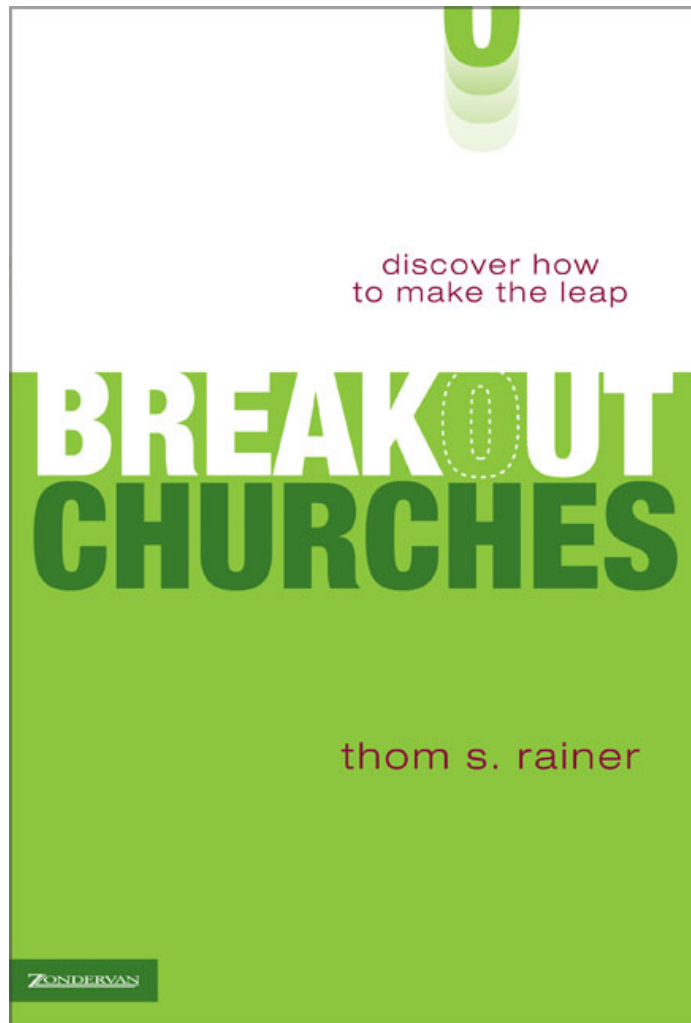


BREAKOUT CHURCHES

INDIVIDUAL/SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

BASED ON THE BOOK *BREAKOUT CHURCHES* BY THOM S. RAINER



ZONDERVAN

Thank you for picking up the Breakout Churches Individual/Small Group Study Guide. We are grateful that you have read or are reading Breakout Churches, and it is our prayer that this guide will be a significant blessing to you.

It is the passion of everyone involved in the Breakout Churches project to see Christians and their churches achieve the greatness to which God has called us. The specific goal of this guide is to extend the impact of the book by providing you, the reader, with ways to translate the theory about which you have read into personal application.

The questions you will find in this guide are challenging, but they are geared toward provoking thought rather than testing knowledge. Some questions will have easy answers while others will be more difficult. What is most important, however, is that as you work through the material, you do so approaching each question openly, answering them honestly, all the while listening to hear what God may be trying to communicate to you.

In order to get the most out of this study, we recommend that you use this tool with a small group of your church leaders. It would be best if the group could read one chapter per week for ten weeks, meeting at a group member's home or over a meal at a restaurant to work through the discussion questions. But no matter how, when, or where you decide to use this resource, be sure to share your insights and findings with others along the way. You will likely encounter several who are very interested in what you have to say. Further, you never know what a conversation might do. God could use your words to save a soul, grow someone's faith, or even lay the foundation for the next breakout church.

Enjoy the study, and may God bless you richly as you faithfully serve him.



Breakout Churches Individual/Small Group Study Questions

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This study guide is provided for use with leadership teams, board/committee meetings, small groups, or classrooms in connection with reading *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap*. This study guide is available for free download at www.zondervan.com.

CHAPTER 1

WHY GOOD IS NOT ENOUGH: THE CHRYSALIS FACTOR

- 1) In the opening line of *Breakout Churches* Thom Rainer states, “It is a sin to be good if God has called us to be great” (p. 15). This statement is one that we should not pass over too quickly. What are your thoughts about this quote? Has God called us to goodness or greatness in our Christian faith? What is the reason for your response?
- 2) Rainer quotes a line from Jim Collins’s *Good to Great* on his first page: “Good is the enemy of great” (p. 15). On a very personal level, consider this statement in relation to your work, your family, and most importantly, your relationship with Christ. Have you settled for good in any of these areas? What would these areas of your life look like if you labored to make them great?
- 3) Applying this same principle of good being the enemy of great to your church, where would you place your church? Is it in the good, the great, or the ugly column? What evidence could you provide that would validate your response?
- 4) Figure 1A, Attendance of Breakout Churches and Comparison Churches (p. 17), is in one way exciting and in another very sobering. While the thirteen “breakout churches” give us great hope and inspiration for growing healthy church congregations in the United States, the “comparison churches” (which are representative of most churches across the nation) display a grim reality. Many churches are dying in our country each year. In

looking at your own church, which type of church is your congregation more like? Are you growing stronger and more vibrant as a body of believers, or is your congregation in a state of decline? What is the reason for your answer?

- 5) Temple Church was doing some good things, but God had planted a far greater vision within the heart of Pastor Bishop Graves. Remember the comment offered by Bishop Graves's peer? Like Job's friends, he offered unwise counsel: "Graves, if you don't build the rest of your vision, you've achieved more than any of us. Be grateful" (p. 18). What would have happened to Temple Church if Bishop Graves had listened to his peer and the 300 people who left his church? Would the church be what God intended it to be? If God placed a vision in the heart of your pastor or your church leadership team like that of Bishop Graves, how would you respond?

- 6) In the list of six criteria used to define "breakout churches" the first two criteria are extremely important (p. 20). The first is that breakout churches had at least twenty-six conversions annually, and the second is that their conversion ratios (members to converts) were no higher than 20:1. Realizing that these figures are as critical to the health of a church as blood pressure and cholesterol level to humans, how do your church's numbers compare?

- 7) Take a look back at the following statement found on page 23.

With most of these churches, somewhere in their histories they have become

satisfied with the status quo. They resist change and often seek to minister only to those inside the church. They have some or many programs. They may even have large budgets. But they are not making a significant impact on their communities, nor do they see significant numbers of changed lives in their congregations.

As you think about your church, has your congregation become satisfied with the “status quo”? Why or why not? How do you feel about your church “making a significant impact in your community” and “seeing significant numbers of changed lives in your congregation”?

- 8) Note the seven examples of findings that the research team did not find (p. 25). As you look at the list, do you see any surprises? Which finding is most noteworthy to you? Explain.

- 9) In looking at the description of the “Acts 6/7 Legacy Leader” we find five traits or characteristics that these leaders share in common (p. 28). These traits are as follows:
 - a. They seek to equip others for the work of the ministry.
 - b. They deflect recognition of themselves.
 - c. They make decisions to benefit the church.
 - d. They praise others quickly.
 - e. They accept responsibility for anything that may go wrong.

While God may not call you to be a pastor, he has called every believer to be a member of the body of Christ. How much of a positive impact could you have within your church, your family, and your work place if you made it a personal priority to practice these five actions on a daily basis?

10) The B in the “ABC Moment” stands for “belief,” and it is within this stage that the leader becomes willing to “confront the brutal facts about the church’s inadequacies” (p. 29). Put yourself in the leader’s shoes for a moment. Let’s assume that “a wide gap” does indeed “exist between what is and what God intends for your church.” As you survey the various aspects of your church, what would you say are its inadequacies? List them in priority of greatest to least in the space provided below.

PRAYER FOCUS:

Much focus and attention has been placed on you and your church within the preceding discussion questions. As you prepare to end your group meeting today, take a few moments as a group to pray for the following matters:

1. Pray for the members of your group—that each of you would be receptive to whatever God may be leading you and your church to do.
2. Pray for your pastor and the other leadership of your church—that they may be diligent in seeking God’s will for your congregation.

3. Pray for your church—that the hearts and minds of your entire church family would seek first and foremost to glorify God by being obedient to his will for your church.

CHAPTER 2

ACTS 6/7 LEADERSHIP

- 1) In this chapter we learn about Donald Schaeffer, the pastor of Grace Church, who has served in the same capacity now for over thirty-eight years (p. 35). Given Schaeffer's situation, consider the following questions:
 - a. What is the length of time pastors should spend serving in one place?
 - b. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a single pastor for a long duration at a church? What about shorter pastoral tenures?
 - c. Is your church the type of place pastors want to be for the long run? Why or why not?

- 2) During the church growth conference that the leadership of Grace Church attended, the group was stuck by something Bill Orr said: "Churches do not remain plateaued. They either begin to grow again or they begin to die" (p. 36). Below, you will find a sigmoid curve representing the life span of a church. Take a moment to think about where you would place your church on the curve, and then mark it with an "X." Underneath the curve, list the three primary reasons you believe your church is where you have placed it.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What can your congregation do to avoid becoming plateaued or declining?

- 3) Returning again in this chapter to the qualities of good-to-great leaders and breakout church pastors (p. 40), the two columns below are given as an exercise in evaluation. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being very weak and 10 very strong), rate your pastor and yourself fairly and honestly. You may be thinking, “Why two columns? I’m not the leader of our church.” While indeed you may not be a pastor, you’re still a leader. In our roles at work, at church, and at home we each have important responsibilities in leading and influencing the lives of people around us. While how we score below doesn’t make us a good or bad leader, it does give us a starting point for knowing where we need improvement.

4) Revisit “The Leader Pyramid” (Figure 2F, p. 41). It is clear from the *Breakout Churches* research that leaders can progress from one level of leadership to the next, “in God’s power.” Given this reality, what tangible steps could you put into place to help your pastor move to the next level of leadership? Make a list of four ideas below:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

5) In the discussion of the “Acts 2 Contributing Leader” we find that a minority of pastors spend significant time in preaching preparation and prayer (see Acts 2:14–39, 42) (p. 42). Understanding the pivotal importance of these two activities, how would you respond to the following questions:

- a. If you’re a pastor, how much time on a weekly basis do you give to:
 - i. sermon preparation? _____ hours/minutes
 - ii. prayer? _____ hours/minutes
- b. If you’re a church member, how much time each week do you give your pastor for these two specific tasks?
- c. Should your church give a pastor twenty hours per week for prayer and preaching? Why or why not?

6) The “Acts 3 Outwardly-Focused Leader” and the churches they serve concentrate on the work of evangelism, making it a high congregational priority (p. 42).

- a. Does your church leadership emphasize evangelism?
- b. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being nonevangelistic and 10 highly evangelistic) where would you place your church? _____
- c. What could you and your church do to make evangelism a higher priority?

7) Like Peter in the discussion of the “Acts 5 Bold Leader,” every leader (pastoral or otherwise) faces times when he or she has to make a difficult decision that brings about conflict or a negative response (p. 43).

- a. Can you think of a time in your life where you faced such a situation?
- b. In your situation, what did you do and how did people respond?
- c. Has there been a similar situation in your church with your pastor? What was the response?
- d. How has it impacted the church? How has it impacted the church’s ministry?

8) The “Acts 6/7 Legacy Leader” displays several important characteristics. They deflect praise to others, they praise others, they accept the blame when anything goes wrong, and they give ministry to others (p. 44). The first three traits mentioned here rest completely in the hands of the pastor, but the last requires help from the congregation. Given this reality:

- a. In what ways could you help your pastoral leadership give ministry away?
- b. What jobs does your pastor do that others in your church could do just as well?

- c. What ministry job or task could you do specifically that would give your pastor more time to dedicate to matters like preaching and prayer?

- 9) Review the gray box at the top of page 47 that discusses the residual effect of “autocratic” and “peacemaking” pastors. In evaluating the history of your church:
 - a. Have your previous pastors leaned toward one extreme or the other?
 - b. Have their leadership styles influenced the atmosphere, relationships, and structure of your church? Please explain.

- 10) When Stephen Schwambach had reached his breaking point at Bethel Temple Community Church, he decided to step back for a “protracted time of prayer and fasting” (p. 50). The impact of this spiritual retreat was powerful, and both he and his church benefited from it enormously. Consider the following questions:
 - a. Have you ever set aside a time for a spiritual retreat?
 - i. If yes, what happened?
 - ii. If no, would you ever consider doing one?
 - b. In light of Stephen Schwambach’s story, would it be possible for your church to make available a regular time on a yearly basis to send your pastor away for a spiritual retreat?

CHAPTER 3:

EIGHT KEYS TO ACTS 6/7 LEADERSHIP

- 1) If asked to define the word “ministry” from a biblical perspective, what would you say?

Take a moment to write your definition in the space below.

Ministry is

With this definition in mind, evaluate the activities and events of your church. How much of what your church does (in terms of a percentage) would qualify as biblically based ministry?

- 2) Calvary Memorial Church in Oak Park, Illinois, took a negative situation and made it a very positive one for both their church and their community (p. 55). They stood firmly upon the teachings of Scripture, and they used an otherwise trying situation to show God’s love with the lost. Is there a problem or issue within your community by which God could use your congregation to reach out with the gospel? What problems does your community face?
- 3) Concerning pastoral tenure, Rainer comments:

After studying thousands of churches for two decades, I have come to the conclusion that long tenure should be normative, but that several factors are creating abnormally short tenures. Indeed, our research indicates that the problem of the short-term pastor is a relatively recent phenomenon from the past fifty years. Both churches and their leaders are responsible for this new development.

(57)

- a. What are your thoughts about Rainer's conclusion?
 - b. Realizing the importance of pastoral tenure, what steps could your church take in order to increase it?
- 4) Grace Evangelical Free Church in Allen, Texas, has made a profound ministry commitment to future planning. Rainer explains: "The plans [based on the church's vision] call for the planting of new churches every time the attendance reaches 500" (p.58).
- a. What would happen if every church adopted this type of planning strategy?
 - b. Would you be willing to plant a new church every time your church grew to 500 in attendance? Why or why not?
- 5) The members of Grace Evangelical Free Church praise their pastor, Joel Walters, for his communication of vision. One member explains: "He has consistently and confidently communicated the vision of planting new churches and equipping people to do ministry"

(p. 59). How well does the pastoral and lay leadership of your church communicate vision? Perhaps these questions will help you determine the answer.

- a. What is the vision of your church?
- b. How does church leadership communicate vision within your church?
- c. Do most members of your church understand the church's vision?

6) Take a moment to reread the first paragraph at the top of page 60. With the example of Pastor David Clark in mind, consider the following questions.

- a. How important is the "humility factor" to you personally?
- b. How does a self-focused leader affect a church?
- c. How does a humble leader affect a church?

7) Refer back to the box on page 61 where a breakout church pastor and a comparison church pastor from the very same area explained how "unchurched" their community was.

- a. What was the difference between their two views?
- b. Based on their responses, what conclusion might be drawn concerning the attitude of church leadership?
- c. How deeply does the attitude, thought, and personality of a pastor affect a congregation?

8) Who is your "Max"? At Korean Central Presbyterian Church, Pastor Won Sang Lee struggled with a church member named "Max." He was Lee's greatest adversary within

the congregation, and he worked to have Lee dismissed from the pastorate. But Pastor Lee, with great encouragement from his wife, stayed the course. Lee recounts:

I admit that I went home on some days ready to kill Max. He was the biggest pain I have ever known in ministry.... Through prayer I eventually began really feeling love toward Max, even when he was my biggest critic. God even showed me some things I could learn from Max's criticisms. It was not the most fun experience of my ministry, but I did learn a lot. (62)

Unsurprisingly, when Max found himself in the middle of a painful personal problem, Pastor Lee was able to minister to Max and his family. What was the result? Max's heart changed toward Pastor Lee, and he is now Lee's greatest supporter.

- a. Who is the "Max" God has placed in your life?
 - b. How much love are you showing toward him or her?
 - c. Would you be willing to pray for and minister to your Max on a regular basis?
 - d. What would have happened if Pastor Lee had not labored to love Max?
- 9) The model of ministry used at Southwest Baptist Church in Amarillo, Texas, seems to be quite powerful. Pastor J. Alan Ford "led the church to organize Sunday school classes into small groups where small-group leaders [were] responsible for ministry" (p.63). As a result, the church broke out of its plateaued state.
- a. What type of benefits are there of moving ministry responsibilities into the hands of small-group leaders?

- b. Would this type of model be beneficial in your church? Why or why not?

10) Revisit the comments made by Acts 6/7 leaders concerning the future of the church ministries they lead (p. 65). There comments are revealing.

- a. What recurrent ideas or thoughts do you see the leaders expressing?
- b. How important is it to “do church” with the future in mind?
- c. What do you think happens to churches that focus their attention more on the past or present than the future?

CHAPTER 4

THE ABC MOMENT

- 1) Let's take a moment to look at the big picture of your church. Review the list of responses given by the consultation team when asked to evaluate the church they were consulting (pp. 70–71).
 - a. Do you see any similarities between your church and the church being evaluated?
 - b. Where do you think the church will be in ten years? In twenty-five years?
 - c. Is there a solution to their situation?

- 2) Suppose that Thom Rainer's assessment that "the vast majority of churches ... are addicted to mediocrity" is true.
 - a. If you agree, why do you think churches are this way?
 - b. If you disagree, what is the evidence you see to support this perspective?
 - c. Whether you agree or disagree with Rainer's position, what do you think will happen to the church in the United States if this "mediocrity" view is true?

- 3) While the "ABC Moment" concept is derived from church research, it also finds application in the lives of individuals. Have you ever had an "ABC Moment" or an "ABC Season" when you became "aware of a problem," "faced the facts," and then "faced the crisis"?
 - a. Realizing that we have all had this type of moment, in a few sentences summarize your most significant "ABC Moment."

- b. Reflecting back upon that time or event, has God used that situation to help you grow in your faith? If yes, please explain.

- 4) Concerning the matter of “doctrinal ignorance,” the research presented in the book shows that over the last five years (within a sampling of conservative churches) the average percentage of church members who believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven has decreased from 97 percent to 83 percent. That means as many as 1 in 5 evangelicals believes there are ways to heaven outside Jesus Christ (p. 73).
 - a. What are your thoughts about these findings?
 - b. What do you think are the reasons for this shift in thinking?
 - c. How would you predict that it will affect churches in the Unites States if belief in salvation through Christ alone is not maintained as a foundational doctrine?

- 5) Consider the paragraph provided below that continues the discussion on “Evangelistic Apathy.”

It now takes 85 church members a year to reach one person for Christ. And fewer than 15 percent of church members indicated that they had shared with someone how to become a Christian in the past twelve months. And more than 8 of 10 churches are either declining or growing less than their community’s population growth rate. A growing number of Christians tell us that they are reluctant to be evangelistic because they do not want to impose their beliefs on others. (74)

- a. What are your thoughts about the findings of this research?
- b. What do you think God thinks about the research?

6) Rainer’s statement that “most of the ministry in the church is focused on the membership” (p. 74) is profound. To test this idea, take a moment to evaluate your church to see where the focuses of its ministries rest. List the seven most significant ministries of your church in the blanks to the left in the space below. Then, beside each ministry in the blanks to the right place an “M” if the focus of the ministry is on membership and a “C” if the focus is on community. Some ministries will focus on both. In these cases, assign the letter that represents the group most affected by the ministry.

Name of Ministry	→	Focus (Membership or Community)
1. _____	→	_____
2. _____	→	_____
3. _____	→	_____
4. _____	→	_____
5. _____	→	_____
6. _____	→	_____
7. _____	→	_____

Based on this simple evaluation tool, what is the greater focus of your church ministry?

7) Is your church an inwardly-focused church? Look at the list of conflict matters or points of contention to follow: worship styles, pastoral attention, music choices, and carpet colors (p. 74). Do people in your church fight over matters like these?

- a. What are the major recurring matters of conflict within your church?
- b. Would these problems continue to remain major issues if church members focused on reaching the lost and growing in their faith?
- c. In your estimation, what kind of impact does church conflict have upon church visitors or prospective members?

8) Does your church suffer from slow erosion in its membership and participation numbers?

If it does, how would you be able to tell for sure? What would be some ways that you could track the numbers of people involved in your ministry? List three ideas.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

9) In the section on positive outside influences (pp. 81–84), emphasis is placed upon the benefits that can come from reading books and going to conferences designed to strengthen churches. What are your thoughts on the following?

- a. Would books or conferences be helpful to the staff and membership of your church family?
- b. Would you be willing to participate in a book discussion group or go to a conference with your pastor or a staff member?

- c. What are some ways that you personally could facilitate positive outside influences coming into your church?

10) How is your church doing at reaching the young? For the sixty-seven-year-old man at the church in the Midwest (p. 89), the answer to this question was heartbreaking. His comment presents a challenge to every church: “We are not even reaching my grandchildren. I never realized how complacent we have become.”

- a. Is your church reaching children, youth, young adults, and young married couples?
- b. What could your church do to be more intentional about reaching out to the young people within your community? List four ideas below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

CHAPTER 5

THE WHO/WHAT SIMULTRACK

- 1) When seeking the right people to fill ministry positions, the Breakout Church research team concluded that getting the right people on board is extremely important. Do you remember the two reasons why the breakout churches don't have any problems finding the right people?

First, these churches tend to attract the best people because of their clear and compelling vision. Second, the breakout church leaders often do not wait for an opening before bringing a person on staff or providing a place for a lay leader to serve. If they come across a promising individual, they invite him or her to join the team even if there is no clear place for the person at the time. (92)

- a. What are the benefits to this type of approach to ministry placement?
 - b. What would prevent your church from adopting this strategy to filling:
 - i. Layperson ministry niches within your church?
 - ii. Church staff positions within your church?
-
- 2) Unfortunately, there are points in the life of every church where leadership decisions must be made to protect the health and vitality of the church body. Many times, people become hurt, frustrated, or even angered by the changes that are needed in the leadership of the church. What should be pointed out here is that if certain changes aren't made—

perhaps a staff member removed or a divisive person asked to leave—then a far greater hurt takes place: God’s church can be crippled from doing what God has called it to do.

Think about this quote by Jim Collins:

To let people languish in uncertainty for months or years, stealing precious time in their lives that they could use to move on to something else, when in the end they aren’t going to make it anyway—*that* would be ruthless. To deal with it up front and let people get on with their lives—that is *rigorous*. (93)

- a. If you had a staff member or church member within your congregation who was inhibiting the church from accomplishing its purpose, would you be willing to approach and encourage this person, in love, to move on?
 - b. Is there a situation in your church presently that needs to be handled before your church will really be able to move forward?
- 3) The concept of hiring people because of who they are instead of hiring them to fill positions is a new idea for many of us. But finding the right person seems to be far easier and far more fruitful than the normal or traditional approach. What are your thoughts about shifting to this person-centered approach when searching for future staff at your church? What are the strengths of this approach? What are the weaknesses?
- 4) On page 95, the discussion turns to what one might call a “breakdown” church. Consider the situation and the work through the evaluation questions.

One comparison church refused to relocate even though the four acres it owns can hardly accommodate the 500 persons in worship attendance today. Attempts to acquire more land have proved unsuccessful.

Why is the church refusing to make such an obvious move? Key members of the church have strong emotional and sentimental attachments to the 115-year-old sanctuary. They have threatened to leave or withhold money if any such attempt is made. The church has already shown signs of slow erosion. Attendance has dropped by almost 100 in the past three years. (95)

- a. What would you say is the biggest problem within this church?
 - b. Do we find any sinfulness in the actions of those involved? If yes, what sin?
 - c. What should be done to fix the slow erosion problem?
 - d. What will happen to the church if the slow erosion is not addressed?
- 5) Revisit the gray box on page 96 for a moment and consider the scenario of the eight nonrotating deacons.
- a. If you were a pastor or a leader in the church, what would you do?
 - b. Are there any areas of your church where the control of an individual or a group is inhibiting the growth or strengthening of your church?
 - c. What actions or strategies can you think of that could help correct this problem?

6) What happens in life when we don't address problems? Generally, they don't go away and they often get worse. Remember the "lazy bum" associate pastor who spent all his time counseling church members (pp. 99–101). Because the church hired the wrong guy, they had to deal with the negative repercussions. But they did it with the three Cs:

C _____, C _____, and C _____

- a. Is there a personnel problem, staff or otherwise, in your church that needs to be addressed?
 - b. If your church is in this type of situation, what steps should be taken?
 - c. What could you do to prevent this type of problem happening to your church in the years to come?
- 7) In the section entitled "Compatibility Is as Important as Competency" (p. 101) the fact is brought out that breakout churches have strong ministry teams that demonstrate chemistry.
- a. Does your church staff operate like a team?
 - b. What could your church do to help the staff develop chemistry?
 - c. What are the benefits of having a team-oriented work environment?
- 8) Every pastor in the United States who is committed to the Lord and God's vision for his church longs to reach the point where Pastor David Cobb is at Fairfield New Life Church.

“The church clearly has an environment of trust and freedom for the pastors to do the work to which they have been called” (103).

- a. What three words would best describe the environment of your church for your pastor? 1)_____ 2)_____ 3)_____
 - b. What does your church do that encourages your pastor’s ministry?
 - c. What does your church do that hinders your pastor’s ministry?
- 9) Assimilation is the activity of keeping new members within a church by getting them plugged into relationships and ministries. At Grace Church, under Donald Schaeffer’s leadership the church “raised the expectation level for new members and leaders alike,” and the result was an increase in their assimilation rate (p. 104).
- a. What are your thoughts about requiring assimilation classes in your church?
 - b. How could having this type of membership requirement help your church?
 - c. How would you do it?
 - d. Who would be the best person in your church to fill the position?
- 10) The research team found that the breakout churches consistently displayed a culture of “serious fun” (pp. 107–108). Given this reality, consider your own church.
- a. How would you describe your church culture?
 - b. What is the most important issue to your church congregation collectively?
 - c. When outsiders visit your church, what do you think are their first impressions about your church family?

CHAPTER 6

THE VIP FACTOR

- 1) Can you remember what the acronym “VIP” represents? The answer is **V**ision **I**nteraction **P**rofile. Below you will find a reproduction of Figure 6B, The Vision Intersection Profile. Take a moment to fill in the blanks for each ring of the circle. If you can’t remember the exact wording, feel free to look in the book (p. 114). Once you complete the diagram, summarize the main idea of the concept in one sentence on the line below.
-

- 2) In the case of Xenos Christian Fellowship (XCF) God allowed a small Bible study to blossom into a large and growing church (p. 115). The church, while growing quickly, had a variety of people pressing it in a variety of different directions.
- a. What do you think caused the diverse directions within the XCF congregation?
 - b. Why would God allow something like this type of scenario to take place in a church?
 - c. Is your congregation facing the “diverse directions” scenario?
 - d. If you are facing this type of challenge, what should be done about it?
- 3) The top circle in the Vision Intersection Profile stands for “Leadership Passions” (p. 117). Take a moment to think about the ministry passions of your pastor and other members of your church ministry team. As you think about them, answer the following questions in as much detail as possible.
- a. What aspect of ministry is my pastor (or other staff member) exceptionally gifted at doing?
 - b. What aspect of ministry does my pastor (or other staff member) really struggle with or dislike doing?
 - c. If I were to ask my pastor (or other staff member), “What part of ministry are you most passionate about doing?” what would he or she say?

- 4) The right circle in the Vision Intersection Profile stands for “Passions/Gifts of the Congregation” (pp. 118–119). Consider your church congregation for a moment. Being as open and honest as possible, answer the following questions.
- a. Looking at your church congregation collectively, what is it that your church congregation or large groups of your congregation is/are passionate about doing?
 - b. Again, with your congregational makeup in mind, what ministry, or ministries, is your congregation distinctly equipped to do?
 - c. Given your congregational passions and gifts, are there any changes that your church should consider making in ministry priorities or focus?
- 5) The left circle in the Vision Intersection Profile stands for “Community Needs” (pp. 120–122). Consider the community in which you live and answer the following questions.
- a. What would you say are the primary needs of the community surrounding your church meeting place?
 - b. What is your church doing to meet those needs?
 - c. Brainstorm for a moment about your community needs and your church congregation. Can you come up with five ideas for how your church could minister to these needs? What would they be?
- 6) In the section “Choose What You Can Do Best” the author states: “One of the comparison churches in our study seemed to be involved in more ministries than was humanly possible” (p. 124). Does this church sound like your church? Do you seem to have more ministries and activities than you have the people and the interest to do (and

do well)? If you were honest, what ministries (if any) in your church would you say probably should be set aside in order to pursue a more important, church-wide ministry focus?

7) The research team came to realize that breakout churches follow the model of Acts 6. In this passage, church members were not spectators; they were active participants vital to the life, health, and ministry of the church.

- a. What percentage of the ministry in your church is done by:
 - i. Pastoral leadership? _____%
 - ii. Designated lay leadership (e.g., elders, deacons, teachers)? _____%
 - iii. Regular and ordinary church members? _____%
- b. From what you understand about ministry, what will happen if ministry responsibilities go unshared and ministry gifts go unused?
- c. What could your church do to share its ministry?

8) After reading this chapter on the VIP factor and considering the various issues of your leadership's passions, passions and gifts of your congregation, and the needs of your community, how would you explain the vision of your church?

9) Given the vision you have explained above, what type of ministry activity do you think your church should begin to prepare and plan for?

10) At the end of the chapter, a research team member shared an inspiring observation about breakout church leaders.

It seems like the leaders in these churches understand how short life is, and they want to make a difference for God in their short time they have. They don't want to waste their time doing things that don't matter. (127)

As you leave this study today, think about your life. Are you living your life in such a way as to make a difference for God in the limited time you have here on earth? Is God asking you to make any changes?

PRAYER FOCUS:

In this chapter you have been given the tools to find the vision for your church. Should your church leadership decide to work toward realizing and adopting that vision, you will need God's strength, guidance, and blessing to do so. Be sure to pray earnestly for the following:

- 1) That God would give you wisdom to seek his will above all things
- 2) That God would allow the church to weather the storms of change as his vision for the church is discovered and put into place
- 3) That God would give you personally the grace and patience to be faithful as you lead others in love and tenderness

CHAPTER 7

A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE

1) In chapter seven we are introduced to First Gethsemane Baptist Church, where a commitment to a culture of excellence has led to a strong and vibrant congregation (pp. 129–131). Four areas in particular are noted as being the foci of excellence: music and worship, facilities, preaching, and congregational ministry. In thinking about your church:

a. Is there an emphasis on excellence in what your congregation does as a church?

Why?

b. If you were to grade your church in how it is doing in these four areas (from an A+ to an F-), how would they score? Provide your answers in the space below, and then include a general explanation as to why you have given that specific grade.

i. Music & Worship – ___ Reason: _____

ii. Facilities – ___ Reason: _____

iii. Preaching – ___ Reason: _____

iv. Cong. Ministry – ___ Reason: _____

2) On page 131 Vaughn Walker is quoted thus: “By allowing the laity to become an integral part of the ministry ... they become empowered and become owners of the overall vision and ministry of First Gethsemane.”

- a. What type of benefits could come from placing ministry in the hands of the church family?
 - b. What happens to a church if the members are not involved in ministry?
 - c. If the congregation is responsible for doing ministry within the church, what is the role of the church's pastoral staff?

- 3) In the section "Excellence in All Things" (pp. 131–132) the research team comes to an important realization about the motivation for excellence. They observed that the churches were not "fanatical" about excellence for self-promotion as is often the case in the business world, but driven toward excellence for another reason.
 - a. What was that reason?
 - b. What would happen to a church if a pastor, church leader, or congregation sought to achieve excellence in the "fanatical," business-type sense?
 - c. What are some ways your church could begin the process of seeking excellence?

- 4) In seeking to be a more effective church, Central Christian Church, under the direction of Pastor David Clark, brought in Church Growth Services (a church consultation organization) to help the congregation and its leadership determine how the church could improve its ministry (p. 133).
 - a. Has your church ever brought in outside consultants or evaluators to help determine the strengths and weaknesses of your church?
 - b. If yes, was it beneficial?
 - c. If no, would you be interested in having a consultation team in for evaluation?

- 5) Do you remember the description of Naples Florida presented in the book? Its appearance is praised for being clean, tidy, and admirable. In short, visitors to the community can tell that “somebody really cares about [the] place” (134). Would visitors say the same thing about your church? The next time you go to church, consider the following questions:
- a. The exterior of the building: Does the outside of your church look inviting to a visitor? How would your parking lot, landscaping, paint job, signage, and building structure influence a first time guest? Collectively, give a grade to the outside of your facilities (A+ to F-). _____
 - b. The interior of the building: Does the inside of your church look inviting to a visitor? What do your interior painting, carpeting, furniture, lighting, sanctuary, Sunday school rooms, nursery, and especially, your bathrooms convey to a first time guest? Collectively, give a grade to the inside of your facilities (A+ to F-). _____
 - c. How important is the appearance of a church?
 - d. What are simple ways you could begin to improve your church’s look and feel?
- 6) Research team member David Whitaker observed of Grove City Church of the Nazarene, “It seemed to me, as I interviewed people in this church, that everything they did revolved around those who were not there yet” (p. 136).
- a. How does this idea fit within your understanding of the church and its purpose?
 - b. Does your church revolve around people who will come in the future? Should it?

c. Based on your knowledge of the Bible, what do the Scriptures teach about the purpose and focus of churches?

d. Should the church focus its efforts on church members, on outsiders, or both?

What Scriptures validate your answer? Which Scriptures contradict your answer?

7) Can you image what it must have been like at Grove City Church of the Nazarene on that day in 1999 when they baptized 100 persons in one service? What an incredible day that must have been for all present! Seeing so many people come to know Christ was no accident. It took time, work, and commitment. Remember though, breakout churches had plateaued before they grew. Is your church on a plateau? Here are some evaluation questions to help you determine the answer. Be careful though, they may hurt a bit.*

a. How many people have been baptized in your church in the last year (conversion growth)?

b. How many of those people were not family members of your church members (biological church growth)?

c. How many of those baptized were you responsible for leading to Christ?

d. How many times in the last year have you attempted to share your faith?

e. What would help you become better at and more committed to sharing your faith?

8) When it comes to exploring options for new areas of ministry, breakout churches were extremely careful in evaluating new opportunities, asking two questions. (1) Does it fit into our vision? and (2) Can we take on this new responsibility and do it with excellence?

* These questions are not intended to reprimand you. They are intended to encourage all of us to be faithful in sharing our faith. All successful churches, breakout or otherwise, are built upon personal evangelism. If a church is to remain healthy and strong in future generations, its members must be committed to sharing their faith.

- a. Should a church enter into or begin a new area of ministry if it is not within the vision of the church? How would you respond to a person who does not agree with your answer?
 - b. What happens if a new ministry responsibility is adopted in an area where a church cannot achieve excellence?
 - i. What happens to the church if it is successful, but not excellent?
 - ii. What happens to the church if the new ministry is unsuccessful?
- 9) Refer back to Figure 7D, The Freedom/Expectation Paradox (p. 138), and fill in the blanks provided below.

- a. In which quadrant would you place your church?
- b. What reasons lead you to place it there?
- c. What steps could your church take in order to move to a different quadrant?

10) The section entitled “The Culture of Excellence and the ‘Not-to-Do’ List” (pp. 142–144) should provide a challenge for each of us as believers. Far too many of us have way too many plates spinning with our jobs, families, hobbies, church responsibilities, and recreational activities, just to name a few.

- a. Are there some plates in your life that perhaps God might be calling you to put down? If yes, what are they?
- b. In the next few moments earnestly seek God in prayer. In a genuine way ask him if there are obligations or commitments in your life that he may want you to put aside for a few weeks, a few seasons, a few years, or forever.

CHAPTER 8

INNOVATION ACCELERATORS

- 1) In “A Tale of Two Churches” (pp. 148–150) two churches are the focus of the conversation. Westmont Memorial Church was the traditional church focused on keeping things “the way they’ve always been.” Fleming City Community Church was just the opposite. They adopted innovation at a rapid-fire pace.
 - a. What is wrong with a church that maintains tradition without exception?
 - b. What is wrong with a church that embraces dramatic change regularly?
 - c. In your opinion, how does God want individuals and churches to handle change?
 - d. What does Scripture teach about change?

- 2) The statement made about Westmont Memorial Church members not wanting to accept change is strikingly similar to the response given by the Israelites when Moses led them out of Egypt (Exodus 14:10–13): “[They] just liked things the way they were” (p. 149). Essentially, because both the Israelites and Westmont church members were stubborn about following God’s direction, they faced a dire consequence and missed God’s blessing.
 - a. Is God leading your church toward some change that your congregation is resisting or fighting? If yes, what is it?
 - b. Based upon the teachings of Scripture, specifically the New Testament, how important is the church building in the worship and health of the Church? Explain your answer.

c. In your opinion, how much latitude does God give church members when it comes to their preferences about his church? Explain.

3) Based on the comparison of the two church change acceptance models (Figures 8B and 8C on p. 151), how would you classify your church. Is it Traditionalist/Resistor, Innovative/Embracer, or somewhere in between? Circle the number below that best represents your church.

Traditionalist			Balanced				Innovator			
5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5

- a. What are your reasons for scoring your church the way you did?
- b. What is the most significant issue that influenced your score?

4) When evaluating the breakout churches, we find out that they take “the road less traveled” regarding tradition and innovation (p. 150).

- a. What is the road less traveled (p. 151)?
- b. What is the benefit of taking this road?

5) In the discussion about dogs and their tails (p. 155–158) the research team concluded that some sort of tail was wagging most comparison churches.

- a. Is there a program, a ministry, a tradition, or a certain way of thinking that “wags” your church? If there is, what is it?
 - b. What did the researcher mean when he asked, “What a minute—where’s the dog?” (p.156).
 - c. Do you know the “dog” of your church?
- 6) One of the issues brought out in the discussion of Rick Warren’s Purpose Driven philosophy is that a church should be driven by its purposes (p. 158). Let’s assume that Warren’s conclusion is correct and churches are indeed driven by their purpose or purposes.
- a. What would you say is the driving force within your church (budget, programs, buildings, or another factor)? Explain.
 - b. Warren argues that every church has five purposes. These purposes are listed below for your consideration. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being very low and 10 very high) give your church a rating in terms of its commitment level to each purpose.
 - i. Worship _____
 - ii. Evangelism _____
 - iii. Discipleship _____
 - iv. Ministry _____
 - v. Fellowship _____
 - c. In which of these areas is your church most in need of improvement?

- 7) Rainer speaks favorably of the Purpose Driven concept, but he encourages the adoption of the p_____ rather than the m_____ (p. 159).
- a. What reason does he give for this directive?
 - b. What is the concern raised regarding churches adopting only the latter blank (m _____) within their ministry?
- 8) What is the “innovation trap” (p. 163) and the catchy phrase the wise old pastor used to explain it (p. 162)?
- a. What two concerns were voiced about pastors who fall into the “innovation trap”?
 - b. What do you suppose happens to churches when pastors fall into the “innovation trap”?
- 9) What conclusions does the research team offer about church buildings?
- a. Are they good or bad?
 - b. When was the last time (year) your church did any type of construction on your church that led to the addition of space?
 - c. How did this construction affect the size of your church?
 - d. When should churches add space?
 - A. Before they reach capacity
 - B. At the moment they reach capacity
 - C. After they have reach capacity
 - e. What are the pros and cons of building at the three times mentioned above?

10) Up to this point in working through the reading and study guide:

- a. What has been the most significant insight you have gained personally?
- b. In your opinion, what is the most pressing change needed within your church?
- c. On a personal level, how has God spoken to you in your use of these materials?

More specifically, what changes is God leading you to make?

CHAPTER 9

BIG MO OR BLIND EROSION?

- 1) What does Rainer mean when he uses the term “Big Mo”?

- 2) Using the University of Kentucky as an illustration, Rainer notes that it generally takes an extended period of time to build an extended period of success (pp. 166–167).
 - a. How many years was Adolph Rupp head coach at the University of Kentucky before he won his first NCAA title? ____ years
 - b. How many championships did Adolph Rupp win during his tenure as head coach? ____ titles
 - c. What was the interval of time between his first and last title? ____ years
 - d. What happened to the University of Kentucky men’s basketball program as a result of Adolph Rupp’s success?
 - e. Is there anything about Rupp’s career that could be carried over into understanding the success of churches?

- 3) In achieving the “Big Mo” within breakout churches the research indicates that there were essentially four stages in the development process (p. 167).
 - a. What are those four stages?
 - 1) _____
 - 2) _____
 - 3) _____
 - 4) _____
 - b. What does the “Big Mo” seem to provide more easily and frequently?

- 4) How would you define “blind erosion” (p. 174)?
- 5) Consider these questions about blind erosion and churches (pp. 174–175).
- a. Generally, what is the speed or rate of blind erosion within churches?
 - b. At what point is blind erosion usually noticed?
 - c. What is the ultimate impact of blind erosion?
 - d. Is your church suffering from blind erosion? Why or why not?
 - e. If you are facing blind erosion in your church, what is its rate of speed?
- 6) When Thom Rainer took his first pastorate in St. Petersburg, Florida, he realized that something was wrong with the church. Despite a 62 percent decline in seven years (191 members down to 118 members), the church members said their church was “stable.” Rainer explains further:

The more I looked at the reports, the more concerned I grew. The number of conversions in the church was almost nonexistent. Ministries had been discontinued. Conversations with knowledgeable people in the community indicated that the reputation of the church had suffered. But the condition of the church, according to its leaders, was “stable.” (175)

- a. Note the issues highlighted in the discussion above: nonexistent conversions, ministries discontinued, suffering church reputation in the community, and declining numbers. Is your church facing any of these issues? If yes, which ones?

- b. What connection does Rainer make between blind erosion and no accountability?
 - c. What ideas do you have that could help remedy the problem with blind erosion and accountability?
- 7) Concerning the issue of theology as it relates to blind erosion, three critical matters surfaced concerning the belief systems of the comparison churches (p. 177).
- a. Few members knew anything about their churches' doctrinal position.
 - b. Members frequently held theological positions in contradiction to those found in their churches' printed materials, especially in terms of the exclusiveness of the gospel, i.e., Jesus as the only way to salvation.
 - c. Those who do believe Jesus is the exclusive way to salvation were unwilling or unable to share their faith.

Do you see any similar issues within your congregation?

- 8) Conversations between research team members and comparison church members revealed ignorance about certain aspects of their churches (pp.177–178).
- a. What did these church members explain about the priority of their church?
 - b. Where did these church members believe their church should focus its energy and attention?
 - c. How far off were the estimates given by group members relating to the size of their congregation? _____%

9) In describing the resistant staff leader who by his leadership contributes to slow erosion the research team identified six primary characteristics (179).

a. List these characteristics below.

i. B _____

ii. L _____

iii. C _____ A _____

iv. I _____

v. T _____ W _____

vi. A _____ S _____

b. If you are a staff leader, do you struggle with any of these characteristics?

c. If you are a church member, do you see any particular characteristics with which your pastoral leadership struggles?

d. If you are a minister, present this list to a trusted confidant and ask him for his honest assessment of your leadership.

e. If you are a church member, with love, grace, and a Christ-like spirit, schedule a time to meet with your minister individually and confidentially. During your time together, present your concern to him. At the conclusion of your time, commit to pray for him and promise not to hold the discussion against him or share it with others.

10) In the section on “The Myth of the Plateaued Church” (p. 181) Rainer states directly,

“There is no such thing as a plateaued church.”

a. What is his reason for making this statement?

b. Is he accurate in his assessment? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 10

To BECOME A BREAKOUT CHURCH

1) In this closing chapter of *Breakout Churches* Rainer highlights the last paragraph of Jim Collins's "secular leadership book," *Good to Great* (p. 186). Within that paragraph Collins offered a profound concluding insight. "Indeed, you might even gain the deepest of all satisfactions: knowing that your short time here on earth has been well spent, and that it mattered." While our deepest satisfaction as believers comes from our relationship with Christ, Collins's point is still meaningful to our lives here on earth. In light of this reality consider the following questions.

- a. Has the life of your church been meaningful? More specifically, has the life and vitality of your church been spent in such a way that it matters in people's lives?
 - b. Has your life been well spent to this point in time? More specifically, has your life mattered?
 - c. In the short time you have left, what goals do you have in your walk with Christ?
- 2) When Art Rainer introduced his father to the gathering of college students, Thom Rainer was deeply moved, calling it "one of the greatest honors of my life" (p. 186). He recounts:

Tears flowed freely down my cheeks as he spoke of me being his spiritual role model. Then he told those college students in the closing of his introduction: "I

love how my dad loves the Lord. I love how he treats my mom. I love my dad.

Let me introduce to you my hero and my father, Thom Rainer.”

The words of Art offer one of the highest forms of praise imaginable. Even though he has clearly seen his father’s strengths and weaknesses, his good days and bad days, and his successes and failures, he still honors his father by way of public affirmation. Their relationship leads us to a challenging set of questions.

- a. Are you living in such a way that your family clearly sees your love for God, for your spouse, and for your children?
 - b. When your time is done on earth, what will be the legacy you leave to your friends, your family, and your church?
 - c. Is there a person in your life who you could begin to invest your life in as Thom did Art? If not, ask God to bring such a person to your mind or across your path.
- 3) Rainer adamantly contends “greatness does not depend on size” (p. 188). His research demonstrates that great churches are *not* always big churches. Instead, he argues that greatness is determined by something far different. By what measure or measures does Rainer say greatness should be determined (p. 189)?
- 4) In comparing good-to-great companies to breakout churches Rainer asks two questions.
1. “Is it possible that good-to-great companies and breakout churches have so many institutional commonalities that their leaders and central values are alike?”

2. “Is it possible that the good-to-great corporations actually assumed biblical characteristics that led them to become great companies?”

Following these questions, he explains: “Simply stated, the more the corporations became biblical in their approaches to business practices, the higher the likelihood that they would become great businesses” (p. 191).

- a. What are your thoughts about this conclusion?
- b. If this conclusion is true, can we learn anything about how we do business as believers?

- 5) In the section on “Where the Cost Is Greatest” Rainer documents the results of his investigation into the source of the challenges and problems faced by pastors (p. 192).

Based on this discussion, work through the following questions.

- a. Of the 172 problems identified by the research team, how many of these problems or struggles were related to other Christians? _____
- b. What does this finding tell us about pastors?
- c. What does this finding tell us about churches?

- 6) Refer back to the box on page 193 for a moment and reread its content. What key factor or decision does the research team claim separates the pastors of the comparison churches from those of the breakout churches?

- a. What lesson is there here for pastors?
- b. What lesson is there here for church members?

- 7) Do you remember how breakout church pastors generally made decisions concerning people who were holding the church back? There are four elements to their decision making process (p. 193).
- a. What are these elements?
 - 1) Q_____
 - 2) C_____
 - 3) M_____ D_____
 - 4) M_____ S _____ (O_____)
 - b. Why do you think this process is common among the breakout church pastors?
 - c. What are the benefits of using this formula?
- 8) The issue of getting “the right people on the bus” seems to present a serious challenge to churches and their pastors (p. 195).
- a. How did breakout churches go about finding the right people?
 - b. What was the key to them getting on board with the church?
- 9) How does Rainer define the term “passion” (p. 197)? Do you agree or disagree with his definition? What would you change about it, if anything?
- 10) At the final meeting of the research team, Rainer asked the group, “Have we missed anything?” (p. 197). The response of the group was “love.” As you think about your church, your pastor, your staff, your members, your families, and your relationships with each of them:

- a. Is love clearly visible within your church?
- b. Are you contributing to or detracting from the spirit of love within your church?
- c. Will you make the conscious decision to strive to love others more within your church family?

CONCLUDING EXERCISE

As with every book we read, generally only one or two major thoughts or ideas remain firmly implanted within our minds. Unfortunately, as time passes, most details of the book fade away. To help curb the inevitable loss after your reading of *Breakout Churches*, we would like to propose you do two things. First, answer this question: What are the five to ten most significant thoughts or insight you have learned from reading this book and working through the accompanying study? Second, once you have come up with these thoughts, take a few moments to write these ideas down in the front or back cover of your book. Not only will it help your memory in the future, it could also prove beneficial to another reader in the future.

We want to hear from you. Please send your comments about this book to us in care of zreview@zondervan.com. Thank you.

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