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Building A Contagious Church Culture

“Then the Lord replied: ‘Write down the vision and make it plain on tablets so that a messenger may run with it. For the vision awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay...but the righteous will live by faith.’” (Habakkuk 2:2-4)

Effective leaders know that while we clarify mission, develop vision and build strategy, **changing the culture** of a church is the most important objective we face in shaping a great future. It is our culture that determines the receptivity of leaders to new ideas. It is our culture that unleashes creativity, builds enthusiasm, fosters encouragement and creates a sense of ownership as we work together. Ultimately, it is the

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culture of a church that shapes individual morale, teamwork, effectiveness, and directly impacts our long-term health and capacity to multiply.

What do we mean by church culture? It is not a simple thing to define. It includes things we can see, like the way people dress and behave, the look of the office and the pictures and

messages we put on the walls. It includes our values, both stated and unstated, our beliefs and assumptions, not just doctrinal beliefs but op-

erational beliefs. How is spiritual health celebrated? How are problems addressed? How do we demonstrate trust and respect for each other?

Culture is deeper than vision or strategy and harder to shape and change because culture is about relationships and people. The way people are treated, the way people treat their peers within the church, the way people respond to church leaders and church operations...all of this is the “air” of a church that people breathe. If we make sure that air is healthy and invigorating, our church will thrive. If that “air” gets stagnant or discouraging, the agenda harmony will subside, creativity will lag, seeds of apathy will germinate, and the culture of the church will lack spiritual momentum.¹ In other words, the “air” quality we breathe together is really important!

Desire, Resources and Climate

After conversations with numerous pastors and superintendents, there are three things that seem to be foundational in building a contagious church culture. We refer to them as the “three circles.”²

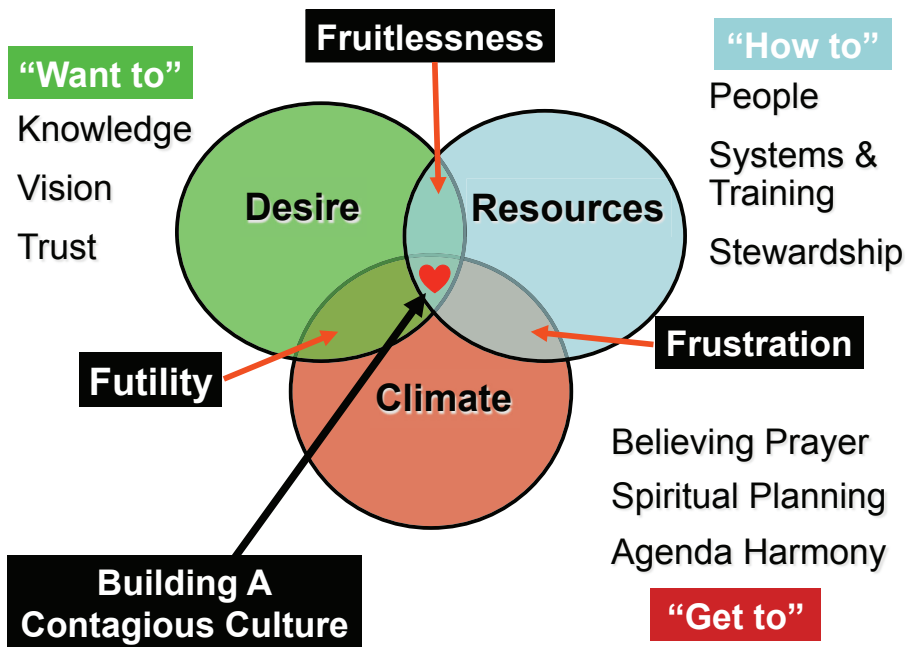
Desire is the “**want to**,” resources are the “**how to**,” and climate is the “**get to**” in building a contagious church culture.

Part of our discovery is that desire, resources, and climate are all essential in developing a healthy, multiplying church.

Building a contagious church culture takes not one or two but all three circles of desire, resources, and climate, integrated together. Desire is the “**want to**,” resources are the “**how to**,” and

climate is the “**get to**.” The integration of all three circles is essential for a contagious church culture to be built.

As illustrated below, fruitlessness, futility, and frustration are all the result when only two of the three circles are present. When desire and resources are present but there is no development of climate, the result is **fruitlessness**. When resources and a beginning climate are present but there is no desire in the heart of key leaders, the result is **frustration** for people who want to see the Kingdom move forward. When desire and a beginning climate are present but there are no resources, the result is a feeling of **futility**. The heart of building a contagious church culture is found in the center, when all three—desire, resources, and climate come together. The diagram below illustrates this.



The good things that happen in a local church begin with **desire**. Leaders who develop desire begin to seek the **knowledge** they need. They develop the **vision** that motivates them and others to facili-

tate change. They are willing to be vulnerable and open with their team, defining the current reality and investing the time needed to build **trust**. The circle of desire includes knowledge, vision, and trust.

Desire begins with **knowledge**. God says, “my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6). Many leaders want to enjoy the benefits of a healthy, multiplying church, but they do not understand how to get there from the current reality they face. Their future is being “destroyed” simply because of what they do not know. It may be knowledge about how to change the climate, how to build agenda harmony, how to do a church assessment, how to take necessary steps to revitalize the church, how to develop deeper relationships of trust or how to develop systems for evangelism and leader development.

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The humility that allows us to
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for life-long learning is the founda-
tion of receiving the knowledge

we need. Leaders of healthy, multiplying churches have teachable spirits. They are hungry to be taught, corrected and trained. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is **useful for** teaching, rebuking, **correcting** and **training** in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

Leaders who desire to build a contagious church culture have spiritually matured and have no ego to protect. The knowledge they seek can be learned from anyone and everyone. They deeply **desire** to be taught, trained, and corrected. Do you remember being corrected when you were a child? Did you love it? You probably did not. Paul

writes, “When I was a child...I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me” (1 Corinthians 13:11).

Leaders who want to build a contagious church culture have a deep desire to be taught, trained and corrected.

Maturity in leadership requires us to leave the “ways of childhood.” As leaders, we must embrace a life-long commitment to learning, correction, and training. The Scriptures explain that if we ignore correction, we will lead others astray (Proverbs 10:17); if we hate correction, we are senseless (Proverbs 12:1), and if we heed correction, we will be honored (Proverbs 13:18). Mockers resent correction and will not consult those who are wise (Proverbs 15:12). Whoever heeds correction gains understanding (Proverbs 15:32).

It is God’s Word within us that cultivates this desire to grow and learn, rather than maintain the status quo. Many leaders serving in churches that need change must begin to replace their current habits with new thinking and desire that lead them to be different. “If you had responded to my rebuke, I (wisdom) would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you” (Proverbs 1:23). “Fools are headstrong and do what they like; wise people take advice” (Proverbs 12:15, Msg).

“If you correct those who care about life...they’ll love you for it!” (Proverbs 9:8, Msg). “Give instruction to the wise, and they will become wiser still; teach the righteous and they will gain in learning” (Proverbs 9:9, NRSV). “The wise in heart accept commands” (Proverbs 10:8).

At this point, we ask that you be totally honest before God (He-

brews 4:13). As a leader, how much desire do you have to seek the knowledge you need for participating in a healthy, multiplying church?

How deep is your desire to be corrected and changed by Jesus? How willing are you to learn, grow and receive the knowledge you do not now have?

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There is a direct relationship between healthy, multiplying churches and a deep desire by their leaders to be teachable. Leaders who become highly effective develop

the private habits they need to change, learn and grow. **They seek knowledge**—they have a deep desire to be corrected and trained **in any way** that makes them wiser and more effective. “The Word is in their heart like a burning fire...they cannot hold it in” (Jeremiah 20:9) and they cannot stay the same. Because of the Word in them, status quo is not acceptable.

If your heart is beating fast right now, because the Spirit inside you testifies with your spirit that this is true (1 John 5:6-9) and you are in agreement, believe today that Jesus has the power to make your future different than your past! You can become a renewed, vital part of fueling the movement of God through the people of God where you serve.

Believe today that Jesus has the power to make your future different than your past!

The Holy Spirit can teach you and remind you of everything Jesus wants you to learn (John 14:26). Cultivate humility because the Spirit may surprise you regard-

ing the source of your needed knowledge. As the Holy Spirit births desire within us, we gain understanding through other people who have been on the journey before us. We never stop networking with other leaders who are willing to help us learn. “When the student is ready, the

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teacher will appear.”³ The circle of desire always begins with a thirst for knowledge. Our development of knowledge leads us to pray and seek God’s vision.

Desire builds with **vision**. The development of vision for a church follows our exposure to knowledge. If God had his full way and the church experienced incredible health, what would look different? What would be different? How would people think and

act? If God moved in a great way and did “immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20), how would we know it happened? If God supernaturally worked within our church and the culture was transformed, what would be different?

The vision for a different future always begins in the heart of a leader. That is just the beginning...It cannot stay there. It must become a “shared vision” through building agenda harmony. One of the greatest gifts a leader can give those who follow is a mental picture and vision description of the future that is different from the present.

This kind of vision does not come all at once. It takes time to develop, much like needing binoculars to see something five hundred yards away. We think we see it and we begin to walk toward it. It is always fuzzy at first, but it becomes clearer and clearer as time goes on.

The vision continues to be perfected as it is shared with the leadership team. God reminds us, “Write it down and make it plain...if it lingers, wait for it...it will certainly come” (Habakkuk 2:2-3).

Once **knowledge** is present and **vision** becomes clearer, the building of **trust** on the team is also essential. In the Old Testament, David did this by assigning **positions of trust** to his “gatekeepers” (1 Chronicles 9:22). In his book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Patrick Lencioni observes that trust is one of the most powerful traits in shaping a positive culture, and trust thrives on honesty. He writes, “When there is an absence of trust, it stems from a leader’s unwillingness to be vulnerable with the group. Leaders who are not genuinely open with one another about their mistakes and weaknesses make it impossible to build a foundation of trust.”⁴

We build trust by being honest with one another. We tell positive stories. We celebrate heroes. We try to listen and learn all the time. We ask for input from people as we let the team shape the future. We encourage creativity and pray for enthusiasm. The integrity of leaders, their competence and the care they show for every person on the team—these are the things that build trust.

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The first circle of **desire** is our “want to.” It includes knowledge, vision and trust. The second circle relates to our **resources**. This circle includes **people, systems & training**, and **stewardship**.

Some church leaders mistakenly think that the most important resource we have relates to our finances, but this is not the case. The most important part of the church is always our **people**. They are never a commodity to be expended or replaced.

People know whether they are being used or respected and valued. We must care about people and “lay down our lives for them as a good shepherd” (John 10:11). People do not care how much we know until they know how much we care. Healthy churches build agenda harmony with a team of people. They know they are called by God and believe in what he is leading them to do. The foundation of every healthy church begins with **people**.

Once we have identified people to serve on the leadership team, we must build **systems** and provide **training** for them. We will address systems for church development in Book 2 of the **MULTIPLYNAZ** series. Excellent training tools now abound for our 480+ districts to use as we train and resource our pastors and lay leaders.

As superintendents work with pastors and church boards, they are always training, both formally and informally. They help leaders create church development plans. They provide mentoring and build systems of accountability for the implementation of those plans. Mentoring to encourage the church to move forward can be done by a variety of mentors. As pastors and lay leaders pray, seek the mind of Christ, and do spiritual planning, agenda harmony begins to build among them.

With people, systems and training in place, the circle of resources also requires stewardship. As we discussed in chapter 3, contagious churches are generous churches and high-expectation churches. Stewardship includes our time, talents, and treasure (finances). Jesus talked often about money, and because the church’s mission is so important, healthy churches teach stewardship and raise money for ministry. Jesus used people with pure hearts and willing hands, but he also needed people to travel with him “and help support his disciples out of their own means” (Luke 8:3).

The agenda of Jesus and his mission required raising financial resources. Jesus boldly talked about the way people should manage the

money God entrusted to them. He taught that we are stewards of everything we have, not owners.

Local churches with desire, vision, and trust experience the miraculous as they obey what the Scriptures teach regarding stewardship and generosity in giving. Where there is agenda harmony, shared vision, and hope for the future, there are resources and power that emerge in the present. The second circle of **resources** is our “how to.” It includes people, systems and training, and stewardship.

The third circle involves the **climate** of a church. Some people use “climate” and “culture” interchangeably; we do not. We believe climate is one of the factors that contributes to a change of culture. If we fuel a change of climate, over time the culture of a church will change. We have discovered there are three components that fuel a change of climate: believing prayer, spiritual planning, and agenda harmony.

Everything Begins with Believing Prayer

Believing prayer is where everything begins in a church. Many Christians pray, but their prayer life does not operate at a faith level where they practice “believing prayer.” They would benefit greatly from following the example of a father who came to Jesus. His son struggled with an impure spirit nearly all his life.

He pleaded with Jesus, “If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” “If you can?” said Jesus. “**Everything is possible for one who believes.**” Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:22-24) Our faith grows when we practice believing prayer. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17, NKJV). Building faith is what Jesus planted in the hearts of his disciples, and it is also what a leader plants in the heart of a healthy, multiplying church.

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disciple-making. They said, “Lord, increase our faith!” (Luke 17:5) As followers of Jesus, we recognize our same need. This is our prayer as Nazarenes hungry for Jesus to increase our faith today! We believe he is the head of the church. He is alive and well, directing his Bride to depend on him and practice

“believing prayer” all over the world.

A critical objective of our church has always been “the simplicity and spiritual power manifest in the New Testament Church.”⁵ What did the early church do? They practiced believing prayer. They understood that spending time with Jesus was the key. As we spend time with Jesus in prayer, his will, his Spirit, his values, his agenda and his heart begin to seep into our hearts. We begin to realize that what he said about the spiritual realm really is true— “with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). We are never alone! (Matthew 28:20) He is with us! (Matthew 18:20)

What was the “spirit” that fueled the early church? Where did they get their spiritual power? Luke explains, “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Spending time with Jesus taught them they needed more faith! (Luke 17:5) They needed more time listening to and talking with the Heavenly Father (Luke 11:1). As they watched Jesus operate, they saw the power that flowed into his life from God as he practiced believing prayer.

Jesus is our example. Our mission is to make Christlike disciples who follow him. We pursue his heart, seek to be filled with his Spirit, read his Word, search for his agenda and come together with other like-minded believers. His agenda begins to create agenda har-

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mony among us as we pray. We long for no other agenda except his. There is nothing in the world like the Spirit of Jesus dwelling in a church that practices believing prayer!

This kind of prayer includes learning to pray until we receive the assurance that God will

answer us and show us what we now do not know (Jeremiah 33:3). It includes praying specifically (Matthew 6:11, Mark 10:51). It includes learning that we do not receive because we do not ask (Matthew 7:7). Sometimes we do not ask with the right motives (James 4:2-3). It includes learning to be persistent in our praying. Jesus taught that there is a direct relationship between faith and persistence. When he returns, he wants to find faith alive and well among us (Luke 18:1-8).

When we have sanctified hearts and only want Jesus' agenda, not ours, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—**we know that we have what we asked of him**" (1 John 5:14-15).

Believing prayer changes the climate of a church. Believing prayer brings the presence of God into the midst of his people. "Divine power always follows divine presence. The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is filled with stories of how prayer brings God's power. Jesus promised his disciples that power would be the first fruit of our

waiting and praying for the Holy Spirit”⁶ (Acts 1:4,8). The practice of believing prayer looks different in different churches. In larger churches prayer may happen among leaders and also throughout the church in small groups. In smaller churches it can be a corporate prayer gathering which includes everyone. Some larger churches also follow this approach.

Whatever the process used, gaining agenda harmony with Jesus through believing prayer lies at the heart of all healthy churches. This is not our church; it belongs to Jesus. He is the head of it. His agenda must run it. We seek his agenda and what he wants through prayer. Later in the **MULTIPLYNAZ** series, we will talk about how prayer is the engine room of the church and how believing prayer creates the climate for church revitalizing and renewal. Churches that build spiritual momentum understand that everything begins with believing prayer.

In Book 2 of the **MULTIPLYNAZ** series, we will also talk about spiritual planning and how healthy, multiplying churches realize they do not know everything they need to know. This drives them to seek the knowledge they do not have from other leaders and churches. In the church development process, they move from dependence, through independence to interdependence. When believing prayer, spiritual planning and church development come together, it produces agenda harmony with amazing results.

Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, when a church cultivates the “soil” by developing the right disciple-making habits, and when people begin experiencing divine moments with God, that church becomes unstoppable (Acts 2:42-47)! They move ahead with joy and optimism because everyone in the church senses they have a great future together. Jesus is alive and they know it (Acts 4:20). When these three circles of **desire**, **resources**, and **climate** all align in a local church, they fuel the beginning of a contagious culture.

Linking Passion with Planning

Wherever there is a contagious culture, a group of people live with passion. It has nothing to do with personality, emotion or temperament. Whether outgoing or quiet and behind-the-scenes, they deeply desire to know where Jesus is leading them. Like Paul, “they labor, struggling with all **God’s energy**, which so powerfully works in them” (Colossians 1:29). They regularly remind themselves “to **fan into**

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flame the gift of God, which is within them” (2 Timothy 1:6). They know “the fire must be **kept burning** on the altar continuously; it must not go out” (Leviticus 6:13).

In a healthy, multiplying church, leaders **link their passion with planning**. There can and should be no doubt in your mind that, with God’s power, he can achieve through you the spiritual desires he is placing in your heart. God would not have given you these specific, Christ-centered desires for a healthy, multiplying church unless he knew you were capable of achieving them.

Every Christian leader has the potential of being personally led by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts and abilities “just as he determines” (1 Corinthians 12:11). Paul teaches that our abilities and the Spirit’s leadings modify our desires. “God is at work **in you**, to **will** and to **do**, according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13). Centered in God’s will, the desire he has put in you for a healthy, multiplying church can and should become a reality! To aid you in the development of God’s passion within you, the following are some practical steps you can take to bring God’s vision into existence.

Begin this process with prayer and waiting on God. Do not just talk to God about it; listen for God's voice. Ask him to build your faith.

Centered in God's will, the desire he has put in you for a healthy, multiplying church can and should become a reality!

Record any ideas or impressions God gives you as you seek his wisdom. In private, be definite about what you believe God wants you and your leadership team to do. Be wise about **when** and **what** you share. Joseph had the right

dream, but he had horrible timing in sharing it (Genesis 37:5-11).

Ask yourself the question, "If we go after the vision God is beginning to place within us, what part does God expect **us** to play in achieving it? What part must **God** do?" This becomes your believing prayer list as you seek the divine moments you need from God. There is also a part **we play** in this process. Never forget, there is someone, somewhere who will help you fulfill God's vision and get your prayers answered. Everything can change in one day. Pray that you will be at the right place, at the right time, to meet the right person, so that together you can fulfill God's plan.

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A key part of this process is also your commitment to create a detailed plan for achieving the vision God is giving you. With as much detail as you can, write everything down. Dr. J.B. Chapman wrote years ago, "Thoughts disentangle themselves when they pass

through the lips and the fingertips." As you write the details of the plan, remember it will never be a static plan. It will always continue to adjust

and change. You cannot wait until the plan is perfect to begin. There is no perfect plan. Do not procrastinate or wait for God to begin his part.

Everything can change in one day. Pray that you will be at the right place, at the right time, to meet the right person, so that together you can fulfill God's plan.

He is waiting to see if you are serious about your part!

After you begin, regularly review the plan God has given you. Keep perfecting it. Seek to be led by the Lord in his will. As his Spirit confirms his plans to you, see in your mind's eye, feel in your heart and believe with your will that your God-given desires have

already begun to be fulfilled. God himself is big enough to make it happen! "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

Through the power of a God-given vision and the spiritual desire that God grants to those who long for it, God can and does give to people who seek it, that "**something within**" that recognizes no such word as impossible and spiritual power that accepts no such reality as failure.

"Thoughts disentangle themselves when they pass through the lips and the fingertips."

Think Long-Term

It is an undeniable fact that the decisions made by leaders today greatly affect the church tomorrow. In the Scriptures, this is clearly seen in the life of Hezekiah. He was a leader who was only concerned about himself in the present. He was selfish, shortsighted and proud.

After he was healed of his sickness, representatives were sent by the rulers of Babylon to see his kingdom and ask how God had healed him. In reality, God was testing Hezekiah to see what was really in his heart and Hezekiah failed the test (2 Chronicles 32:31).

When the prophet Isaiah came to him and confronted him about his failure to think long-term, Hezekiah's only response was that he was happy he would be taken care of "in peace and security" during his lifetime (2 Kings 20:19). The lesson of Hezekiah applies to the church today. Lay leaders and pastors too often make decisions for the present, and the churches they serve reap the consequences, sometimes twenty or thirty years later.

For example, a highly influential lay leader may fight proposed changes that will reach outsiders...and win the battle. The church begins to decline because of this decision. Peace and security win over risk and opportunity. It can also be pastors who decide they are not interested in helping start new churches. The focus on planting new churches and new ministries erodes. Years later these decisions have a

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profound impact on the development of the healthy, multiplying movement that God desires.

Starting new churches is difficult work. Restarting a church can be messy. Revitalizing a church is a process filled with potential conflict

and high degrees of criticism. Parenting a new church can require the sacrifice of members and money. As a church leader, it is easier to want "peace and security in my lifetime." It is more convenient to "let the leader who follows me handle the hassle." However, making

a short-sighted decision today is choosing the decline of the church tomorrow.

As a result of the decisions church leaders make today, the churches they serve reap the consequences of those decisions long after they are gone.

Our calling as church leaders is to make decisions today based on what is best for the church tomorrow, not what is best or easy for us. Dr. Bill Sullivan wrote, “The best time to plant a new tree was 20 years ago. The next best time is today.”

Today is our day. In our church, we are not guided by a desire for peace and security; give us risk and opportunity! Leaders who are effective always think long-term. They know they are not bound to accept the current culture of the church as normal or a status quo church culture as inevitable. Filled with God’s love, they build desire, gather needed resources, begin to change the climate, and over time, watch God build a contagious, new church culture.

The foundations that fuel a movement include leading with love, a focus on outsiders, clear beliefs about the church, practicing interdependence, cultivating our commitment to multiply and building a contagious church culture. Thank you for taking the time to not only read this book, but to reflect on the questions and talk with other church leaders about putting these ideas into practice. The Bible teaches we are not to be hearers only, but doers (James 1:22).

We are not guided by a desire for peace and security; give us risk and opportunity!

In Book 2 of the **MULTIPLYNAZ** series, we will discuss how God

creates healthy, multiplying churches. We will discuss God's role in creating healthy churches, our Nazarene essentials, leaving no church behind, practicing spiritual planning, revitalizing and restarting, how healthy churches never stop learning, how healthy churches can grow large and more. We hope you will join us!

Questions for Reflection—Chapter 7

1. Is this the first time you have read about or discussed the “culture” of your church? What are the things we do or ways we behave that affect our culture?
2. Discuss the “three circles” of desire, resources, and climate. Why do the authors contend it is the integration of all three that produce a contagious culture? What happens when only two of the three are present?
3. The authors contend that the **desire** to develop God's church is fueled by three things: knowledge, vision, and trust. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
4. The authors state that people who gain knowledge have a deep desire for life-long learning. They have teachable spirits and are hungry to be taught, corrected, and trained. What do you think are the factors that make some people hungry to learn and others to just want the status quo?

5. Discuss these questions using the following scale: on a scale of 1 to 10, (1 being very low desire and 10 incredibly high desire), how much desire do you have to participate in a healthy, multiplying church? How great is your desire to be corrected and changed by Jesus? How much desire do you have to learn, to grow and to receive the knowledge you do not now have? Share your thoughts with someone else and ask them to pray for you and with you.
6. The development of vision for a church follows our exposure to knowledge. If God had his full way and your church experienced incredible health, what would look different? What would be different? How would people think and act?
7. If God moved in a great way and did “immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20), how would we know it happened? If God supernaturally worked within your church and the culture was transformed, what would look different? What would be different?
8. Read the believing prayer section on pages 128-131. What are your thoughts? What did you read about that was new? What stood out to you?
9. How would you describe your current “faith level?” Like the disciples, do you need Jesus to increase your faith? What needs to change so that you begin to believe and practice that “with God, all things are possible?”
10. Have you ever been part of a church where you experienced the Holy Spirit building agenda harmony through believing prayer? If so, what was it like? Share your thoughts with your group.
11. Have you ever been part of a church where desire, resources and climate all came together to create a contagious church culture? If so, describe the church to the other people in your group.

12. Read through the section entitled, “Linking Passion with Planning.” What stood out to you? What was new to you? What did you learn about the importance of writing out a plan?
13. Why should leaders always think and act long-term?
14. Reflect on the next steps Jesus wants you to take. Now that you have a beginning understanding of the issues involved in building a contagious church culture, what is Jesus saying to you? What practical steps can you take to make the church where you serve a place that becomes “contagious”? Pray about this. Our prayers are with you as well. We are thankful for your love for the church.