

Small Church BIG Deal

How to rethink size, success and significance in ministry

Study guide by Chris Vitarelli

Chapter 1

Jeremiah was a powerful prophet who faithfully executed God's commands throughout his ministry. The challenge he faced in ministry was a group of people who simply didn't want to listen to the word of the Lord. Even so, Jeremiah continued to preach. Jeremiah 1:17-19; 17:14-18; 20:8-9,18

Connection Questions:

1. What ministry struggles tempt you to give up?
2. How does Jeremiah's ministry encourage you?
3. Jeremiah's ministry was significant in God's eyes, but there were few who responded or followed. What about Jeremiah's ministry honored God above men?

Chapter 2

The American church has all the signs of addiction to growth and success. This leads to the pastoral diseases of comparison, competition and collapse. What is needed is 3 key shifts, from Fear to Faithfulness, Success to the Sacred and from Grief to Grace.

Connection Questions:

1. What pastoral diseases have afflicted you in your ministry? How have you overcome them?
2. Of the three moves we must make, which one do you feel is most urgently needed in your life?
3. When have you found yourself in the cycle of grief?

Chapter 3

We all have standards by which we measure our work. If our metrics are healthy and biblically based, we get a good measure of what is happening within our ministry. Often our standards are overly critical or based on unrealistic expectations of what ministry should be.

Connection Questions:

1. How has a judgmental spirit affected you or your ministry?
2. Do the statistics about the effectiveness of small churches surprise you? What does this tell you about your own ministry?
3. Evaluate your ministry foundation. To what degree is it truly on the rock, Jesus Christ?

Chapter 4

If we're honest, there are things we all wish we had in ministry. It's easy to look at a small church ministry and feel like we are missing out somehow. This attitude of discontent with the status of our ministry says to God, "you are not enough". This attitude must change if we are to be fruitful in ministry.

Connection Questions:

1. What has caused discontent in your ministry?
2. Where are you tempted to be the one-talent servant? What would you add to or subtract from the definition of contentment offered in this chapter?
3. Assess the explanation of Romans 12. Is this an accurate representation of the meaning of this passage?

Chapter 5

New pastors, church planters and pastors moving into a new ministry all come with expectations. Disappointment comes when those expectations are unhealthy and unmet.

Connection Questions:

1. What parts of Paul's story stand out to you? Can you identify with any aspects of his journey?
2. Which of the first five expectations have you found yourself embracing?
3. How have you experienced the reality of the second set of expectations?

Chapter 6

Ego might be the greatest enemy of the pastor and of fruitful ministry. It is too easy in every area of ministry to make it about us. If the church is "successful" it can be attributed to the pastor. If it is "failing" it can be attributed to the pastor. Either way it plays on our ego. This often drives our desire to find magic bullets or the perfect program to bring us success.

Connection Questions:

1. What "Magic bullets" have you turned to in the past? What made them appealing to you?
2. How does the unique look and feel of your church conflict with church models and programs you've tried?
3. If you strip away all the clever ideas and methods you've read about, what does your church really look like? What is it gifted by God to be and do?

Chapter 7

Who are we? This is an essential question for pastors, who often tie their identities to their work. We must see ourselves, not just as pastors, but as children of God, loved and accepted. When we seek our sense of identity and worth in our ministry or our success, we end up frustrated and lost.

Connection questions:

1. Where do you get your sense of identity? What makes you who you are?
2. This chapter is important for any pastor, but for a small church pastor it is essential that we settle the question of what makes us feel important, needed and used by God. Has the idea of being indispensable come up in your ministry? How have you dealt with this?
3. Which suggestion for handing off ministry can you implement in the next month?

Chapter 8

Faithfulness and obedience are not glamorous and yet they are the essential building blocks of effective pastoral ministry. There are many other things we can do in ministry that will keep us busy but the pastor is not called to busy work. The pastor is called to faithful obedience.

Connection Questions:

1. Why are methods so much more popular than talking about obedience and faithfulness?
2. How could someone use the concepts of obedience and faithfulness to excuse themselves from mission-minded ministry? What should be our response to this idea?
3. What occasionally distracts you from being obedient and faithful in your ministry?

Chapter 9

What you do matters. Even if the “well done” from Jesus seems a long way off, we can find joy in the small victories along the way.

1. Do you keep a “Victory File” full of thank yous and notes of appreciation?
2. What can you do to keep the eternal nature of your work before you?

Chapter 10

Being close to the people we are leading is a strength in the small church. We preach to friends, not just faces.

Connection Questions:

1. How have you seen close proximity bless your church?
2. Do you agree with the idea that people want to know others and be known? Why or why not? How do you see this lived out in your church?
3. How can you leverage proximity for spiritual growth?

Chapter 11

Spiritual growth looks different in a small church. There are fewer programs and many more personal growth tracks. Growth takes place more in the context of a family rather than a large scale learning environment.

Connection questions:

1. What can you do to begin shifting from a one-and-done mentality to one of ongoing growth?
2. Respond to the idea of creating a personalized spiritual growth plan. Is this doable?
3. What is the difference between addition and multiplication?

Chapter 12

The church is compared to a family and to a body in Scripture. These pictures help us understand the relationship dynamics present in churches everywhere. Though our churches are in different places all over the country or the world, there is one constant – people are basically the same wherever you go and though they may have cultural nuances, they all want to love and be loved, know and be known.,

Connection Questions:

1. In what ways does your church look like a family, both positively and negatively?
2. Why do churches struggle with the idea of family accountability?
3. How can you help your church embrace the Body of Christ mentality?

Chapter 13

Every church is unique. No mix of people is exactly the same. There are certain types of people we encounter in churches wherever we go but no church has the same blend of gifts, abilities and inclinations. As a leader, our job is to discover that unique mix and use it in our community to share the Gospel.

Connection Questions

1. Make a list of potential niche ministries your church could specialize in. With what skills and interests does God seem to be gifting your congregation?
2. Which of your ministries is a laser and which is a shotgun? How can you begin to focus your approach to reaching your community?
3. Do you see your church as adaptable? Or is your congregation stuck? What is one step you can take to help your church move beyond where it is now?