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Bishop I.V. & Pastor Bridget Hilliard
New Light Christian Center Church
Ira V. Hilliard, a native Houstonian, was called at the age of nine to preach God's Word. Having waited one year so that his Pastor would know he heard from God, Ira Hilliard preached his first sermon on a Mother's Day night at the age of ten. He married the beautiful Bridget E. Harrison on October 4, 1975, who has co-laborated with him in building a dynamic ministry that is recognized around the world.

This dynamic couple co-founded the outstanding New Light Christian Center Church ("One Church, Multiple Locations") in North, East, West, and South Houston; Beaumont and Austin, Texas. The opening of the West location culminates the vision and God's mandate for a New Light Church facility in all four regions of the City of Houston. Their passion to take God's Word to a hurting and lost generation has resulted in a current church membership of over 30,000 and counting. New Light Christian Center Church is not only recognized around the country as a Mega-Church, but in September 2007 it was honored as one of the Top 50 Most Influential Churches in America.

IN THIS ISSUE

Dr. Verna Du Pont
Dream Center, Lauderdale, FL
Verna Du Pont is the Founder and Senior Pastor of the Dream Center in Lauderdale, FL. She has ministered throughout the United States and internationally. Having graduated from Spirit Life Bible College in Costa Mesa, California, Dr. Du Pont is a member of the Association of Independent Ministries (AIM) under the leadership of Bishop I.V. and Pastor Bridget Hilliard.

Dr. Dexter Easley
New Life Christian Fellowship Church, Goose Creek, SC
Dr. Dexter Easley, pastor, New Life Christian Fellowship in Goose Creek, SC. He is a ministerial visionary, empowering leader, renowned author, extraordinary teacher, entrepreneur, spiritual director, community humanitarian, devoted husband and a trailblazer on various platforms. He is married to Lady Leisa Easley.

Bishop Silas Johnson
Full Counsel Metro Church, Little Rock, AR
Bishop Silas Johnson is the founder and pastor of Metro Church in North Little Rock, Arkansas. With over 4650 members, Metro Church has locations in Fort Smith, Brinkley, Malvern, and Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Bishop Johnson, along with his wife, Dr. Jennifer, are founders of Full Counsel Ministerial/Missionary Association (FCMMA) and Full Counsel Bible Training Center (FCBTC).

Dr. Cedric Oliver
Embassies of Christ Kingdom Ministries, Gary, Indiana
Dr. Cedric Oliver is the founder and pastor of Embassies of Christ Kingdom Ministries, a 4800 member church in Gary, Indiana. Dr. Cedric received a Bachelor's degree in Management from Purdue University, an MBA from the University of Chicago, and was awarded an Honorary Doctorate degree in 2011. Dr. Cedric is president of Ambassador Christian Academy, Diplomat Plaza, Ambassador Senior Residence, Market City Retail Inc., and New Gary Community Development Corporation. Dr. Cedric can be seen and heard on television and radio throughout the Chicago Metro area and nationally and internationally on satellite and cable networks, on the "You Have a Destiny" television broadcast. Drs. Cedric & Joyce Oliver reside in Merrillville Indiana and have one daughter, Joy.

Pastors Chad Rowe
Destiny World Outreach Church, Killeen, TX
Pastor Chad Rowe is founder along with his wife, Pastor Marla, of Destiny World Outreach Center in Killeen, TX. Known for this down to earth, faith-filled preaching, Pastor Chad has innovated in the area of building construction, worship execution and reaching the next generation.

Drs. James & Teressa White
Heritage Christian Center, Jacksonville, FL
Drs. James and Teressa White are the founders of Heritage Christian Center in Jacksonville, Fl. They have been married for 20 plus years with two sons to their union, James II and Jasper. Their ministry style is entrenched in biblical integrity and delivered with practical examples that provide understanding and immediate application. Their high spirited personalities are a staple in their personal and ministerial lives.

Dr. John Ramsey
New Life Worship Center, Indianapolis, IN
Dr. John Ramsey is the gifted and anointed Senior Pastor of New Life Worship Center, in Indianapolis, Indiana. The church is an exciting and rapidly growing church. Under his dynamic and visionary leadership, New Life Worship Center moved from its initial 350 seat sanctuary (Kessler location) into a 13-acre 80,000 square foot 1500 seat facility, in the city's historic Traders Point neighborhood in July 2005. The church has grown to over 6000 members with 80 active ministries.

Pastor Brandon Pitts
Covenant Church of Jesus Christ, Macon, GA
Pastor Brandon is a second generation pastor who picked up the mantle of his Father, Apostle David Pitts and is leading the church his parents founded. Continuing the legacy of equipping, educating, and empowering through the ministry of the Word, he is leading the church to build a new 5000 seat facility.
BUILDING A NEW MODEL FOR MINISTRY

Bishop IV Hilliard

This year, I celebrate 50 years of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and my 60th birthday. As I look back over my ministry I can see that much has changed with how we present the Good News to a new generation. When I first started preaching, women were unwelcome in the pulpit, preaching was the preferred delivery method, educational programs in ministry were limited to Sunday School and Vacation Bible School, and attendance at church was an automatic occurrence on Sunday Morning.

Today, we have women leading major ministries and making real impact. Standing flat-footed and teaching people how to apply the Word of God in their lives has become the norm. Churches offer full children’s church and youth church ministries; in addition, small group ministries (in homes or in the church) have replaced traditional weekly Bible Study. And, regular attendance at Sunday Worship is challenged by competing priorities of children’s sports, the need to rest and spend time with family.

As much as I have seen the world and ministry change over the past five decades, I see the cycle of change happening much faster than before. We live in a world where things are changing rapidly. The landscape of life and ministry is evolving almost monthly.

There are vehicles that God has made available to the church that were unutilized when I started in ministry. Take, for example, the area of technology. Seldom were messages recorded.

Now, one can acquire CDs after the service, download sermon notes while the message is in progress, sync to podcasts and even watch a live worship service over the Internet through a computer or a cell phone. The way in which we engage people during a worship service has changed because of technology.

I can recall that the lights were only dimmed during candlelight communion service. Now, it is unusual to see a worship service without spotlights, color LEDs and even smoke machines. Even the old mimeographed program has been replaced with double-sided, full color bulletins that rival the best-printed publications available. It would have been unheard of years ago to come and watch an entire worship service on a video screen. Now, there are multi-campus churches that do just that.

There is a heightened level of sophistication required in how we execute our worship services more than ever before because of the advent of technology.

Even our culture and its expectations have changed. With personal schedules overloaded by commitments and the 35-hour workweek expanding to 50 hours or more. Even people who love God with all their heart are being challenged how to make time for worship and fellowship. There was a time when being in church all day Sunday was considered “our reasonable service.” Now, people’s attention is limited to a 90-minute worship service held on Saturdays or Sundays. Years ago, only Catholic Mass lasted an hour or less.

Now, there are many charismatic ministries that have mastered a 60-minute service. Churches have even had to schedule multiple services to accommodate the fact that the culture does not respect Sunday as “The Lord’s Day” or a “Day of Rest”.

Needless to say, social media has changed how the Gospel is spread. In what forum can you send one message of 140 characters or less and it be broadcast to thousands instantly. Moreover, it’s all free! God has made available cutting edge technology, media, tools and strategies that we should use to advance His Kingdom. How are you and your ministry poised to respond to the existing realities of ministry? What are you doing to discern the next wave of ministry innovation? What are you doing to develop your own new models of ministry for the 21st century?

There are serious questions! Our response to this change must be informed, intentional and inspired.

What are you doing to learn more about the trends taking place in ministry? How are you staying abreast of the evolution that is taking place in the culture as it relates to communication, socialization and personal development? How do you know what is working and what is not working?

Have you developed a culture in your church that allows for some level of experimentation with new methods and techniques to winning the lost? To reach this post-Christian society we will need to learn and become adopt at new strategies. Learning is only the first part. You will have to intentionally implement new ideas to see what will work with your community and demographic.

With all things, prayer is your best tool to guide your exploration into God’s heart for reaching this generation. The changes that we will all have to make in our ministries will have to be supported by more than just human ingenuity. It will take the Holy Spirit’s leading for us to know how to operate effectively in our times.

“From the tribe of Issachar, there were 200 leaders of the tribe with their relatives. All these men understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take” (1 Chronicles 12:32 NLT).

Where we are in ministry is no different than where others were years ago. In fact, each generation has had to renew their commitment to finding relevant ways to reach the world using the available tools. When I first started doing evangelism outreach, we used photocopied paper. Now, we have full color, glossy cards with QR codes! We should be like the tribe of Issachar who understood their times and plotted the best course forward.

God has lead me to start this magazine to expose new strategies for carrying the unchanging Gospel of Jesus to a new generation. In each issue, you will hear from ministry leaders who are innovating for the 21st Century church. The articles will cover topics such as administration, staff management, finances, family, personal spiritual development, technology, worship, evangelism and next generation strategies. Because this magazine is presented with you in mind, I want to hear from you about what issues matter most to you. So please use our feedback mechanism to communicate with us. This is your magazine designed to help you stay out in front of what’s happening in ministry.

I started this article by talking about how much everything is changing. I want to be clear as you begin to read this inaugural issue; there are some things that have not changed and these form the bedrock of our Strategies Magazine:

- God still loves all people, especially those who are different from us.
- Jesus is still Lord of all!
- The Word of God is still relevant to all our lives and situations.
- The Holy Spirit is still doing His work to convict the world of sin, judgment and righteousness.
- Faith will still work regardless of your geographical location or natural limitations.

Seeking to serve our present age, my calling to fulfill

† I.V. Hilliard
When members are impacted by job loss, no matter how much heart they may have for their church, they are limited in how they can financially support it. For this reason, I am convinced that during this season of economic uncertainty, it is NOT time to scale back on our vision. It is time to intensify the effectiveness of our stewardship. It is a time that pastors, board members and church administrators must learn to do more with less without compromising excellence. Leaders must develop the ability to manage the expected and the unexpected.

In Matthew 25:14-25, we have all read the parable of the servants who were given the five talents. What has always resonated with me in this parable is the fact that increase continued to flow in the life of the two servants that exhibited the best stewardship over what had been given to them. As a result of their stewardship, they experienced both increase and promotion.

As a pastor, I am grateful for staff, board and members who have worked to advance the vision of growth and expansion that God has given me for our church during these difficult times. Our church was founded 10 years ago and for the first seven years utilized sound stewardship principles including: managing expense levels at 85 percent of revenue; installing a detailed accounting system for monitoring and tracking expenses and implementing fiscal management policies that required maintenance of an established level of surplus funds. The surplus level is set by the Pastor and balanced against major purchases and expenses. These funds are invested with a top-tier financial investment company with an established history and financial credentials for managing large corporate accounts. In this past year, the return on investment for this account was enough to pay the annual salary of one of our staff. Additionally, the ministry maintains strict control on hiring and employs people who are gifted and qualified to fulfill multiple roles, thereby maximizing the resources and minimizing the number of positions required to support the ministry.

These strategies allowed the ministry to finance the purchase of our main location for $3.5 million, a 70,000 sq. ft. facility with a full service daycare.

In the following six years, the ministry;

- Completed main campus renovations of approximately $2 million
- Executed a cash purchase of a second 40,000 sq. ft campus for $1 million dollars,
- Completed major infrastructure repairs and ministry purchases while reducing the only mortgage to a balance of $1.5 million.

During this downturn, our ministry giving decreased due to the loss of household income. By maintaining expense and hiring controls; our ministry remains fiscally sound. I thank God for this blessing and for staff, board and members who understand the power of stewardship. We believe God will empower unemployed members with jobs and that our ministry is positioned to accomplish something great for the kingdom. We also believe God will bring us members who have a heart to serve, finance and support the ministry to fill every campus and service.

1 Additional information about strategies to maintain financial stability are outlined in Pastor John Ramsey’s book entitled “Smart Money Management, a Biblical Approach to Financial Stability.”
BALANCING Ministry & Family

Drs. James & Terresa White

Life comes at you fast and living a balanced life can feel impossible when it seems like everyone is pulling on you. A common issue that challenges the lives of many Pastors is maintaining effective balance with ministry.

While drama can exist in every church, the principles used to navigate through the chaos successfully are the same, no matter the size. When we trust the principles of God, we will experience an amazing level of balance that will yield incredible productivity. When we fail to execute God’s principles effectively, the challenges of ministry can be overwhelming causing undue stress that can spill over into our personal lives.

Maintaining a healthy balance between ministry and family should always be a top priority for the first family.

As Ministers, we should consider it a privilege to be in partnership with God for kingdom advancement, and in doing so; never neglect the care and attention required by our own family or minimize their needs while providing for others.

Ministry executed well enhances our existence, allowing us to live a maximized life that only God can provide.

“...I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows).” John 10:10 Amp

Albeit, the family unit should never suffer because of ministry and ministry should never suffer because of family.

Several key factors will intensify an inner self-care, causing a rhythmic balance for a thriving ministry and a healthy home life.

Putting first things first. Everything and everyone does not deserve a front row seat in your life. God and family should take precedence over other areas. If you refuse to schedule and prioritize life, life will take over and run you.

Persistent Fulfillment. A spiritual regiment for personal growth is critical to balance the responsibilities of both ministry and family properly. It is often assumed that the preparation and study used to minister can take the place of personal devotion. A healthy spiritual regiment for personal growth can never be substituted.

Personal Faithfulness. Stay cutting edge and find ways to enhance the ministry and explore ideas that increase the cohesiveness of the family unit. Never rest on your laurels. The habits of comfort should never win over your desire for new adventures in ministry and family. The entire first family should be enjoying the journey!

If you step-up your intensity, you can experience the utopia God promises every believer in the word.

A critical element of success that allows our family partnership to work well both in ministry and at home is effective communication. Family unity is a top priority and everyone has a say. We consistently spend time together enjoying ministry and each other. Moreover, every family member has liberty to voice their concerns, if they feel the balance of life slipping. It is a requirement; however, for those listening to resist the urge to defend their position and to suspend criticism.

It would be dishonorable to invest time and energy in members of the church, while neglecting our own family.

No matter the role or position of each family member, there should be an open forum for feedback. To ignore, criticize or listen to the comments of a vulnerable family member in a cavalier manner is an ultimate sign of disrespect. When family members can see their value, balance is easy.

As a family, some of the most synergistic ideas for the ministry were born during the time spent recharging every February in Houston. Bishop and Pastor Bridget along with the first family providing the “work hard/play hard” example sparks ideas for every member of our family.

The results of adopting the philosophy that every family member’s ideas make us better have been of great benefit to the ministry and to our personal lives.

For instance, each of our personalities while different, they all fit and make the team better. Dr. James is the implementer who is going to make sure the family stays on task and sticks with the plan. Dr. Terresa is the avant-garde of the group who is always trying to get the “dukes” (and the ministry) out of their comfort zone. James II is the “fun meter” and food regulator who makes sure meals are never skipped and whatever we are doing in ministry or on vacation is not mundane. Jasper is the stabilizer and the practical joker who brightens the darkest moments. He ensures there is no tension and everyone can hold hands and sing “Kumbaya”.

When attention and commitment to the family is clear, they cannot view the time invested in ministry endeavors as competition or replacement.

Exercising the discipline of the word will give way to accomplishing kingdom assignments with ease that brings professional contentment and personal comfort.
MOTIVATING STAFF FOR GREATER PRODUCTIVITY

Dr. Cedric Oliver

God believes in productivity. He is not wasteful and expects optimum results from minimal resources. Let’s look at a few examples:

1. God instructed Adam and Eve to fill the entire earth (Gen. 1:28)
2. God reduced Gideon’s army from 32,000 to 300 men (Judges 7:1-7)
3. David killed Goliath with a sling shot and “one” rock (1 Sam. 17:48-49)
4. Jesus instructed 11 disciples to go make disciples of nations (Matt. 28:18-19)
5. One can chase a 1,000 and two can put 10,000 to flight (Deut. 32:30)
6. Jesus fed over 6,000 with two fish and five loaves of bread (Matt. 14:15-21)

As pastors most of us are self-motivated and have a passion to fulfill the vision God has given us. We are generally willing to make the most effective use of our time to ensure that our days are productive. The reality is that those who join with us to fulfill the vision, may or may not share our same passion. This leaves us with a challenge to keep our staff motivated to be productive, and to share our passion for ministry.

Productivity is the ability to complete assignments with the minimum use of resources, time, and effort. It is one of the most significant principals in the kingdom of God. In fact, it was the first command given to Adam in Gen 1:28. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful…. or “be productive.” God wanted Adam to be productive “before” he multiplied, replenished, subdued, or took dominion on the earth.

4. Let your staff identify ideas to improve productivity
    The people who routinely perform task generally have excellent ideas to improve productivity. When I was in management I was instructed to reduce cost in one of my departments. I facilitated a meeting with the employees and asked for their recommendations. They redesigned their jobs, and suggested eliminating positions. Since the team made the recommendations the transition was very smooth and team productivity increased.

5. Reward good performance
    The entire kingdom of God is harvest and reward based. Reward can be monetary, or non-monetary. To some, recognition is as important as monetary reward.

6. Remind your staff that God is with them
    “They can do all things through Christ that gives them strength.”

7. Celebrate success
    Make a “BIG” deal about your ministry’s accomplishments, and give God glory, then your staff can feel that their efforts have pleased God.

Let’s motivate our staff to give God their best and we will all stand before Him one day and hear Him say to us:

“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!” (NIV)
Ushering a New Generation into His Presence

Pastor Chad Rowe

As a new generation of believers filters into our sanctuaries and congregations what we are seeing within them is a deep gnawing hunger for what is real.

The common text we read in correlation to this subject of coming into the presence of God is found in John 4:23-24 and stands today as the benchmark for us all.

Jesus said, “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeks such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” (KJV)

The prophet Isaiah spoke of this model in Isaiah 51:16
“And I have put my words in thy mouth and I have covered thee in the shadow of my hand that I may plant the heavens and lay foundations of the earth and say unto Zion, Thou art my people” (KJV)

Here we have a picture of a generation being given inspiration from on high.
“...I have put my words in your mouth...”

Then we see them covered, having been planted in the house of God.
“...I have covered thee in the shadow of my hand...”

Next we see God’s purpose revealed.
“...that I may plant the heavens...”

Lastly we see the power of identification.
“...I will say unto Zion, you are My people...”

I believe that as we enter into this time of accelerated growth in the kingdom of God one thing is for sure, we must live what we believe. We must teach a new generation what it means to give all you’ve got and to flow in the anointing that changes everything.

There is an abandon in the worship of our young people that you can both hear and see when they connect with the reality of God. I see a generation that is arising that is in total abandonment to God’s purpose and power in their life.

This is a generation that will shift the world, as we know like never before.

They are establishing heaven on earth in and thru their praise.

They are a generation whose monumental goal in life is as the great evangelist Smith Wigglesworth once said, “Lord use me solitary every day until there is no more left of me, only a display of your glory in the earth!”

As each one of us take our place to help usher in a new generation into His presence, together we are posed for uncommon, supernatural breakouts of His glory, a tangible presence of God in the atmosphere and a dynamic power that is unstoppable. This is where we are headed and truly, our greatest days are ahead of us!

Pastor Chad Rowe is the Senior Pastor of Destiny World Outreach in Killean, TX
www.destinywoc.com
We have been chosen to run the race of faith; it’s a marathon, cross-country and relay race with various hurdles. The baton that we are to run with is the promises given to us by God. The hurdles of faith are trials and tribulations which come to make the promises seem far away and even unachievable. As a chosen participant, we must know that trials of any sort are a part of the Christian experience, yet these adversities are beneficial when approached by faith. On February 28th 2007, Apostle David L. Pitts went home to be with Lord. At his death an overwhelming amount of hurdles arose which challenged my faith. I suffered the loss of my father and friend; in ministry I suffered the loss of my Pastor, mentor and shepherd.

Apostle David L. Pitts, along with my mother, Prophetess Angela W. Pitts founded the Covenant Church in November 1984 with a plan from God and only 10 members. As they set forth to do the work of the Lord, they build up their faith with the Word and stayed focused in the midst of adversity. With doing so, the Lord blessed and the ministry grew to 1000 plus members. Upon my father’s passing the ministry was shaken, shocked and unsettled. Many of the members allowed confusion to outweigh their Christian commitment, ultimately leaving the ministry. With about 75% of the members having departed, my family and I found ourselves in a state of uncertainty. But God sent a man by the name of Bishop. I. V Hilliard to encourage our hearts to stay in the race. The entire Hilliard family opened their hearts and lives to be an example of support and stability; sharing their personal experiences and extensive knowledge in ministry.

Reflecting on the legacy of my late father Apostle David L. Pitts and observing the ministry of my spiritual father Bishop. I. V Hilliard, I can bear witness that tough times are beneficial with a strategic plan.

The Christian’s Faith Regiment for success:

**Aim** – Set your goal
*Habakkuk 2:3*

**Train** – Build up your faith daily in the Word
*Acts 20:32*

**Focus** – Stay focused in the midst of adversity
*Colossians 3:2*

In the book of Genesis chapters 37-45 we read of Joseph’s course to greatness. Upon receiving the dreams from God, Joseph encountered hurdles of slavery, false accusations and imprisonment. Without these Joseph would not have been equipped to receive the promises of God. Scripture tells us that adversities come to:

Prove our spiritual resolve *Deut. 8:2, 3*

Prepare us for future days of adversity
*Psalms 94:12, 13*

Prepare us to receive of the Lord’s best
*Acts 14:22*

Joseph says in Gen 45:8 “So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.” telling his brothers that it was the plan of God for him to go through the various trials and tribulations. The promises put pressure on the heart of Joseph so that he would qualify for the greatness destined for him *(Psalms 105:17-19)*.

*Heb 5:14 “But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”*

In *Heb 5:14*, Paul explains that if we are going to win the race of faith we must train and discipline our spiritual senses to be unaffected by the obstacles of life. Discipline is having self control; self restraint or more beautifully put, “enforced obedience.” Discipline is what caused Joseph to be promoted from slave to Governor; it took discipline for Joseph not to slip into the grips of rejection when his brothers sold him into slavery.

Looking back on my 4 years in ministry I can testify to Romans 6:26, “And we know all things work together for them that love God and to them who are called according to His purpose.” The proving and preparation through adversity has allowed God to position me to pick up the baton, impact my generation and future generations to come with the Word of faith. Restraint and obedience moulds you to be all that God has called you to be.

When picking up the baton and running the race in faith we know that distractions come with the aim of causing us to drift off our God-ordained destiny path, but by disciplining our ear, eyes and mouth gates we are well able to run the race with patience that is set before us *(Hebrews 12:1)*.

Brandon M Pitts is the Pastor of Covenant Church of Jesus Christ in Macon, GA, which is an affiliate church of New Light Christian Center Church.

For more information visit www.ccojc.org
We can’t focus our thoughts on Him when we’re worried with outside problems. Bring those cares and concerns to God. When we allow those issues to clutter our minds, we’re not able to seek His will or listen for His guidance.

1 Peter 5:7

For “who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:16

Now that we’ve given those concerns to the Lord, we need to fill our minds with the power of the Holy Spirit. Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses.

For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Romans 8:26-27

You are on your way to Strengthening Your Spiritual Life Through Prayer and a deeper relationship with our God. Remember as we seek His face we must apply faith.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6

Seeking God is key, you and those you minister to will experience a deeper relationship with God.

Dr. Dexter Easley
New Life Christian Fellowship

As we go through life, we as Ministers of the Gospel are sensing in our spirits a need for more of the Father. We find ourselves desiring more of God. There is a desire to draw nearer and spend more time in His presence. To properly care for the sheep you must fulfill that desire for a deeper relationship.

God calls your desire for a deeper relationship with him hunger, a hunger for more of Him.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled. Matthew 5:6

Wow! God promises to fill us. Then He says: Draw near to God and He will draw near to us. James 4:8

Seeking after God is to desire or to endeavor; inquire; I define seeking after God as: a desire to have a deeper relationship with Him.

There are two powerful keys to help us renew our hunger for God.

1. Repentance: If we cover our sin we will not prosper. Proverbs 28:13. When we repent, the door of refreshing is opened. This refreshing comes from God’s presence. Act 3:19

2. Prayer: We must refocus our prayer life on God’s Word: The Word of God must permeate every aspect of our lives in order for us to pray. God commands us to learn His Word and speak it in prayer to receive His blessings.

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, … observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Joshua 1:8

By learning His Word, we learn about our Creator and Redeemer. We know His will for us, His expectations, and His love and grace. We see Him more clearly, and we align our thoughts with His will. God wants us to know Him in a personal way. We must build this relationship through prayer. When we pray His word, we focus on God and not ourselves or on the many distractions of the day. Set aside special times each day and commit this time solely to prayer. Schedule appointments around your prayer time giving time to God alone. A time of solitude allows us to bring our whole being to the Lord; to empty ourselves mentally; seeking only Him. Think on things that are pure. Philippians 4:8.
Ecclesiastes 9:14-16 gives us an example of how dangerous the lack of numbers can be: “There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.”

We can take some awesome truths from this story. Did you know that a little church with few people has no influence in its community? Did you also know that it is this same small mentality that causes our churches to be overlooked and not taken seriously? We must become significant in numbers if we are to be believable in maximizing our lives as well as the lives of others. Acts 17:6 says “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.” Jesus understood the importance of numbers and with 12 men he impacted the world.

If we are to become difference makers and those who make an uncommon contribution; if we are to increase in numbers and reach the harvest through teamwork, we must understand the relevance of numbers. Quite often in small churches the coined phrases are “where two or three are gathered together” or “one can chase a thousand and two can put ten thousand to flight”. We understand these are spiritual analogies, but when it comes to the influence of our churches in our communities, numbers are important. David came to understand this concept in the Cave of Adullam by taking a catalog of undesirables and changing their viewpoint by:

1. Teaching them the importance of becoming mighty in numbers

2. Infusing them with his passion for worship

3. Training them in the importance of covenant through teamwork for a cause

4. Equipping them to be relentless in their pursuit of kingdom expansion

We find that David’s heart was the same as Jesus’, who was found in the temple at an early age attracting numbers to talk about kingdom business. When Jesus came into His public ministry he sought out 12 men and taught them to be fishers of other men. Throughout the timeline of Jesus’ life, even at the end, an emphasis was placed on numbers. In John 15:16 when he said “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” Jesus was specifically talking about numbers and we as leaders must change our viewpoint when it comes to growing our churches by changing the minds of our people toward numbers. We must begin to teach that numbers really do matter when it comes to our churches having significant influence in our communities. One can chase a thousand and two can put ten thousand to flight, but it takes an army to win a war.

Numbers are only attained through a calculated and consistent pursuit of growth. Numbers are a matter of determined effort, not accident or chance. The decision to grow can be facilitated through three fundamental principles:

Select The Leaders: The first key in developing a system of growth is to establish a framework of leaders and growth-focused teams who will support the initiative, just as Jethro did with Moses in Exodus 18:21. The Bible says “Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.” Pastors, you must understand that the passion for numbers starts with you as the head and will flow down into your people.

3. Measure The Success: The third key to expansion is to define success metrics, monitor results, and keep the results before the eyes of the people. Your growth objectives must be made clear so that the teams can rally and run with the vision and results can be monitored. Success should be celebrated, and the lack of success should be quickly addressed and corrected. Remember, the Bible tells us to “Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds” in Proverbs 27:23. Lastly, you should keep your achievements before the eyes of the congregation. Publicly celebrating your success is a motivational tool that builds momentum and inspires people to diligently pursue results.

As with anything, we must continue to sow into the hearts of the people the significance of numbers when it comes to kingdom building. Acts 2:47 “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”
The tragic account of the life of young king Jehu, given above unfortunately parallels the lives of many of today’s young ministers. King Jehu had a clear calling from God and began his reign by carrying out the instructions that God gave to him with careful detail and great zeal; disposing of Jezebel; destroying the idols of Baal; and doing unto the house of Ahab “according to all that was in mine heart.” God was so pleased with this young king in fact that He promised to bless him with longevity and a legacy that would extend to four generations. He was a man after God’s own heart. In II Kings 10:30.

And the LORD said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.

But like so many of today’s young ministers, when he arrived at a place of power, prominence, and prosperity, he begins to let things “slip.” He departed from the people, principles, and patterns that had made him successful. Notice that verse thirty-one says that he no longer took heed to walk in the ways of the Lord. As a result, verse thirty-two says that in those days, God began to cut Israel short.

How many promising ministers have in our day been suddenly and sadly cut short because they began to let things slip? Some have had their lives cut short. Some have had their marriages cut short. Some have had their finances cut short, and far too many the effectiveness of their ministries cut short because they stopped giving earnest heed and subsequently, let things slip.

Like Jehu, when ministers begin to let things slip, it is because they begin to involve themselves in what I call “selective service.”

1. They develop selective amnesia – forgetting the Cadre that instructed, trained and nurtured them, while revising their history.

II Timothy 3:14 says,

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;

2. They practice selective adherence – only following the parts of the Bible that fit their lifestyles, desires, and ambitions at the expense of their character.

I Timothy 4:16 reminds us:

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

3. They pursue selective assignments, abandoning the calling that God has given them for that which is popular, profitable, or political.

And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received of the Lord, that thou fulfill it. (Colossians 4:17)

By giving more earnest heed to these three areas

OUR CADRE (mentors and fathers);
OUR CHARACTER (morals and ethical behavior);
OUR CALLING (ministry assignment);

we can ensure that we enjoy the blessings of longevity and success!

Then like King David, it will be said of us, “And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honor; and Solomon his son reigned in his stead. (I Chronicles 29:28) 

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