you back from instituting a visionary plan for growth of your business, church, or organization? As a leader, what are three steps you can take in the next three weeks to instill your vision in those who follow you?

It may be time to reawaken childhood dreams. List two overriding goals from younger years and what you can do to make them come true in the future.

CHAPTER 8

THE CULTURE OF CONTENDERS

CREATED BY DEFAULT OR DESIGN?

“Everywhere we go, people breathe in the exquisite fragrance. Because of Christ, we give off a sweet scent rising to God, which is recognized by those on the way of salvation—an aroma redolent with life.” —2 Corinthians 2:15–16 MSG

People come from all over the world to experience Hawai'i and the wonder of God's creation. Of all the beautiful places, it seems God placed His special favor in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, saying on the day of creation, “Want to see something amazing? Watch this!” And voila! Hawai'i!

If you haven't visited Hawai'i, I hope you've been able to talk to someone who has vacationed here. They surely told you about the white sandy beaches and crystal-blue surf of the North Shore, the lush vegetation of Kaua'i, or the volcanoes of the Big Island. But I'm guessing they also eventually talked about the people. Our island culture makes a big impact, and it is the people who perpetuate it. Take away the *'olelo*, or the language of the indigenous people, and it would disappear. Hawaiian culture is characterized by two other key words. There is *'ohana*, or family. *Hanai* (adoption) refers to the Hawaiians welcoming a non-blood-related person into their family. Doesn't it make you want to immerse yourself in our culture?

Whether of Hawaiian ethnicity or not, we believe in the strong value of 'ohana.

Because I came from an identifiable culture of church at Hope Chapel Kaneohe Bay, I knew what kind of culture we wanted at Hope Chapel West O'ahu (now Inspire). We also knew what kind of culture we didn't want.

With culture, definition is key: *Culture is the underlying, overarching environment that shapes mores and values, which in turn determines its success.* This heavily influences fruitfulness, whether a family, a sports team, or other groups of people. And according to my friend, leadership guru Sam Chand, it's the way we do things here.

When I think of great sports teams, the Green Bay Packers of the 1960s and '70s come to mind. Their coach, Vince Lombardi, has been venerated as a sage of leadership. Or, the Boston Celtics of the 1950s and 1960s. Coach Red Auerbach demanded older players mentor younger players, creating a culture that translated into eight consecutive titles. John Wooden coached UCLA to ten NCAA men's basketball titles. Wooden has been quoted as saying that he never had to yell in a game because he did all that in practice.

You either create the kind of culture you want, or—by default—it will be created for you.

The first thing to notice about these teams is that they all had a culture of “winning.” It wasn't just talent. You can

have all the talented and gifted people in the world, but if they aren't working together, it goes to waste. Legendary baseball coach Casey Stengel once said, "It's easy to get good players. It's getting them to play together that's the hard part!"

In all of these examples, the largest contributing factor to their success was their coaches. Each one mentioned above took personal responsibility for their team's culture. A team with a healthy, clearly-stated, and diligently pursued culture is likely to win its share of games (and titles).

CREATE THE CULTURE, OR IT WILL BE CREATED FOR YOU

Create the kind of culture you want, or—by default—a culture will be created for you. If you do not intentionally create a culture, players will haphazardly create one. Abdicate this essential duty and you forfeit a powerful leadership tool. However, if you intentionally set a healthy culture, your team will thrive.

So, what kind of culture do *you* have? Do you like what you see? Or you are irritated? Take responsibility and launch the process of becoming a "cultural architect." The obvious person to assume this role is the leader of any church, business, or organization.

However, culture can also be shaped by those not at the top. Those on our team who have joined us through the years learn the culture of Inspire Church. We don't expect them to figure it out all on their own; we teach it and they observe it in action. Once they understand it, they are expected to contribute and guard and protecting what is dear to our hearts.

IDENTITY CULTURE PROBLEMS

The first thing you must do in order to shape culture is to identify what exists.

It's likely you've walked into an office or even your own home and felt the tension. Maybe everyone seemed on edge. If it's an ongoing thing, chances are that tension has made its way into the office culture. You may shy away from facing it, but eventually you must be honest with yourself and let others be honest with you. If it's unhealthy, call it that. The first step to healing and wholeness is to admit what's wrong and say, "This has got to change."

While I was a youth pastor, one night a couple women from Youth With A Mission visited from their home base on the island of Maui. They appeared to be solid in their faith; one had the gift of prophecy. At the time, I wasn't

familiar with that spiritual gift but wanted to “experiment” with letting the Holy Spirit lead.

So, in my desire to venture into an unknown area, I made a rookie mistake. I gave prophecy-girl the opportunity to address the students with “whatever the Lord has placed on your heart.” With charisma and confidence, she said, “Hmmm. What is the Lord saying? Okay. The Lord is showing me there is a lack of unity in this ministry . . . yadda, yadda, yadda, blah, blah, blah.”

I’m sure you can imagine what I thought: *No, that’s not what I was expecting! Oh, my. You couldn’t be more wrong! Who is this girl and who invited her anyway? You’re an idiot, Michael Kai, for letting her up there!*

**Sometimes the hardest thing to do is
to admit you have a problem.**

After I calmed down later, I realized she was right. I hated to admit it. I can tell you from experience that if an outsider comes into a culture of disunity, you don’t have to be prophetic to discern it. In this case, it took someone from the outside to tell me there was something wrong. I was in it and it had become too familiar.

OWN UP TO CULTURE PROBLEMS

After identifying the problem, the second thing is to *own up to it*. At first, I persisted in denial for a few days. But as I prayed and pondered it, I realized I needed to make some changes. Sometimes that's the hardest part of overcoming a problem.

It's like the story I once heard about a farmer whose bloodhound was wailing on his porch. After several days, neighbor Jimmy Joe comes over to see why. Walking up the stairs, he says, "Why's your bloodhound wailing, Billy Bob?" The old farmer rocks a bit, pulls his pipe from his teeth, and says, "He done got a nail that he's sittin' on." Jimmy Joe replied, "Well, ain't you gonna do sumpin' 'bout it?" Billy Bob replied, "Well, I reckon when he admits he got a problem and gets off the nail, I can. But until then, I can't do nothin' for him!" The moral of the story: Admit you have a problem! I'm sure you're not like that bloodhound. But after admitting the problem and owning up to it comes step three: dealing with it.

DEAL WITH IT

Our problem begged to be addressed. If left untreated, it would have eaten away at the entire youth ministry. The students had the most to lose if we didn't. Again, it's not

enough to know what the problem is. You have to have courage to fight it and change the culture's negative characteristics. It took a while, but we eventually prevailed and saw healthy results.

If your destination for your family, workplace, or ministry is peace, it must go through a toll bridge called conflict.

In my years leading Inspire, I have had my share of occurrences in dealing with the effects of disunity. Before I get into detail, let me first say that I had to learn how to confront people as well as how to push for confrontation to reach a peaceful resolution. If your destination for your family, workplace, or ministry is *peace*, it must go through a toll bridge called *conflict*. *There will be a price to pay for peace*. We all want peace, but sometimes we want *peace at all costs*. And when we do, we tolerate things that we shouldn't.

Avoiding the issue enables those who are directly involved and confuses those on the periphery. I needed to address this. Confrontation and initiating conflict are skills I developed over the years. Now that I have developed them,

I will often initiate conflict to achieve peace. Jesus called us to be peacemakers, not just peacekeepers.

Each case of disunity always involved a specific person as its root source. I could easily identify the results (fruit), but I had to dig deeper and in time would find the source (root) of the problem. And in all three cases, as usual, they involved someone close to me in a working relationship.

In one case, I wondered why we seemed to be barely cruising on a “high seas yacht” built for speed. We weren’t going too fast, despite open sails and favorable winds. We had some momentum and were about to move into our new facility, but everything seemed as slow as molasses.

Then the Holy Spirit revealed through some painful circumstances (which I don’t want to divulge) the problem and its source. After this surfaced, I realized our yacht had been dragging its anchor all along. Everything looked great above the surface; there were smiling faces on deck. But the anchor, a staff member, had dug in.

After the initial shock, I pushed to reveal the conflict. We needed temporary hurt for long-term healing. Everyone paid a price, especially those he led who had to say *aloha* to him. His family suffered financial hardship. I paid a price in

anxiety, a partially ruined vacation (I couldn't stop thinking about it), and in hurt because I didn't see it coming. At my core, I'm a shepherd. I love people and want to be loved. Not surprisingly, when we cut the anchor loose, we flew across the ocean.

Many of us don't like confrontation, but we also don't see peace. Leaders who don't want to (or are unsure how to) confront a situation or a person for fear of fallout sometimes allow things to go unchecked. Then it spreads to other staff members and leaders. It did to us.

I'm glad we addressed it and removed the blinders from those unable or unwilling to stand up to this person. If not trained in healthy confrontation, we can overcompensate and border on abusive. If you're a pastor or in management, it's important to get that skill or find someone on your team who has the authority and respect to do that. Hopefully, confrontation will bring repentance and change, but if not, show disunity the door. When it comes to culture, whatever you tolerate becomes the "new normal."

I've learned that you can confront people when it is still healthy; these can be win-win situations. We've been able to coach our daughters on how to use healthy confrontation,

following Jesus's principles in Matthew 18:15, to improve friendships and speak frankly to coaches and teachers.

MAKING THE CHANGE

If you want to change your culture, start by determining the source of the aggravation. It could be a policy or procedure tripping you up. Or, worse, it could be a person like I mentioned above. Whatever, it must be evaluated. Some struggle to make the changes required once they discover the source (person). It's like someone who discovers they have diabetes, but never returns for another check-up and fails to take their medication or change their diet. This means possibly means possibly losing their eyesight, amputation, and even death. The obvious lesson? Make the change.

**To make the change, sometimes you
have to bid aloha to someone.**

After removing specific aggravators, make it clear what you don't want your culture to be like and eliminate anything that doesn't line up with your conviction. You have to be resolute in your conviction and say, "That will not be a part of who we are." Some changes will be difficult because they may involve releasing people not willing to buy in. It

will be worth it. After you've done the tough work of eliminating, reinstate as you protect and guard your culture. With careful diligence, your organization will elevate!

CREATING WHAT YOU WANT

Without an intentional approach from leadership, culture will settle to the lowest level. But if you have difficulty articulating the kind of culture you want, start by articulating *what you don't want*. That's easy to do. What do you not want your church or organization to be like? After you've come up with a list of what you don't want, list what you do want. Close your eyes and answer this phrase: the church I envision is _____. Simple. I wish I'd started with a clearly defined culture. While I had it in my mind and heart, to document it would have been helpful for everyone. So please don't just make a note to work on this "someday"—start writing your culture statement now. Behind every great team is an esprit de corps and a culture that is articulated, expressed, and taught. Combine these elements and you'll find that a healthy culture will be *caught* by your team. Once a team is unified in a healthy culture, they will naturally produce victories. There's no limit to what God can do with a church, business, or organization in that kind of condition.



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

In two or three sentences, describe the culture of your church, business, or organization. Then, reflect on what you have written. What are two cultural strengths that promote the group's esprit de corps. What are two weaknesses that you need to address? How can you start to do that this week?

CHAPTER 9

YOU GET WHAT YOU GET

DEFINING YOUR PRESENT REALITY

“To accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God.” —Ecclesiastes 5:19

Our daughters, Courtney, Rebekah, and Charis, have a nine-year gap between each, presenting pros and cons. One disadvantage: the oldest doesn't get to mature alongside the youngest. Also, Lisa and I will essentially be raising children for a long, long time. Some of you are thinking, *What? It's a joy and privilege.* Relax. Seriously, we know we have been blessed beyond measure and appreciate each of our daughters' uniqueness.

Years ago our youngest, Charis (pronounced Ka-riss, or *grace* in Greek), bought Rebekah a birthday gift out of her own savings. Pretty impressive for a five-year-old. But Bekah failed to show the appreciation Charis had hoped for. Charis ran to Lisa, crying, “She doesn’t like my gift. Bekah is so mean, Mommy!” Bekah tried to comfort Charis, but our little stick of dynamite wasn’t giving in. Turning from Lisa’s arms, Charis spun and sputtered a phrase that reminds me of the parable of the talents: “Bekah! You get what you get!”

So true, isn’t it?

OUT THE DOOR

The time arrived to notify HCKB of my departure—fast. We needed to get to Waikele within a couple of weekends. Our denomination wanted the public introduction as soon as possible. As a re-plant, it called for a different strategy. I know of church plants whose goal was to raise \$500,000. When we got there, there was \$15,000 in the bank. Back then, I thought that was a lot to work with—though today Lisa reminds me we used it up in two months on advertising and growth strategies.

It wasn’t just money. Normally, it takes a year for interest-gathering meetings and building a core team prior to launch (or relaunch). We had a week. Looking back, that’s

all we needed. The ones the Lord called would come. As Charis would say, “You get what you get!”

That weekend Ralph announced I was leaving for Waikele before bringing me to the platform and commissioning me. I expected to feel more emotion, but Lisa was still going to be working at HCKB, and Rebekah and Courtney would also be there for a while longer.

I would have counted cockroaches if they had shown up.

After the last service, we held a meeting to see who was interested in moving to the new church. About forty people showed up, but those forty were precious. I remember counting them all myself. It didn't matter that only twenty were adults. I would have counted cockroaches if they had shown up.

In Waikele, we held an all-church meeting on a week-night prior to the “anointing” service. About twenty people came. To me, their crossed arms and looks said, “Oh, yeah? We'll wait and see how this young, cocky kid is going to lead us.” In reality, some seemed excited about me coming because of my having worked under

Pastor Ralph. But skeptics in the crowd voiced their concerns.

“How long are you going to be here?” demanded one lady.

“Longer than you,” I thought to myself.

“I don’t want to be treated like a number,” said another.

From the beginning, I faced a level of opposition, which prompted the thought: “Give me a break, people!” Starting out, we had at most sixty people.

PERSPECTIVES

Later, I sat with the divisional superintendent overseeing the transfer, examining finances, ledger, membership log, and bylaws. In addition to the small checking account for operational costs (as I’ve already mentioned), the church had \$15,000 in savings. That was nearly three times my youth group checking account. In my eyes it was a fortune—seed to be planted. And I had plans for it. I was naïve, and in hindsight I’m glad I had no mental barriers for what to do. I pondered the amount, which seemed like a gift and an opportunity to gamble—er, plant seed.

I still couldn’t believe \$15,000 was tucked away for safe-keeping. It seemed like a waste to earn less than 2 percent interest when it could be used for greater purposes. Instead of seeing the need to save for a rainy day or something

down the road,” I thought, “Wow! Here’s our chance to parlay this into something great!”

I may have sounded like a gambler. In Hawai’i, we consider Las Vegas as the “Ninth Island” because so many Hawaiians have been transplanted there, including my parents. We find it easy to place a bet on the table and accept the odds of losing hard-earned money. But when it comes to laying it all on the line for God, we hesitate. Why is that?

When it comes to laying it all on the line for God, we hesitate. Why is that?

My plans may not have been grandiose, but I used the money to purchase advertising and laptops. We also bought two Nextel cell phones; I called them “Next-to-Hell” because of the terrible reception! We secured a spot on a Christian radio station that aired Ralph’s radio broadcast. Hope Chapel’s name and Ralph’s influence brought awareness to the Christian community of a Hope Chapel in West O’ahu. We advertised on the state’s biggest secular radio station, in the local newspaper, the phone book, and a new website, along with placing lots of eye-catching

signage. Coupled with the laptops, most of the money was invested as *seed*.

Keep in mind that we didn't do this thinking it was a magic bullet that would bring a flock of people. Our core team, mixed with the present leadership that eventually warmed to us, didn't sit around twiddling our thumbs. We went door-to-door on prayer walks in the community. We hung door-hangers. We served at the school and in neighboring towns. We needed to water what we had along with what we had planted. All this to say that our fresh perspective enabled us to see things and do things from a new angle that might not have been previously attempted.

THINK YOURSELF CLEAR

There is so much power in the way we see things. We can look at a situation and see one thing while an outsider often sees something totally different. You need to "think yourself clear."

You may be a pastor, a business owner, or a leader of an organization. When you are the one, and no one else is on the horizon, a lot depends on your response. Get some time away with the Lord. Pray for a clear mind and a fresh perspective. Others will have opinions and you'll be tempted

to take a poll to see what they're saying. But what it comes down to is: what is the Lord saying to you?

WHAT YOU HAVE IS ALL HE NEEDS

The way you view things can be the difference between a poverty mentality and having more than you need. My mentor, Pastor Chris Hodges of the well-known Church of the Highlands in Alabama, says the way you view things is the way you do things. And a poverty mentality is characterized by feelings of scarcity and a stingy heart, which can be detrimental to any endeavor.

One of my favorite passages in the Old Testament is the story of Elisha and the widow (2 Kings 4:1–7). In a time of drought and famine in Israel, Elisha, a prophet of Israel, visits a widow. She came crying to him for relief, saying, “My husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves” (v. 1) Keep in mind the Bible gives us no other emotional clues or additional verbal exchange between them.

However, I would imagine that after speaking comfort and showing genuine concern for the widow, he looked at her and spoke in a soothing voice, “Tell me, what do you have left in the house? Do you have anything left in the pantry?” She didn't have to think twice because for the

last few weeks she had taken inventory. When you haven't got much, you end up staring in the cupboards for what doesn't exist.

Like the widow, you might be desperate and feel defeated by your circumstances. Perhaps during the coronavirus pandemic you found yourself staring at the checkbook, asking yourself how to the mortgage or utilities and how many days until it all ran dry. Several minutes went by, but nothing changed and the numbers continued to show you heading for the negative.

A poverty mentality is characterized by feelings of scarcity and an attitude that reflects a stingy heart.

But let's forget the panic of early 2020. Think about the times you've stared out the window, wondering when your wayward son or daughter will return home. Or you may have gazed in the mirror, wondering where all the years have gone and how in the world you and your spouse drifted so far apart.

I can understand if you've quit trying because everywhere you turn can remind you what you lack. You can almost

ignore the checkbook, the mirror, and the view outside. If you don't look, maybe the problem will cease to exist. That's why some pastors don't look at attendance reports or weekly offerings more than once a month. Staff and board meetings serve as an inevitable reminder of what is not taking place rather than what should be happening.

Much like the widow, we can become so defeated by circumstances that we've almost forgotten the oil in the pantry. Something is always better than nothing. One talent is better than none. The oil before the miracle (because a miracle is coming) represents the remaining dreams and resources. Inevitably, as the supply dwindles, so does vision. However, the oil can mean something totally different—depending on how you see it. It can represent what you have, not what you don't have. For the widow, her answer to Elisha's question was the giveaway: "Your servant has nothing there at all . . . except a small jar of olive oil" (v. 2). It would be like you sighing, "All I have is a little . . ."

BEYOND WINEPRESS WALLS

When you are close to a problem, it's tough to see beyond. From a front-row seat, your mind tells you to focus on that instead of seeing what lies beyond. Like Gideon threshing wheat in a winepress (Judges 6), your view is limited. You

can't get ahead because there's no breeze, no wind to carry away the chaff.

The problem with focusing on circumstances is it clouds your vision. You get stifled and weary from the heat. The last place you want to be threshing wheat is in a closed-off, walled-off environment. You may react like Gideon when he said to the Lord's angel: "Where is this God my forefathers told me about? Where is He when we need Him?" Get out of the winepress! Get to higher ground and get a fresh perspective so you can see what is at your feet. What you have is all He needs. Getting yourself up on a high place is much different from placing yourself on a high horse.

By focusing on her problems, she failed to see that what she had left was more than enough for God to use.

IT'S RIGHT UNDER YOUR NOSE

Have you ever misplaced your wallet or keys, and (like me) announced to anyone in earshot, "I can't find it!" only to discover it under your nose? If so, we could be really good friends one day.

The widow overlooked what was right in front of her. Why? She had focused on her grief and inability to care for her sons. Who could blame her? But she failed to see that what she had left was more than enough for God. Read her response again, “Your servant has nothing . . .”

When we started Inspire, I would look at established churches and get frustrated. This continued for several years. I would think, “Man, if we had leaders like that . . .” or, “If we had a video and drama team like that . . .” and dismiss what the Lord had given us. I was focusing on what I did not have so we could make the most of it.

I rarely get to see our University of Hawai’i Warriors football team play on Saturdays because of church. Occasionally, though, I get to a game. I especially remember the era of the team’s great rivalry with the Fresno State Bulldogs from 1997-2011, when they were coached by Pat Hill. A throw-back to a bygone era, Hill didn’t just walk up and down the sideline; he stalked it. His Fu Manchu mustache made him look like a walrus, and his expressive passion alone was worth the price of admission.

The thing about Coach Hill that stood out was a quote that appeared one time in our local newspaper. When a reporter asked Hill if bigger universities sought him

out as a head coach, he responded, “Everyone asks me if the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, wondering if I ever think about moving on to greener pastures, or whatever that is. I figure, ‘Make your own grass green!’”

Make your own grass green.

I had that quote on my office wall for several years. It is burned in my memory. It contains the essence of the parable of the talents. Stop focusing on what you don’t have and look at what you do have. Ultimately, *you get what you get!*

For the widow, it wasn’t as simple as taking what little oil she had and manufacturing more. She needed a man of God from the outside to help her see that what she had was “more than enough” in God’s hands. She needed perspective. God was about to pour out His own special favor and provision on her. He just wanted her to cooperate with Him in the miracle.



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

What kind of shortages are you facing in the post-pandemic environment? List three of the leading factors that are keeping you up at night. Then, name a couple solutions to these problems—alternatives that can help you pivot in the midst of overwhelming pressures and see the possibilities instead of the shortages.

CHAPTER 10

THE ART OF THE START

SMALL STARTS AND HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

“And though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great.” —Job 8:7 ESV

“Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin.” —Zechariah 4:10 NLT

Our first Sunday at Hope Chapel West O’ahu (our name for eight years before becoming Inspire Church) was filled with well-wishers from HCKB—the forty who came and the forty-plus who were already part of the church. I was excited about the opportunity God had entrusted to us. That first sermon is a blur, but I remember gathering the core leadership team, thanking the Lord in prayer, and giving everyone a high five. The families who joined us

from Hope Chapel Kaneʻohe Bay made huge sacrifices to be there.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

My first office was amazing—beautifully furnished with books lining wall-to-wall shelves, food, free Wi-Fi, decent bathrooms, and plate-glass windows overlooking the Waialeale Shopping Center. I'd tell members, "If you want to meet with me, I'll be at my office across the street in Borders bookstore."

**We began small, but we
were thinking big.**

Randy Kimura, the first to commit to help us re-launch, and I had Sony Vaio laptops and those two "Next-to-Hell" cell phones, and the latest Bible software. We were open for business. I continued to run HCKB's youth ministry for three months while Randy (our first full-time employee) handled day-to-day operations. We soon realized that I needed a place to study and somewhere for team meetings. God always provided. A good friend owned a cabinet-and-window company and lent me space (rent-free) in the mezzanine above his offices. He provided a desk and I bought a

decent chair from OfficeMax and connected a phone line with the church's number. We conducted team meetings, new believers' classes, and youth ministry there. In our first year, we grew to about 250. For the first few years, many who weren't full-time employees received a modest monthly stipend. Others volunteered their time. While starting small, we thought big. Ralph taught me a maximum of 40 percent of a church's income should go to salaries and benefits, so we were careful with our funds. As I look back, I am so thankful for those who sacrificed to lay a foundation. Randy left a career in insurance to become our first employee, and still serves on staff. If I had to do it all over again, Randy is still one of the first people I'd ask to help me.

SMALL STARTS ARE GREAT STARTS

It's so easy to look at a well-running church, ministry, or business, and come up with a plethora of misconceptions. Many look at who we've become and think we've had it easy. On occasion, some call us a "golden child." They see several thousand people but don't know we started off on a wing and a prayer. They see the conferences we host and our presence in the community and think we always had this. Not so. It took seven years to reach a thousand in attendance.

Not many know I struggled to overcome huge insecurities and fear of failure. They didn't see our first conference when we barely mustered up two hundred people to buy tickets. Yet, we had God's favor. I can't explain it, but I believe favor happens when someone is prepared to receive it. I think our diligence made us favorable.

Even so, at first things weren't happening fast enough. It's as if the church was a baby, and when I saw it crawl I would complain, "When are you going to walk?" Ridiculous, huh? As with our daughters, I had to come to the realization that I needed to enjoy every developmental stage.

It doesn't help that I can be very competitive. With that kind of spirit, I knew it would become unhealthy to compare, so instead I learned to admire and emulate. This can be challenging. If insecure or lacking a healthy self-image, we can resort to criticizing others to make ourselves feel better. We can look at a larger church and sneer: "Oh, that church is so into numbers," or, "They don't know how to disciple people." Knowing this, we needed to examine ourselves and focus on reaching our unique potential.

Instead of coveting what other churches had accomplished, I decided to learn from them. I enrolled at Pacific Rim Bible College (now Pacific Rim Christian College),

where classes in leadership and preaching added to the foundation I received at HCKB. I began attending New Hope's leadership practicums too. Instead of being intimidated, I experienced its ethos and learned what makes it tick. I caught two things there: magnitude and excellence. When I say magnitude, I am referring to size of vision. No one had built a church of its size in Hawai'i since the 1800s, when Haili Congregational Church blossomed during the Second Great Awakening.

I don't go anywhere as a critic. There are enough of those sitting in pews.

I don't go anywhere as a critic. There are enough sitting in the pews. I completely believe Christ's words: "For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Matthew 7:2). Even if I attend a workshop or conference which I feel might not be as impacting as I would like, I pray for an open mind and heart, waiting to receive what the Lord wants to download into me.

One of the biggest deterrents to growth can be a pessimistic attitude. If I show up somewhere with arms crossed

and a look on my face that says, “This better be good,” then I need to look out because Proverbs 16:18 says, “Pride goes before destruction.” It irritates me when I see this. A bad attitude is wrong because you bring no honor with you. I’m big on honoring others by paying close attention to them and respecting them, regardless of what they can do for me. Secondly, a “show me” attitude closes you off to the *rhe-ma* (revelation) word God wants to speak to you through someone. I also believe it saddens the Lord when His children aren’t open to learning from others.

ADDITION THROUGH MULTIPLICATION

Values and principles are sometimes better caught than taught. The early years of our development as pastors and leaders were critical. I spent almost a thousand hours in staff and discipleship meetings with Pastor Ralph. Combined with informal discipleship hanging out at Ralph’s pool or working on my car grew my leadership ability and capacity.

Another great thing I learned has been a mindset of multiplication. Discipleship is inherently linked to multiplication. In discipleship you’re learning to follow Jesus’s command to make disciples. Small groups are its main engine. From day one, we used the same small-group system as

Hope Chapel.⁶ Mentioned earlier, MiniChurch is based on Acts 2:42–47 and helps us retain a small church kind of feel. We disciple the church in these weekly meetings, which we call “connect groups.”

In these groups, we have all the elements of the Acts 2 Church: teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, praising God, and prayer. These are the dynamics in which disciples are made. Each MiniChurch reviews the weekend sermon and discusses two questions: “What did the Holy Spirit say to you that applies to your life?” and “What are you going to do with it?” It really is that simple. We’ve learned how multiply leadership, offer godly wisdom, minister to one another, and more. Just as one church “births” another, small groups reproduce into other small groups.

A START IS A START

I might have discounted our start and seen it as weak compared to others. Some launch with hundreds, paid staff, state-of-the-art video, and lighting and sound systems! Or, perhaps they begin as a satellite campus and then slowly sever the umbilical cord. That’s a great start! We intend to plant a few churches that way. These are examples of the five-talent variety.

However, just as there are multiple ways to pastor a church, there is more than one way to plant a church. But if a “start” is small, the odds may seem stacked against you. In the early days of Inspire, some of our guys read *The Prayer of Jabez* by Bruce Wilkinson. Little did we know that 1 Chronicles 4:9–10 would influence us so much.⁷ Jabez’s prayer was a bit over-the-top. He boldly asked God to “bless him indeed.” Many Christians shy away from asking God this, thinking we are remiss or self-centered to ask that. Yet in his book, *Fascinating Stories of Forgotten Lives*, noted pastor Chuck Swindoll said Jabez was asking the Lord for an “uncommon blessing.”⁸ Jabez also asked the Lord to “enlarge his territory;” to make him wealthy and prosperous, “to keep him from harm,” and that he not cause anyone “pain.” This is fascinating. When his mother gave birth, she named him Jabez—the meaning originates from the word “pain.” Imagine if your first name was *Pain*. What would that have done to you? We can agree that his mother gave him a name viewed as a curse, not a blessing.

Talk about a horrible start. However, the last part of verse 10 says, “And God granted his request.” Now isn’t this the underdog of all underdogs? To be able to bounce back from a start like that is noteworthy, to say the least.

Think about it. A guy with one of the Bible's worst names somehow believes it's fine to ask God for an uncommon blessing, wealth, have God's hand on him at all times, and to keep him from causing pain. He is a biblical version of Hollywood's *Rudy*! The only other person who gives Jabez a run for his money is Nabal, whose name means "fool." What was wrong with their mothers?

We wrongly believe we would be remiss or even offensive to the Lord if we asked him to bless us the way Jabez asked.

The difference: one guy is blessed indeed and the other dies prematurely. We've all got a starting point. Don't hate those who had easier starts, because God knows what He's doing and what you're capable of doing.

The Lord loves all kinds of starts. Don't feel guilty if you've had a great one. That's like a kid who grows up as a Christian, but as an adult laments lacking a dramatic conversion experience. What? If you've had a great start, congratulations!

Maybe you were blessed with a slow start. Maybe God knew that the lessons you would glean from this would

encourage and inspire others with similar beginnings. As I look back, I wouldn't trade Inspire's start for anything because we learned so much through it.

REJOICE IN IT

When the people of Israel returned from seventy years of Babylonian captivity, Ezra says they came back to rebuild the Temple. It was magnificent! King Solomon spared no expense. But when Israel began its steady decline, God had had enough. He sent prophet after prophet to warn king after king of their evil ways. All failed to repent.

These men saw the start of the Temple as insignificant, but the Lord rejoiced to see the start of something new.

As a result, God stirred up a sleeping giant, Babylon. God's people were taken into exile—one of the worst times in Israel's history. When the exiles returned from captivity, the younger generation was able to see the original Temple site. Instead of the magnificent center of worship they had heard about, they saw a center of worship reduced to a pile of rubble.

And, when the old-timers realized that the new structure wouldn't come close to its former glory, they were disheartened. Instead of rejoicing over rebuilding, they mourned. Yet the Lord gently sent the prophet Zechariah to encourage them: "Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin" (Zechariah 4:10 NLT).

Despise in Hebrew is translated as to hold as insignificant or in contempt, which gives the idea of something being trampled underfoot.⁹ While these men saw the start of the new Temple as insignificant, the Lord rejoiced over it. If you've had a small, slow, or struggling start, rejoice!

If God saw that second Temple as significant with its small beginning, wouldn't He delight in your church's small beginning? Isn't that amazing? It doesn't matter how big or small, or what size start. The bottom line is you started.

How about you? Have you despised the start you've been given? Ashamed of humble beginnings? If so, I hope you will look at where you are today and find joy in your beginnings.

This is where it begins. Do the very best that you can with what you have been given and you will hear the words,

“Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.” — Matthew 25:23 NKJV



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

If your church or business came from humble beginnings, what advantages can you see from the way you struggled in those early days? Write down three lessons that you might not have learned had you been equipped with plush surroundings, plenty of financial resources, and a staff of seventy-five to a hundred people.

Conversely, if you started with more resources, list three things you have been able to accomplish because of those advantages.

CHAPTER 11

EQUIPPING A CONTENDER

STEWARDING WELL WHAT IS ENTRUSTED TO YOU

“I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.”

—Philippians 3:13–14 NLT

Whenever you start a new church (or relaunch an existing one), people join for different reasons. Some who had attended HCKB lived near the church in Waikele. Initially, they liked not having to make a thirty-minute drive. But when they began to see the possibilities here, they became enthused about being a part of what God was doing.

Aside from geographical reasons, some joined to be a part of something new. What's funny is many had no idea of the commitment that would require. Everyone who came with us got placed into leadership roles. Some led the children's ministry; others served on the set-up team. A few led small groups. It was exciting and laborious, but lots of fun. Though our expansion occurred slowly, I'm convinced personal development was the bigger lesson. People were discovering their gifts and abilities. That's one of the great things about church planting: seeing people filling roles and finding fulfillment in them.

GETTING PEOPLE INVOLVED

I'm guessing what we experienced isn't much different from what you've seen. Most people sincerely want to make a difference wherever they join a church. But many don't think they're gifted enough to do a certain task, or traditional ministries don't grab their interest. They see the worship team and think, "I can't do that." They see parking lot attendants, ushers, greeters, children's ministry workers, or people in hospitality and think, *None of this interests me.*

If new people want to volunteer, how many ushers or greeters are really needed? There are only so many of

those positions to go around. Lots of people tell themselves, *There's got to be more than this! More than just good music and good Bible teaching. Give me something to do. Help me make an impact.*

We were meant to flow like rivers, not store like reservoirs.

I love that! There are only so many classes to take, sermons to podcast, books to read, and worship to listen to. Eventually, there has to be an outlet for all this input. We were meant to flow like rivers, not store like reservoirs! If there's no flow, you become like Israel's Dead Sea—full of deposits but lacking an environment for growth!

If people are growing in their relationship with Jesus and walking in the power of the Spirit, they will arrive at the place of wanting to make a contribution to others' lives. When they find it, this brings glory to God. I'm not putting anyone down who's serving in the church in "obvious" places, like me. I'm talking about discovering areas outside church where people can contribute.

This is where the Church universal must provide outside ministry opportunities that stir people to action. This can

only happen if people are challenged and presented opportunities to minister. A person has holy discontent when there's something either tangible or intangible that is bothering them about their life, work, or ministry. It must receive attention before they either lose fire for it or it grows until it's out of control.

This holy discontent is where the potential lies to do something of significance.¹⁰ I consider this dissatisfaction as evidence of a talent deposit by the Master. Say you're sitting in church one weekend and are stirred by the Spirit through the teaching. The pastor speaks of your God-given calling and destiny. You get excited because there's a seed lying dormant inside, but circumstances have prevented you from fulfilling your God-given potential.

But now the preacher has just messed with your life! As I like to say, he has just *put his finger in your poi*.¹¹ He stuck his nose in your business. You have to do something. The question is: *How will you respond?* Walk out and ignore it? Or, will you entertain the thought of what *could be* if you started something?

There are myriads of people with untapped potential sitting in churches. Of course, every church has people who want simply to be “fed” as they check off their Sunday

obligation and move on. They don't eat much during the week, so their main meal is on Sunday. I call them anorexic sheep who are weak and feeble.

My philosophy is to let them sit for a while. If you're a pastor, you might get frustrated feeling as if you are entertaining them. Let them be if they aren't ready to get involved yet. They will either get tired of you challenging them to "do something" and leave, or they will be converted to your culture and make a difference.

HOLD PEOPLE LOOSELY

Inevitably, some people leave churches. We didn't get a lot of transfer growth in the beginning, but over time we've seen our share. I know pastors who frown on this, but it happens. People have all kinds of reasons for changing churches. There is proximity, as I mentioned earlier. Sometimes, saving time and money just make sense. I'll often recommend a church whose pastor I am friends with and encourage them to go and make the same, if not greater, contribution there.

People may leave a church because their kids love the children's ministry at another place, or their friends attend there. Others transfer when they hear the "shepherd's" voice with more clarity at another church. When this happens

and people leave (some you'll be glad to see go!), deal with it. At the end of the day, we can't satisfy everyone, and neither can your pastor and church.

Not everyone who comes to our church is meant to stay. When it comes to hearing the voice of the Shepherd through a shepherd, I learned a great lesson from Pastor Ralph. I was having difficulties with a woman; after several confrontations, I could see she wasn't going to listen. When I told Ralph, he suggested, "Tell her, with her husband present: 'Jesus said the sheep hear the Shepherd's voice.'" Because you can't hear the Shepherd in me, you have disqualified me as your shepherd. I'm sure that there is another in whom you will hear His voice. Let me help you find that pastor."

**We can't satisfy everyone, and
neither can your pastor and church.**

This lesson taught me to hold people loosely. Lisa and I have learned we don't own anyone. People are free to come and go. My feelings get hurt if certain people leave, particularly if they depart with unsettled issues. But this outlook allows me to help them find a congregation where they can

belong. Of course, staff members are a different story. I've had a few occasions where a staff member or two were recruited to join another church without me knowing it, and I was disappointed.

When it comes to staff members, I believe if you treat people well and they know you genuinely care for them, they will stay. If you compensate them honorably and have a vision inspiring enough to follow, they will flourish.

Sure, there are exceptions. When a person believes the Lord has called them to go to another place, who can argue with that? I want God's best for everyone. If God's best for someone is to go elsewhere, I believe God is still looking out for my church's interests. This kind of outlook often turns into a win-win situation for everyone.

HIDDEN AGENDAS

There are a few things to consider with new people. Transfers from another church may bring along discontent, frustration, or unresolved issues. There are times when people are frustrated with my leadership or another pastor's. If this comes to my attention, two things need to occur: a conversation and an eventual conclusion. When dealing with those who leave other churches because of

dissatisfaction, you need to use careful consideration and gain discernment from God.

When you're young, some will mistakenly think they can influence you. Caution! They may be trying to gain an audience or favor, which can be demonic. The late Dr. Paul Risser—former president of The Foursquare Church—once told me, “God has a plan for your church just like He has a plan for your life. But you need to know the enemy also has a plan for your life and your church. So, sometimes he will plant people there, who don't realize that they're being used this way, to distract you from what the Lord is trying to do through your church and through you.”

STEWARDED PEOPLE

First-time decision makers for Christ are the best kind of growth. I also love people who return to God after backsliding. We contend for salvations every weekend, meaning regular altar calls. We want our people to expect them, so if they bring a friend, family member, or coworker with whom they've been sharing their faith, there's a chance that person will respond after hearing a clear, straightforward presentation of the gospel. This is a stewardship issue. If you're not giving altar calls, you're not stewarding your talents.

Stewarding people is something to be taken seriously. We can lose precious people if we do not shepherd or steward them well. Every person must be important to us. For this cause, I feel a strong responsibility and burden to give a clear altar call and that we follow up to ensure they grow deep roots.

If you're not giving altar calls, you're not stewarding your talents well.

In the early days, we didn't focus on this as much. Today, when someone surrenders their life to Christ, we have them stand and repeat the prayer of salvation aloud. If they make a stand in a place as safe as church, they'll be able to stand firm amid persecution, which we know will come. After that, we walk them out to the lobby where our Connect Pastor explains what just took place, review their next steps, and hands them a Bible. We have counselors there to pray with them and then we will assign another person to walk them through their next steps.

I want to make sure we are doing all we can to steward these new believers. I don't take their decision lightly. In the

parable in Luke 8:4–15, the farmer scattered seed on four types of soil.

Seeds that fell on the footpath lay exposed, got trampled on, and later were eaten by birds. Jesus explained they represented those who heard the message and understood it, but the devil snatched away the Word planted in their hearts.

Other seeds fell amongst rocks, which withered and died because there wasn't enough moisture for nourishment. Jesus noted such people received the message with great joy, but after a while—because they didn't allow their roots to grow deep—fell away amid temptation. They too withered and faded away. I have seen this happen too many times. When people don't get grounded in the Word and aren't connected to a church family, they fall away. Tragic.

Jesus outlined how other seed fell among thorns, meaning the world's cares and riches. They overpowered the message and crowded out any chance of growth. They represent people who hear the Word and receive it, but succumb to their old nature. They satisfy themselves on the world's priorities: having more until “more” is their undoing.

The last type of seed fell on fertile soil. It had the best chance of survival and more. Jesus said people who received

the Word of God with right hearts, clung to it, and patiently grew produced a huge harvest!

According to this parable, only a fraction of those who hear the Word *receive* the Word. If we consider the parable of the wheat and weeds in Matthew 13:24–30, where the enemy planted weeds among the wheat, you can see why I think every church should have a renewed emphasis to keep those we reach. We must contend to do the best we can with those the Lord has entrusted to us.



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

What is your retention plan? Whether new converts or newcomers to your church, what steps do you follow to encourage them in their faith or enlist them in congregational life? If you have none, when can you gather with leaders to develop one?

The same is true if you run a business or other organization. You need a plan in place to help your team members grow, develop their gifts and talents, and think beyond the confines of urgent, day-to-day demands. Identify two or three workshops that can help this happen.

CHAPTER 12

HARDWORKING HYBRIDS

BEING THE BEST AT WHO YOU WERE CALLED TO BE

*“The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage,
But everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.”*

—Proverbs 21:5 NASB

*“Careful planning puts you ahead in the long run;
hurry and scurry puts you further behind.”*

—Proverbs 21:5 MSG

At Inspire, we worked especially hard—the essential element to any thriving church—after our launch. Leading a church of any size is a challenge. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we set out to build a great church. To me, a great church is where people make to follow Christ every week

and unity exists between believers. It's where people are set free and healed, and the power of the Spirit is evident. In my mind, it's also naturally supernatural (not weird).

**Whatever your occupation or
whatever season you are in, don't wait
for the "when's."**

In addition, disciples are being developed and people are discovering gifts, rekindling dreams, and finding their purpose and destiny. Children and teens enjoy church, not endure it. Families become stronger, single parents find strength and remarry, and divorced couples find hope. Worship is amazing too. In this kind of church, believers join together in small groups to pray for, encourage, and exhort one another. The End-Times Harvest is of the highest priority, so a great church plants others. There is life!

We set out to build a great church. We didn't sit back and say, "When we get bigger, then we will. . . ." No. We said, "Let's be the best in our weight class!" Whatever your occupation or season, don't wait for the "when's." You know, "When we make it" or, "When we have more

money” or, “When we get out of this place.” If it’s a good thing, be it now.

EXPONENTIAL GROWTH FOLLOWS

In the parable of the talents, the master says, “You were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things” (Matthew 25:21 NKJV). From the beginning we were determined to be faithful with the few God entrusted to us. Exponential growth follows incremental growth. Mapping out our long-term growth spans going from sixty to several thousand. From a bird’s-eye view, that looks like we were on the fast track. Not really. We went from eighty in 2001 to a thousand at the beginning of 2009, an average of 15 to 20 percent annual growth. All the while, we worked hard and were diligent to do our best.

A review of the monthly charts shows growth, plateaus, dips, another plateau, a sharp increase (Easter or Christmas), another plateau, and another dip. This is what incremental growth means. Proverbs 21:5 says, “Steady plodding brings prosperity” (TLB). We strived to add more small groups every quarter, see more salvations every weekend, and get better at what we did. If we improved in every area, we were headed in the right direction. Now, Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh would have said, “Oh, we’re just plodding along.”

It was more like a prevailing plodding. Consistency set the stage for God to bring EXPONENTIAL growth, which we are still experiencing!

At times we were tempted to get off this path. “This church” or “that conference” would offer an enticing formula. There were many different kinds of “wineskins.” But after experimenting with a few, we decided we were best at who we were. Certain core values make a Hope Chapel and we never strayed from that. But as we grew, we began adding new components to our DNA.

HYBRID . . . IT'S A GOOD THING

People criticize what they don't understand. I normally hesitate to share some of the opposition we encountered, but I believe doing so may help someone. In the early years, among pastoral criticisms I heard was: “You're not a real Hope Chapel.” So I would ask, “Tell me, what's a Hope Chapel to you?” Funny, but they couldn't put their finger on it. Some would say, “Oh, you're a hybrid.”

Hybrid used to describe the offspring of differing animal breeds or combining separate plants in horticulture. Today, many associate hybrid with a car running on a mix of electricity and gasoline. At first, hybrid vehicles were unusual

and the object of much criticism, so being called a “hybrid church” made me bristle.

But I thought about it. If being a hybrid meant I brought home principles and inspiration that resonated with me from conferences abroad or churches in Hawai’i—then yes, we are a hybrid. If it meant we already had the DNA of an Acts Chapter Two church, and we added some things or got better by studying other ministries, then guilty as charged: hybrid! If we read books and implemented some principles which helped our church, then like the movie *The Elephant Man*,¹² I am a hybrid! If I had a hunger to see things I had never seen before and catch the culture of ministries beyond ours—then hybrid me!

Did we have the foundation of an Acts Chapter Two church and multiply disciples and plant churches? You bet. Do we enjoy Hillsong’s songwriting and emulate their worship style? Definitely! Did the excellence of other influential churches make an impression on us? What do you think? If that’s what it means to be a hybrid, then I wholeheartedly admit it.

STRETCH AND FLEX

Yes, we were a hybrid. Today, I like to think we are a unique brand. We took the best of what we’ve seen and

added it to who we were. I call it stewardship. We are not content to be the same church until Christ returns. We contend to keep the same values as we continue to morph into what we sense the Lord calling us to be. When it comes to remaining flexible, I love what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:22: “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.” I love his heart! There is a humility in adapting to change. We must be willing to flex.

**We have taken the best of what we
have seen and added it to who we
already were.**

I have a saying that I’ve adjusted over time about this: “Blessed are the flexible, for they will never be bent out of shape.” This applies to both our attitudes and the church. We have to keep the “wineskin” of our lives and church flexible. If we are pliable and moldable, we can become anything that we “might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22).

If we believe we are called to be fishers of men and not keepers of the aquarium, then remember: when we remain inflexible, we cannot retain new ideas. When our wineskin cannot adjust, we can lose our effectiveness. Flexibility

allows us to stretch to discover our “new normal” and work from a new stage of development. With flexibility, we can stretch to work hard and take on more. During the COVID-19 crisis, we had to make sure we could pivot with a few weeks’ notice and go from a church that met in buildings to 100 percent online. Talk about being flexible!

HARD WORK

Lisa and I were at a fundraiser one night. A large donor attended—a man who stood six-foot-five and looked like he weighed 350 pounds. The emcee invited Ma’ake Kemoeatu to the podium. A graduate of Kahuku High School in O’ahu, Ma’ake later played at University of Utah and a decade of pro football before retiring. His brother, Chris, was a two-time Super Bowl winner with the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Interestingly enough, Kahuku High School was featured in USA Today back in 2004 as producing the most NFL players per capita of any school.¹³ This is an amazing feat considering Kahuku High is located in a rural community, with only about 1,000 students in grades 9–12.

Then still playing pro ball, the emcee asked Ma’ake about his dedication to succeed as a walk-on in college and an undrafted free agent. His reply: “Hard work beats out talent when talent doesn’t work hard.” That’s simple and yet

profound. If you work hard, you can outperform one with all the talent in the world. That's steady plodding!

The steady plodding of our ministry wasn't all about services. We had people to care for, small groups to multiply, people to disciple, and leaders to train. We had great people with talent, but not in abundance. But people with great hearts can accomplish anything. Regardless of skill, with a heart to serve and other-centeredness, people are teachable. With their teachability, we were able to take what they had been given and multiply their talents while engaging their passions.

For those who worshipped with all of their heart on Sundays, we'd find out if they had a halfway-decent voice. If so, we'd ask them to consider joining the worship team. We weren't necessarily looking for the most anointed, amazing vocalists (although we were surely interested). We wanted those with the heart of a worshiper who would help lead others into God's presence. If we waited for a five-talent worship leader to appear, we'd have waited for a long time!

BEATS, RHYTHMS, AND SEASONS

I love music: worship music, R&B, and Top 40. I love hearing the rhythm of a new song or the beat of an old one.

And for a semi-white (the Italian side), Asian, Hawaiian boy, I can dance too.

In life and ministry, I've had to constantly discover and adjust my rhythm. Finding it in ministry is important. If we aren't in rhythm, we have to check the beat. Too fast? Too slow? Am I weary because I haven't found the right rhythm? I've heard it said, "Don't confuse the rhythm of a beat with a groove. The beat stays the same, but the groove is always changing." Therefore, the beat is like a metronome that keeps musicians in time with the song. You control the beat to how fast or slow you want to go. It's constant; it doesn't change unless you change it. You set the beat. As the senior pastor, I can set the beat. If I'm in tune with what the Spirit is doing, we can settle into a rhythm.

**You have the control of setting the
beat to how fast or slow you want to
go.**

The church has a rhythm to it. Have you found yours, or is it erratic? Having problems keeping pace with the rhythm? Adjust the beat. A great thing we discovered was the rhythm of our church and how we respond; we liken

that to a “season.” We have different seasons in church life that I have adapted from a close friend, Pastor Roger Archer of Puyallup, Washington.

IGNITE, GROWTH, COMPRESSION, REGROUP

The first season, from August to December, is called Ignite. After summer, the rhythm of people getting back to school, ending vacations, and families moving to O’ahu is like a car’s engine getting ignited by the spark plugs. It translates to growing attendance and increased conversions. We groove to that rhythm, including launching our fiscal year in August.

From January until Easter is called Growth. We see evangelistic growth. People are thinking in late December about New Year’s resolutions and turning over a new leaf, which translates into going to church. This means numerous opportunities to lead others to Christ. We experience a sharp increase in salvations during this season.

The third season is called Compression. It’s like a flour sifter. My grandmother taught me to use a sifter to make pie crust. That included constantly slapping the sides while sifting the flour to shake flour loose from the sifter’s wall. Compression is the shortest season, only lasting from

Easter until the first of June. It's when you discover who will remain after an exciting Easter weekend. It's as though a sifting occurs during this time.

This leads to the final season from June to July: Regroup. This is when many go on vacation, so we reset the metronome to a slower beat, downshifting and cruising in the slow lane. This allows the church to rest and staff to take vacation so everyone can regroup and get ready for Ignite again.

Hard work, consistency, prevailing plodding—these are the keys to building a strong foundation.

One important thing: we don't do the same activities in every season. Most of our evangelistic outreaches take place during Ignite. The seed takes a while to grow and will come to fruition during Growth, when the harvest is heaviest. We never tell our people to stop sharing their faith, but outreach events are heaviest in Ignite. Additionally, during Growth, we place a stronger emphasis on discipleship courses and classes—although we offer them year-round. Hard work, consistency, and

prevailing plodding are key to building a strong foundation of incremental growth. Find a rhythm that can sustain you for the long haul.

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

Ever wonder why pastors and other leaders generally work so hard? Is it for a blessing? Or are we just blessed? There are those who feel God sovereignly chooses to bless whom and what He so desires. I believe that. We have seen it happen in business and ministry. God's hand seems to prosper and bless someone, and it looks like it came on a silver platter.

However, I feel that sentiment is incomplete. From my vantage point, the Lord blesses those who are faithful to Him. Second Chronicles 16:9 says, "For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His" (NASB). God is searching to bless those with fully committed hearts. This means being committed to "the things of God"—what He has given and entrusted to us. If we are faithful, He seeks us out the faithful to strengthen them.

Faith and works go hand in hand. We are colaborers with Christ. His blessings don't negate our action, but neither do we earn His blessings. When our lives are

fully His we can understand that we are indeed blessed to be a blessing.

Incremental growth is a great blessing. Steady plodding brings great results. I'm not guaranteeing your church will double; that's up to God. But I am sure that preparing faithfully sets the stage for exponential growth. If it arrives, be ready for it. Because you never know when growth will turn in your favor!



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

Like the author, have you had to struggle to establish your church or business? List three benefits that came from slow, steady plodding.

At the same time, have you grown too contented with little or no growth over the years? Write out three goals you have for the future. After each, name a small step you can take to help those become a reality.

CHAPTER 13

BRING IT!

YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIGHT

“Well, my brothers and sisters, let’s summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you.”

—1 Corinthians 14:26 NLT

Within our first year, the Lord gave me a strategy and a philosophy of ministry from Acts. Every church-planter and pastor knows that Acts 2:42–47 is the foundational model for the New Testament church:

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and

signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. — Acts 2:42–47

While well known, it's beneficial to closely examine this passage. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told His faithful followers (about 120) to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). That's what they did—prayed and waited for the promise to be fulfilled. On the Day of Pentecost (a Jewish holiday), while the 120 were in the Upper Room praying, the Holy Spirit suddenly filled them. Energized, they poured out into the streets of Jerusalem, praising God in languages they had never learned. Yet pilgrims from far-off lands there to celebrate Pentecost understood them!

In a brief time, the Church multiplied as believers interacted with God like never before. In Old Testament days, the third person of the Trinity (the Holy Spirit) would “come upon” a favored person and endow them with supernatural power. Now, believers were filled with the Holy Spirit from the inside. The Church exploded with supernatural power and exponential impact. The rest is history. Acts 2:42–47 is the record of that and continues to be the blueprint for church-building.

The Church multiplied greatly as the apostles and believers interacted with God like never before.

We can gather eight things from this passage:

1. *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.* This is discipleship. Followers became disciples of Christ through the apostles' teaching.

2. *And to fellowship.* They interacted on an intimate and spiritual level as brothers and sisters of Jesus.

3. *To the breaking of bread.* They celebrated Communion together as the Lord commanded in Luke 22:19, and confirmed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:24.

4. *And prayer.* In Matthew 21:13, Jesus told His disciples that His house would be called “a house of prayer.”

5. *Filled with awe at the many signs and wonders.* They experienced the Spirit’s supernatural power.

6. *All the believers . . . had everything in common . . . to give to anyone in need.* The first church shared and cared for everyone’s welfare.

7. *They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.* These disciples ate, had fun, and were filled God’s joy.

8. *And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.* The church reached the lost.

With this Scripture in mind, I asked the Lord for a mission statement. I felt pressure to craft one because all the books on church growth said we should. Really? Mission, purpose, vision, and value statements . . . were overwhelming! At first, we borrowed a few because I had no idea where to start! But then the Lord gave me one. As a former youth pastor, “acrostic” was my middle name. So, I took the word Acts, and made it ACTS: Attract, Connect, Train, and Send.

Attract is for evangelism. *Connect* involves fellowship and assimilation of converts into the life of the church. *Train*

is another word for equip as in “to equip the saints for the work of ministry” as stated in Ephesians 4:12 (ESV). *Send* refers to those we train, equip, and commission to do what Jesus called us to do: to “make disciples of all nations.”

What excited me about ACTS is the Send element. Most Christians assume that being “sent” means leaving everything behind and becoming a missionary or church-planter. But not everyone is called to this. The Lord impressed on me that we were to help people realize their dreams and achieve their God-given calling. Then they would be “sent” to fulfill His plans.

THE MYTH OF THE 2-PERCENT CALLING

What typically happens in a church is people are often hesitant to move to the next stage of the assimilation process. Many stop at the Attract or Connect stage. This results in fewer people who feel the calling to move through Train into Send. Why are they stuck between Connect, Train, or Send? Because they have a traditional view of what it means to be called and sent by the Lord. Many believe that only those who are pastors or missionaries—roughly 2 percent of the church—fall into the category of those called to be sent. I call this myth the “2-percent calling.”

Most Christians have a clear understanding of God's basic call for believers: to evangelize, honor God, and cultivate their relationship with Him and others. But ask the average Christian about their God-given destiny/calling/purpose and I venture to guess most don't know, or don't think they qualify for one. My concern lay with the 98 percent who didn't feel they had one, versus the 2 percent who did. To empower the 98 percent, we approached the evangelism-as-simulation-equipping process much differently.

The fact of the matter is that not everyone is called to be an overseas missionary or pastor.

We began with the belief everyone who came to our church was called to be there, and the conviction that we needed to steward well everyone God entrusted to us. We refused to give in to the 2-percent myth. We asked, "What if everyone got connected to a small group or serving? What would it look like if everyone who got connected were trained and equipped each week? But what if everyone who did not feel called to church ministry (with regard to the 2-percent concept just

mentioned) felt that their place and calling were in other spheres of society?” What would happen if the business owner in row 4, the CEO in row 10, or the stay-at-home mom in row 3, and the football coach in row 8, all felt like we were preaching to their Monday’s and not just their Sunday’s? We would like a church equipping everyone to fulfill their God-given potential! Incredible! If we could get the 98 percenters to see their calling—there was no telling what God could do! That’s why I launched the Influencer’s Network. (For more information on this, go to the back of the book.)

ACTS

This may sound a little utopian. However, since I believe everyone is called by God to do something of significance, I believe every person can fulfill ACTS’ Send category. This concept has radically changed our culture. No longer are people coming here with an attitude of “Okay, this better be good” or a lackadaisical approach. It’s: “I can’t wait to see what God is going to do today.” Why? We have intentionally created a culture where everyone knows they are being equipped to be sent for the purpose of fulfilling their destiny. Attract, Connect, Train, Send—it’s more than just a concept. It works.

People constantly tell us our church feels *different*. I believe a leading reason is because people enter the parking lot each weekend with a sense of anticipation: God is in the House and they will have an encounter with Him. With that level of expectation, combined with the presence of the Holy Spirit, anything can happen!

**Attract, Connect, Train, Send—ACTS.
It's more than just a concept. It works.**

This concept has also changed the way I preach. In every sermon I look for a “Send” example. I have two priorities: First, to include a call to salvation. Second, to communicate people are called to be sent. Whenever a mindset is adjusted, inevitably action will follow. New ideas will be implemented.

ACTS was just what we needed. It came from the Lord, gradually over time, and wasn't developed overnight. We refined it over time and with a lot of sifting. If the Lord gives you something like this—not complete but with a lot of promise and potential—treat it like gold! It could be a talent deposit the Lord is making into your account. Steward it well. What you do with it will make a huge difference in your future.

BRING YOUR DISH

Throughout the formative years of Inspire, several analogies have served as visuals to clarify Inspire's culture. They help communicate who we are, who we intend to become, and our expectations.

One has to do with food. In Hawai'i, we love our potlucks. I'm partial to them because they're the best in the world and are special because of our state's diversity of ethnic groups.

As this pertains to the church, everyone who comes to a potluck brings a dish. It's not proper to show up at a potluck without one. Generally, people bring a dish representing their ethnicity and family. So, if you are of Hawaiian descent, you would bring some poke¹⁴ and kalua pig.¹⁵ A Japanese person might bring a sushi platter; a family from the South, barbecued ribs. You get the picture! When everyone brings a dish, there's more than enough. That's a potluck!

There is also fellowship, music, and a blessing prior to dinner. The table can barely hold all the dishes. After everyone goes through the line, plates are heaped with food that peaks like a mountain at the top. Some with hearty appetites help themselves to seconds. The house is filled with joy because of great food and fellowship. But the beautiful

part is not just the variety of food and colorful furnishings. Love and fellowship fill the air. Without the people or their dishes, something would be missing.

Church should be like a potluck, not a restaurant.

However, the true blessing comes when it's time to head home and the host encourages everyone: "Make a plate. There's so much food and we can't eat it all. Take some for tomorrow's lunch!" After protests they are too full, the host will persist until people give in and make a plate (or two), stuffing them into their casserole dish, cleaned and washed by volunteers. Folks will head home with lots of leftovers.

Church should be like a potluck. It's not a buffet where you pick and choose from an array of dishes. At our church, you don't sit at a table and expect others to wait on you. One day the Church shall be served at a banquet, where the Lord will provide for everyone who has answered His invitation to the Wedding Feast (see Revelation 19:7–9). But in the meantime, the Church is to operate like a potluck.

The moral of this analogy: If everyone brings something into the house, prepared with love and care, there will

always be more than enough. What's more, you'll leave with more food and a greater variety of flavors than when you arrived. The church-is-like-a-potluck analogy is in line with Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 14:26, which essentially says that our contribution "is for the strengthening of the church."

Most people want to make a difference and contribute to something bigger than themselves. They don't want to be spoon-fed and go home feeling like a glutton! People would rather bring a dish representing their talent and watch others enjoy it. We, the church, provide the venue and set the table for such a feast to flourish.



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

The 2-Percent Myth: Do you know if God is calling you to the 2-percent or the 98-percent? Expound on that.

ACTS: Attract, Connect, Train, and Send. List two ways that your church or organization can put these principles into practice. If you have been trying to implement this kind of system without much success, list two ideas you gained from Michael Kai's experience to amend your approach.

CHAPTER 14

MOMENTUM

THE WAVE YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR

*“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’”
—Matthew 25:21*

“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.” —Luke 12:48 ESV

Several years had gone by. Steady plodding kept us focused on our goal: to reach as many people as possible so we might save some. The church grew—slowly but

surely. In retrospect, I am grateful. The Lord knew exactly what He was doing. If we had had a major influx of people those first eight years, I'm not sure how well we would have stewarded them.

On occasion, the worship team outnumbered the congregation!

Perhaps our capacity to shepherd, or our maturity level, had something to do with it. The Lord knew what I could handle mentally, spiritually, and emotionally, and needed us to wait for help to stabilize us. We worked hard, but we sought to make our staff maintained a solid family life. Whatever the reasons, I wouldn't trade that season for anything.

CHANGES

By 2007–2008, weekend attendance grew to approximately 700, including children. The cafeteria where we met held a maximum of 250, with another thirty peering through the windows from outside. From two Sunday services we grew to three at 7:30, 9:00, and 11:00 a.m. We prematurely started a 6:00 p.m., sparsely attended Saturday service. On occasion, the worship team outnumbered the congregation! I just started attending the University of Hawai'i Rainbow

Warriors' football games on slow Saturday nights. I was looking forward to bringing the services to an end.

However, attendance suddenly began to double. Then triple. As a result, I didn't get to witness much of the university's historic 12–0 regular season in 2007, but I did see the Bride blossom!

After a couple of years of four weekend services, we could reach more but lacked the space, especially during our most popular service times. It was killing me when we reached 100-percent capacity, only to see attendance drop to 75 to 85 percent a few weeks later. We needed more space. I hated to see people leave because they couldn't find a seat. We had to do something.¹⁶

NEW SIGHTS AND SITES

Faithfulness and fruitfulness—that's our story. We were faithful with the building we occupied and keeping those we reached. If we continued to do what the Lord called us to, we believed He would help us find creative solutions. The building limited our growth. One pastor teaches that for a church to reach its full potential, it needs the maximum amount of seating at optimum service times. In Hawai'i, most people attend church between 9:00 and 11:00 a.m. on Sunday.

So, to pack three services into a two-hour span, we started a 10:00 a.m. service at another location about five miles away. The plan involved a new site, new logistics, and hospitality teams, another worship team, and transportation to shuttle me there and back. My typical Sunday now included preaching at 7:30 and 9:00 a.m. services. As soon as I gave the last “amen,” a driver took me five miles to a city called Mililani.

In a shopping mall there, the University of Phoenix (U.O.P.) occupied an office space holding approximately 125 people. A mini-version of our Waikele site, it had a welcome area, stage, lights, sound equipment, and classrooms for Children’s Church. I usually arrived during the last worship song, or just before Communion or announcements.

At times I was late because I preached too long at 9:00 a.m., so someone would notify the other service that I was running late. *No problemo*. They’d add another worship song. After closing prayer in Mililani, I’d head back to Waikele and preach again. That was five services every weekend—one on Saturday evenings and four on Sunday mornings. I would get home on Sunday afternoons exhausted.

This crazy routine lasted for a few months until I realized I needed to switch to a team-teaching model. Still, the

new service worked. God blessed our efforts and we grew at U.O.P. until we maxed out the room. Yet when we hit overflow capacity, attendance soon dropped to 80 percent. Yet, what a great problem! Within a year, we flirted with exceeding our 1,000-person goal. People were coming to Christ and the church was healthier than ever. This was a major milestone for us. The average church in America has just seventy-five people, and only 23 percent surpass the 1,000 level.

With me cutting back to preaching three services, a staff pastor doing two, and more people stepping up to fill roles, the team-teaching concept also bore fruit. The ministry was no longer revolving around me.

THE MIGHTY MO

Pearl Harbor is home to the historic U.S.S. Missouri battleship (the Mighty Mo), where Imperial Japan surrendered to the U.S., bringing World War II to a conclusion. Today, the Mighty Mo is a symbol of American service, sacrifice, and pride for both America and the state of Hawai'i.

As the church grew, I was looking for a different kind of "Mo." We prayed, talked, worked, and looked toward the horizon for it, as if it were like the morning sun. And then it finally happened: momentum.

To illustrate, say your car died and you pull off the road a hundred feet from a gas station. Calling a tow truck seems foolish, so you push to get to the station. Since you don't see anyone around, you straighten out your wheel, get in the space between the door and the jamb, and with your left hand on the door and right hand alternating between the jamb and the wheel, you push with all your might. Leveraging your weight, you are nearly perpendicular to the pavement as every muscle strains to move the car. But as you apply muscle and determination, it begins to roll.

But as you keep applying muscle and determination to the object you are leaning into, it begins to roll.

Now, instead of being parallel to the asphalt, you've straightened up your torso; however, you are still bent over to keep moving, although you're not working quite as hard. So, you continue adding pressure and when you see that you are on a roll, straighten your back and find that the speed of the car is in rhythm with your stride. Instead of pushing so hard, most of your effort is on steering the vehicle in the right direction, avoiding the curb while looking ahead. You

are near the gas station, and though sweating, your body is cooling as the car nears its destination. Exertion has paid off. You are experiencing a much coveted, intangible commodity called momentum.

Once we had found momentum, we were determined to keep it. Mighty Mo was our friend. A breakthrough was about to happen. God rewarded us for our faithfulness. With momentum came courage and more growth. We had the courage to step out and do things we previously could not do.



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

How has your church or business been plodding along? List a couple extraordinary steps you can take that will help develop the kind of momentum Michael Kai describes in this chapter. What has prevented you from making it very far to date? What kind of goal have you set that some unusual initiatives can produce?

CHAPTER 15

THE FIGHT OF OUR LIVES

INCREASED STRESS LEADS TO INCREASED CAPACITY

*“God can do anything, you know—
far more than you could ever imagine or guess
or request in your wildest dreams!”*

—Ephesians 3:20 MSG

By 2007, we had planted two churches in Australia and another a few miles from our church, as well as resourcing and inspiring other church planters. While our primary focus was our church, we loved building God’s kingdom elsewhere too. At this point, we knew the buildings we were renting would not take us to where we wanted to

go. But before releasing them, God wanted us to remove some old mindsets.

For our first seven years, I would drive past the Waikele Shopping Center, where a few buildings had a high turnover. For example, one building started off as a national chain computer and electronics store; the business went belly up and it became a clothing store. Another building had been a grocery store, but turned into a furniture store.

While on this particular retreat, I heard two distinct words—*increase* and *enlarge*.

Every weekend—for seven years—on my way to our cafeteria, I would drive by that furniture store and yell, “In the name of Jesus, I claim those buildings for our church!” In August of 2007, I had just returned from a trek that included vacation; the Hillsong Leadership Conference in Sydney, Australia; a personal planning retreat; and a staff retreat. While on my planning retreat, I asked the Lord for a theme for the upcoming fiscal year. This was vital because I wanted to plan my

preaching calendar and steer our staff planning retreat around God's direction.

During this prayer, I heard two distinct words—*increase* and *enlarge*. Then I waited for confirmation, thinking, *Is this just me, or is it the Lord?* After all, Hawai'i's economy was beginning to buckle, companies were downsizing, and real estate was at an all-time high. I struggled with what was "from the Lord" and what was my imagination. Confused, I phoned a friend who put me at ease. After his encouragement, I reasoned, *Hey, if I'm fasting and away from my family and denying myself, why wouldn't the Lord speak to me?* I perused Scripture, looking for anything that would resonate. Two passages leaped out:

And (the Lord) said to me, "I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you."
—Genesis 48:4

Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and

to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities. —Isaiah 54:2–3

I was filled with awe and fear. The awe was understandable. Fear stemmed from the magnitude of *increase* and *enlarge*. I would be too afraid to think them up myself! Despite misgivings, I remembered the Lord backs up His promises. They were His words for us.

After the retreats and our time in Sydney, we were ready to get to work. I was sermon-prepping my first week back when Randy called one afternoon.

“Mike,” he said. “What are you doing? Are you sitting down? I have some bad news.”

To me, bad news is like taking cough medicine as a kid. My blood pressure shot up.

“Just give it to me, Randy.”

“You’re not going to believe this,” he replied. “The school just called to tell us they are raising our rent by 200 percent, and that was after I just dropped off the check for \$5,000 to bless them!” My first instinct was to tell Randy to drive back to the school and ask for the check back. Thankfully, I didn’t act on it.

I couldn’t believe it. After overhearing my end of the conversation, Lisa asked, “What? What?”

When I regained my composure, I told Lisa: “I thought the Lord said increase and enlarge. Not decrease and down-size!” I wasn’t sure what to do. Calling Randy back, I said, “That’s it. We’re outta there. With all that money we will be paying for rent, we need to find another place, one much bigger. Let’s start looking.”

A TIMELY WORD

This story brings to mind an event a year earlier, when we hosted a friend as a guest worship leader. Although neither of us knew it, the Lord was about to use him greatly. Just as he was about to lead his last song that weekend, he stopped and said, “Pastor Mike, do you receive prophetic words here? Because I have a word for you that I believe is from the Lord.”

The Lord says your dreams are too small.

Wow. Talk about being put on the spot! For us quasi-Pentecostal types (just kidding), we aren’t usually as spontaneous when it comes to prophecy. But because I loved his heart and was getting to know him better, I decided to give it a go. Otherwise, what else could I have said? “Sorry. You

have to meet with my head intercessors, let us pray about it to test it and see. . . .”

No.

“Sure,” I replied. “Just give it to me.”

This was the kind of moment one keeps in a special internal photo album, to bring out occasionally: “Ooh! This was the time . . . this was when He . . .”

“The Lord says your dreams are too small.”

I had mixed emotions. On the one hand I thought, “*My dreams are too small? I have BIG dreams! It’s obvious you don’t know to whom you are prophesying!*” But a split second later, tears rolled down my face. *My dreams are too small? God has bigger plans for us?* The worship leader finished and prayed.

Here’s one of my favorite verses:

However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love him.” —1 Corinthians 2:9

This verse and the parable of the talents ran through my mind. This promise has been a foundational Scripture for our life and church. My translation: “If you let Him, God will blow your mind, simply because He loves you.” In the

midst of bad news, the Lord was placing thorns in our nest so that we would learn to get out and soar again.

“IT’S YOURS, BRO”

A while back I had inquired about leasing a building in the shopping center. The furniture store had folded and the property was vacant again, so I thought we might as well try. We created a DVD with me standing in front of the building, expressing the hope the company would consider leasing their 37,000 square-foot building to us.

I was also on the lookout for security guards, wondering what two grown men were doing with their hands on the walls.

At the time, there was no way we could entertain such a thought. Retail space in Hawai'i is quite expensive. I felt like a freshman asking the prom queen for a dance with her boyfriend (the prom king) standing next to her. (I actually did that in high school.)

Proverbs mentions that bribes or gifts can open doors. We FedEx-ed the DVD (back when dinosaurs roamed the earth) and a gift basket filled with treats. We meant

it as a gift—a gesture of Hawaiian hospitality. A month went by. I figured it was a good time to give the leasing company a call.

Interestingly, my friend Roger Archer from Motion Church in Washington was with me one weekend. We went by the old furniture building. He got out of the car, laid his hands on it, and began praying with authority! While nodding, I kept an eye out for security guards wondering what we were doing. Standing spread-eagled, we looked like two guys being held up, with no gunman! Afterwards, Roger said, “It’s yours, Bro.”

That’s Roger. He was a key encourager in this process. When I got down, I’d call Roger and he’d yell: “What’s wrong with you, boy? Pull up your pants and have big faith! God is going to give that to you.” If it weren’t for Roger and Ralph Moore, I would have been an emotional basket case during that season.

I kept calling and emailing, to no avail. I was persistent. (That’s why I find it difficult when someone tells me they text messaged someone twice and since they got no reply, throws up their hands and quits, saying, “I tried.”) Finally, one I received a call from the center’s property manager. She said, “Hi, I’m calling to inform

you that we have received your DVD and gift, but we aren't interested in renting out the space to a church. We wish you luck in your search."

"Just a minute, please," I quickly replied. "Do you have anyone else in mind?"

She told me they were hoping for a big-box retail store.

When I told her that wouldn't work, she asked, "Can you afford it?"

"Of course. With God all things are possible."

Before she politely ended our chat, I told her I would call in a few months. Afterwards, my heart sank. For a while, I quit yelling at the building as I drove by. I would either pretend it wasn't there or that we didn't need it. Defeatist thoughts entered my mind: *Maybe we're out of our league. Set your sights lower.*

I quit yelling at the building as I drove by. I would ignore it, either pretending it wasn't there or that we didn't need it.

Even though my hopes were gone, we still needed more space. So, I aimed for something more "realistic" and closer to our price range. With the increased rent at our current

facility, our combined leases totaled around \$10,000 a month. Back then, that was a lot of money for the space they offered. I couldn't see us spending that kind of money on a school and an office space.

We looked at a few other options, but every attempt failed. In Hawai'i, there weren't many rental choices, and purchasing land meant spending at least ten million dollars. We didn't have it.

WHAT A TRIP!

I already had a trip scheduled to Medan, Indonesia for a conference of Asian churches and missionaries. So, in the midst of our search for a new space, I headed to Indonesia. I had already paid for the trip and am passionate about church planting and missions.

After long flights, I arrived with other delegates. I was having a great time when I heard about October 2008's stock market crash. With an eighteen-hour time difference and a spotty internet connection, I was unable to move my retirement investment selections to stop the bleeding.

But what worried me more were the church's finances. We had monies tied up in certificates of deposit that were relatively safe. While in Indonesia the Lord spoke to me and said, "I'll place the church in Goshen where you will be safe

and multiply” (see Genesis 45:10). Goshen, I thought. Isn’t that where Joseph’s family and Jacob’s offspring lived peacefully in Egypt? I kept calling the office to make sure we were okay, but there was nothing I could do from Indonesia. The Lord was truly in control.

BACK HOME

Once back home, I learned a new clothing store was coming to the Waialeale Shopping Center. They would lease the 25,000-square-foot building next to the former furniture store. After two months, I picked up the newspaper, and read about the clothing chain going bankrupt.

So, as a guilt offering, I did what I felt was the only right thing to do—I bought myself a shirt.

I drove down to investigate. After arriving, I looked at clothing until I found an employee. After the obligatory, “Hi, finding everything all right?” from the salesgirl, I said in an apologetic tone, “I heard you guys are filing for bankruptcy. I’m so sorry to hear that.”

“Oh, no. Our store will remain open.”

“That’s good to hear,” I said. “Bye.”

But inside I was saying, “Argh!” I started to feel guilty over such a self-serving move. So, I did what I felt was the right thing—I bought a shirt.

Disappointed, I walked away and was about to leave when I noticed the furniture store’s door was open. For the first time ever. Here was our chance.

“Hi! Mind if I take a look inside?” I asked a man fixing the door.

“I don’t work here.”

I promised not to tell if he let me in. He said I could look when the boss returned.

“Oh, come on,” I said. “I’ll just run right in and out. You can watch me.”

The man was not convinced.

“Okay, how about if I just stepped right here and had a quick look?”

Persistence pays off. As I scanned the dark place, I said a machine-gun-like prayer in the Spirit: “*Parattatattattattatt . . . tat.*” Satisfied, I turned and headed out.

As I left, the doorkeeper shouted, “Hey, the boss will be back from lunch in an hour!” But I couldn’t be back in an hour. I had an appointment. *Maybe it’s not meant to be, I*

thought briefly. But God had better plans. As it turned out, just then the “Boss” pulled up.

“Hi! I’m Mike Kai,” I said. “Is this place for rent?”

“Yes it is. The economy is so bad right now that we have to lease this place out as soon as we can.”

What’d I tell ya? I’m a man of God with great faith!

Slowly, my faith was chipped away to the point of near depression. I was at my lowest point.

We began negotiations but at one point I thought it was over. A big-box retailer in the complex had a clause inserted into their contract: No “House of Worship” could be a tenant. I was flabbergasted. I’m not sure if that had to do with parking, or with just being anti-religion (which wouldn’t surprise me), but whatever the reason, it was holding up our destiny. Weeks passed and none of our emails or phone calls were returned. I had reached my lowest point.

SPEAK TO ME

I woke up one morning, still discouraged, and got ready to take Bekah to school. While walking out, I repeated to Lisa, “We’re not going to get it.” My wife is one feisty, Chinese woman. She said, “Stop it, Mike. Do you hear what you’re saying?”

After dropping Bekah off at the school, I pulled into a gas station to call our Realtor.

“I’ll fly up to their headquarters in Ohio if that’s what it takes,” I told him. “Maybe I can bring a Hawaiian gift basket. That always seems to work.”

I sat on the beach, covered my head with my workout towel and began crying. I mean, who cries in a gym?

He told me to be patient. In retrospect, he proved to be right. Afterwards, at the gym, I made a weak attempt at my customary workout while listening to a worship song, “Speak To Me”¹⁷ on my ear buds. But I wound up covering my head with a towel and crying because of the words. Really? There’s no crying in gyms! So, embarrassed, I finally got out of there and went home since Lisa and I needed to

be at a luncheon at eleven. After working on my sermon for a while, we headed out.

“Speak to Me” had ministered to me so much I put it on again as we drove.

“Babe, listen to this,” I said. “The Lord really blessed me at the gym with this.”

Then I put my sunglasses on when the tears resumed. However, my combination of self-pity and worship came to a halt when my phone rang.

“Hey, Big Guy,” my Realtor said. “What are you doing?”

“What’s up?” I replied.

“Can you talk?”

He sounded chipper, which made me curious and irritated.

“Yes. I’m talking with you now, right? Go ahead.”

“Ok. We got the place! The big-box retailers signed a document saying they have waived the ‘No House of Worship’ clause!”

The tears reappeared. I pulled over. I needed to thank the Lord in prayer and couldn’t do it with the Realtor on the phone. Even today, this experience brings tears to my eyes.

God is so good and so faithful.

His master replied, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” —Matthew 25:21

However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love him.” —1 Corinthians 2:9



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

Leadership takes vision and perseverance. List two parallels between the obstacles Michael Kai waded through on his way to acquiring larger facilities and those your church or business is facing. What encouragers can you call on to help steady you during this time? What Scripture passages speak to your situation? Write a prayer specific to your situation and repeat it daily for the next week.

CHAPTER 16

THE BEST IS YET TO COME

ALWAYS CONTENT BUT NEVER COMPLACENT

“Your beginnings will seem humble, so prosperous will your future be.” —Job 8:7

*“And though you started with little, you will end with much.”
—Job 8:7 NLT*

We often hear people say, “God won’t give you more than you can handle.” It’s usually made by someone concerned when we’re in pain, offered like a topical ointment for temporary relief. To some extent, I believe it’s true. The Lord does know how much we can endure.

On the other hand, it's also true that God *will give you more than you can handle* because He wants to work greatly in your life. At these moments, He wants you to rely on Him for victory. Almost every major character in the Bible faced things that were way more than they could handle themselves.

God will not give us more than we can handle if we can't steward well what He would like to give to us.

Another way to apply this in light of the parable of the talents: God will not give us more than we can handle if we can't steward well what He would like to give us. He doesn't want what He gives us to go to waste. If I have a quart container but a gallon of milk, it would be foolish to pour the gallon into it. I'll need a vessel equal to, or larger than, the quart container.

Consider the three servants in the parable; each one had a different capacity. The servants with one talent and two talents were not given five talents because they didn't have the capacity to steward more. The master gives according to an individual servant's capacity.

Our old building did not have the capacity to handle the thousands who now call Inspire their home church. We did everything possible, including hosting five services in two locations, to reach 1,000. Unless 400 people received a divine revelation to attend at 7:30 a.m. to make room at the 9:00 and 11:00 a.m. services, this was as far as we could go.

Looking back, there were two critical years within the first eight in which the Lord took us to a *ho' nutha level*.¹⁸ During that period, we grew in leadership and matured as a church. We kept evangelizing the lost and stewarding new believers.

We added a new axiom to our vocabulary: upgrade. We looked around the cafeteria and asked ourselves, “Where can we upgrade?” It could’ve been technology or stage presentation. Or leadership training, discipleship, attitudes, generosity, or compassion. Then we’d prioritize and address it.

A retrospective view is much clearer from a distance. We now realize that we were ready to receive the gift of our current location. The staff would agree that we were already playing at a *ho' nutha level* in the school cafeteria. We never thought we were “too good” for the building; we were thankful and appreciative for it. It was when we had maxed

out our capacity to receive more people, combined with an expansion of our leadership and heart for the Lord's people, that we were given more than we imagined.

MORE THAN WE COULD HANDLE

God sometimes gives us more than we can handle. There were times we encountered such situations. Yet, He made up for our deficit. To go for a building like the one we now lease took huge faith. Looking back, our faith and ability to endure has increased greatly. We can stand higher and see farther because of past trials. They have increased our ability (capacity) to handle more.

**What seemed difficult and painful
in the past has become the new
normal and even something we have
built upon.**

So why would the Lord give us more than we can handle? Two things. One, it increases our ability to endure more in the future. If you can overcome this trial, it only increases your strength for the future. Secondly, it's because the struggles you endure draw you nearer to Him. Brokenness, humility, dependency, and desperation cause us to rely

more on Him. That's what happened to us. As a result, we have a story to tell of the faithfulness of God.

INSPIRATION IS A WISE INVESTMENT

I love inspiring people to answer the call of God on their lives and get great satisfaction when a sermon, a lesson I've taught, or coffee time I share with a young leader inspires them to do something for Jesus. We need more pastors and businesspersons achieving their full potential. We need to exhort young people to see beyond their cynical perspective and push on regardless of pandemic panics, economic forecasts, political differences, or racial divides. We need to challenge the disheartened to push through circumstances and see that God has an awesome plan for their lives. But this cannot happen until someone gets inspired.

If you or I get inspired by God through a book, a conference, a sermon, or His insights, it will translate into action. Action brings change and change involves people. Inspiration is that first domino nudged in the right direction that creates the domino effect.

When I get inspired, look out. Somebody is going to get pushed. *Nothing really happens until someone gets inspired.* Don't ever underestimate its power. If or someone is

God-inspired, that life becomes a God-inspired sacrifice. It begins with inspiration. And, sometimes you have to “pay” to be inspired.

Lisa, Ben Houston from Hillsong Church, author and speaker John Bevere, and I were enjoying lunch after one of our conferences when my Lisa said, “John, I’d love to have your wife, Lisa (Bevere), speak at our first women’s conference next year!” John asked if she had heard Lisa speak. Since she hadn’t, John suggested: “You have to go to the Colour Women’s Conference hosted by Ben’s mom, Pastor Bobbie Houston.”

One problem. We had planned a dream trip to Argentina—one of the first times Lisa and I would leave our two younger daughters at home. Plus, it was the week before the Colour conference.

My wife hemmed and hawed. I jumped in and told her I had the girls; she could head out for Sydney, Australia the day we got back. I wanted her to go because I felt it could be an incredible time for her. Ben added, “I can get you in. It’s sold out but I’ll make some arrangements.” Surrounded by emphatic encouragement, she said, “Yes.”

Lisa rarely called me that week, knowing that the girls were doing fine. When she returned, she didn’t talk much

about it until the third day. Finally, over a cup of tea, she said, “I’ve been afraid to tell you what the Lord said to me, because I know that once I say it, I’ll be held accountable.”

I braced myself.

“The Lord told me I need to step up and take a larger role in the church. He said I needed to speak to you about starting a women’s church service, once a month or so, to encourage women. And to speak more.”

I had no problem with the first two ideas, but felt a bit apprehensive about the third. I shouldn’t have been. Two years prior to this, the Lord spoke to me at my first Hillsong conference, saying, “Platform your wife. I want Lisa to have a voice.” She was hesitant initially, so I backed off. Now we were on the same page. Our denomination ordained women, so women in leadership was not an issue. The problem was not the model, but the vessel. Lisa wasn’t ready.

**In this case, the inspiration we paid
for paid off.**

But in order for Lisa to be ready, the Lord had to prepare me too. Could I allow room for Lisa and Arise (the eventual name of her ministry, conference, and monthly service)?

Was I secure enough in my role to encourage her to accept her new role? The answer was a definite yes.

Since Lisa has answered the Lord's call, women across Hawai'i have done the same. Hundreds have been equipped, inspired, and empowered to become all God has called them to be. It has been one of the most amazing things I have seen happen. And I attribute much of it to a housewife who answered a call to lead other housewives and businesswomen to Arise.

I had no idea the effect the Hillsong Colour Conference would have on Lisa. We are so glad she went! It inspired her to host a similar event. She named it *Arise* because that is what happened to her. Many other women in our church and the state are fulfilling the P4P Value, awakening and arising to their God-given calling. I recommend you get Lisa's book, *Perfectly You*, in which she more clearly chronicles her story.

When it comes to inspiration, I also draw it from watching families stay together and prevail through tough times. The road may be bumpy for a while, but I love seeing them on the other side of the struggle, standing stronger and taller.

And yet, no one like my wife and daughters have the ability to inspire me (just as I want to inspire them). When Lisa

brags about me in front of others, I feel good! Now, I get appreciation from others regularly, which puts “fuel in my tank.” But when Lisa or my girls display their appreciation, look out! I can do anything.

So, who or what inspires you? If it's a church or ministry, do what you can to go see it. We have spent a lot of money sending our staff places to get equipped and inspired, which has impacted our church. Sometimes it can be the best investment with the greatest returns.

Who are you inspiring? It doesn't have to be another church or ministry. It can be the single mother in row six, seat two.

Inspiration can come from a walk on the beach or in the mountains, when creativity often flows. I treasure walks alone or with Lisa on the beach. Walking hand-in-hand with our feet touching the water and God with us sparks a divine chemistry that brings inspiration. That can lead to an invention, a sermon, or a song.

Who are you inspiring? It doesn't have to be another church or ministry. It can be the single mother in row six,

seat two. It could be a “Timothy” whom you invite to your home to help you change the oil in your car. I appreciate that Pastor Ralph taught me how to change the oil in my old Volvo. Although I didn’t know it, he was also discipling me in the process. Go get inspired by someone and inspire someone else in return. Kick off a chain reaction.

INFLUENCE

An older, visiting pastor who came a year after we moved to our new location commented, “You know, this is not just for you.” My knee-jerk answer was a confident, “I know.” Too busy to respond further since this happened between services, I walked away perplexed. It took a few months before I understood his “Yoda-like” statement. We were to share the story of our triumph. The gifts, talents, and abilities the Lord gave us were to be inspiration fuel for others.

Our worst enemies can be our insecurities or fear of others’ perceptions. I hesitated to launch our successful Equip and Inspire conferences because of what others might think. But if I let others’ opinions drive my decisions, we wouldn’t be where we are today. Plus, I don’t think it delights the Lord when the fear of man replaces Him as my Source.

Now, there's a constant tension between humble-gutsy Christ-like servanthood and self-confidence. Groveling on the ground and repeating, "I am a nobody, our church is nothing" isn't honoring God; it diminishes His glory. Without Christ, we are nobodies. Without Him in my life, I shudder to think where I would be. But He is also with us with limitless power and victory in His hands! We strive to walk in humility while embracing the promise: "The Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath" (Deuteronomy 28:13 NKJV). That's the sweet spot we want.

STEWARDS FOR INFLUENCE

It was surprising to us, but pastors called for advice even before our growth. We decided to take the influence God had given us and start a nonprofit called Send Hope International to support church-planters and missionaries. Originally, I wanted to alleviate the pressure on our missions budget for international travel; the churches we planted or disciplined couldn't afford to pay for us to get there. So, we set up a separate entity that could receive funds to send us to equip and inspire others.

The biggest way of stewarding our influence is through our Equip and Inspire Resources and Conferences. The

conferences have become a staple in Hawai'i for church leaders. Over the years, the Arise Women's Conference has grown from 900 to two back-to-back sessions attracting several thousand. If influence is given, it must be stewarded. If it is abused, misused, or mishandled it will be taken away; if not steadily reinvested, the privilege could be passed on to another. I also understand that our role as influencers is not guaranteed forever—there are times in God's sovereignty where He will shift anointing elsewhere. It's His prerogative.

There may one day be a season to pass leadership or influence on because you can't keep it to yourself. It will eventually need to be released. I think it's better if we give it away freely when the time comes. But the timing must be right.

At this moment, I say to myself, *Hold it loosely, Mike. Don't let it be taken away from you or ripped from your hands. Don't treat it with contempt and become complacent. Steward it well. Contend for the honor of handing it to someone one day and whispering, "If you mess it up, I will hurt you, boy!"*

Nah! Just kidding. Kick him on the backside to give him a start and begin yelling, "Run! Run with passion and abandon! But remember to hold it loosely!" Then watch quietly as he puts distance between himself and you.

REACH FOR YOUR REDEMPTIVE POTENTIAL

We have been blessed beyond our wildest expectations. We love our people. We have the most hardworking, dedicated, and kind staff. But we haven't arrived. There are leaders to raise, churches to plant, and souls to be saved.

Every human being has potential, but for one reason or another many fail to attain it. Yet, *potential* is always there. Lisa married me based on potential; she saw what I *could* be. If a person has potential, then so does the church. Add all the people with their potential and you have a Church teeming with it!

What numerical value could we assign to the first church Jesus ever started two millennia ago in the Upper Room in Jerusalem?

A church's full *redemptive potential could be realized* if, during its lifespan, it reached everyone it is supposed to reach. If members encourage the next generation and pass on the mantle of leadership, what could that look like? Would it mean ten thousand souls? Fifty thousand? A million?

Consider this: What numerical value could we assign to the first church Jesus started two millennia ago in the Upper Room? They began with 120. Today, it's in billions!

So, what's your potential? What's the redemptive potential of your church? What can you do with what you've been given? It doesn't matter whether it's one, two or five talents. What matters is what you do with what you've got. Faithfulness. Stewardship. Multiplication. That's the Pound-for-Pound principle.



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

As a leader, inspiring others is a key to expanding your influence and encouraging others to reach beyond their limitations to do great things. List three ways you can develop those in your church, business, or organization, such as a conference, educational seminar, or educational opportunity. Then, for each one, determine how to find the resources to make that happen.

EPILOGUE

During an epic weekend of COVID-19 Easter services in 2020, Inspire welcomed more than 55,000 IP addresses. That represents a minimum of 80,000 people, using the measurement of one parking space per 1.5 people in our auditorium and applying it handheld devices, smart phones, and LED televisions. Hundreds of souls reached a decision that day to make Jesus their Lord and Savior. That Sunday evening, as I washed dishes, my daughter Rebekah said, “Dad, you were really good today.” I paused before replying, “Babe, I don’t know how I could not have done well. I honestly do not know of any pastor who gets more prayer coverage, intercessors praying during every service, and incredible support than your mother and I receive. I’m not surprised at what Jesus did.” She understood. To God be the glory.

For each of us, there is so much more vision to receive and more people to reach. After two decades of consistent hard work, we all pray this is only the beginning. But we will contend until the end. At this writing, we have planted another church overseas in Manila, and opened two more campuses on the island of O’ahu. We finally ran out

of space at our 37,000-square-foot location at the Waikele Shopping Center, so we leased almost twice the amount a few years ago. In 2014, we bought an old church building in the town of Mililani and have nearly paid off the loan. After a three-year search, we recently closed on land in Kapolei, a booming city fifteen minutes away from our main location. Despite COVID-19 slowdowns, we were on pace to break ground in late 2020 and embark on a new multi-million-dollar project.

The coronavirus also caused us to invest money in our online presence worldwide. To imagine engaging with 80,000 people compared to the 10,000 we had seen on Easter in recent years is a bit mind-boggling—for us, not God. We are always looking for new opportunities to leverage everything the Lord has given us. That’s the Pound-for-Pound principle in action: doing the best we can with what God has given us. No matter what your circumstances, I hope this book has given you the inspiration to look at everything you have and invest it back into His kingdom. Do the very best with what He has given you and you will achieve and become the best version of you possible. You may experience discouragement occasionally, but remember Proverbs 24:15–16: “No matter how many times you

trip them up, God-loyal people don't stay down long; soon they're up on their feet" (MSG).

Get yourself a good corner person or two, pick yourself up, and fight! That giant in the ring is smaller than you think. Keep punching away. And, remember this—all the defeats, trials, and frustrations you have endured has been the Lord's way of increasing your capacity and ability to handle exactly what's in front of you. Don't forget: you were born for this. Your story and our story continues . . .

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10. Miles McPherson, *Do Something: Make Your Life Count* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009).
11. Poi is a Hawaiian staple, similar to what potatoes mean to Caucasians from the US mainland, and rice to those of Asian cultures. Poi is often served at parties in Hawai’i where Hawaiian food is served.
12. David Lynch, director, *The Elephant Man*, 1980.
13. Sal Ruibal, “Tiny Hawai’i Looms as Giant in Football World,” *USA Today*, November 9, 2004, http://www.usatoday.com/sports/football/2004-11-09-hawaii-football_x.htm.
14. Seasoned cubes of raw fish or octopus.
15. Smoked, pulled-pork, baked in an underground oven called an imu.
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17. Tommy Walker, “Speak to Me,” from the album, *I Have a Hope*, 2008.

18. I learned this term at my first Hillsong Conference in 2006 when Ed Young, founding pastor of Fellowship Church in suburban Dallas, Texas, kept repeating the phrase. It’s stuck with me ever since.

