

Keeping the FOCUS



Keeping the Focus

Evangelism Course

Church of the Nazarene
Mesoamerica Region

Bernie Slingerland
General Coordinator for the Evangelism Course



Keeping the Focus

A book in the School of Leadership series Evangelism Course
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Introduction

The School of Leadership book series is designed to provide a tool for the church to train and educate its members so they can actively participate in Christian service according to the gifts and calling (vocation) they have received from their Lord.

Each book provides study materials for a course of the School of Leadership program that is offered by the Nazarene Higher Education Institutions of the Mesoamerica Region of the Church of the Nazarene. Most of the key leaders from our schools (presidents, directors, academic vice presidents and directors of decentralized academic studies) actively participated in the program design.

The School of Leadership has five core courses common to all ministries and six specialized courses for each individual ministry. After completing the series, the respective theological Institution gives the student a certificate (or diploma) in Specialized Ministry.

The general objective of the School of Leadership is “to work with the local church in equipping the saints for the work of the ministry, giving them solid, theological, Biblical knowledge and developing them through the exercise of their gifts for service in their local congregation and in society.” The specific objectives of this program are threefold:

- Develop the ministerial gifts of the local congregation.
- Multiply service ministries in the church and community.
- Raise awareness of the vocation of professional ministry in its diverse forms.

The objective of the book series entitled Evangelism is to train those who are gifted in evangelism and desire to participate in the Great Commission, but who do not yet have professional ministerial education. Missionaries, pastors and lay people throughout the Mesoamerica Region have written the lessons of these six books and the desire of the authors is that each student would receive an enriched vision of the Great Commission and the training to win others for Christ. We desire that God would be glorified through the courses and that each student would grow in their preparation and service as an effective worker in his kingdom.

A special thanks to Dr. Ruben E. Fernandez, Education and Clergy Development Coordinator, Dr. Monica Mastronardi Fernandez for her dedication as General Editor of the project, Rev. Simone Mulieri Twibell for her assistance, and the team of writers and designers who collaborated to publish these books. An additional thanks to the teachers who will share these materials. They will make a difference in the lives of thousands of people throughout the Mesoamerica Region.

Finally, I give thanks to the Mesoamerica Regional Literature team for the publication and distribution of these materials, and to Dr. L. Carlos Saenz, Mesoamerica Regional Director, for his continued support in this task, which is the result of his conviction of the important need for the church to be comprehensively trained.

I pray for God’s blessing for all the disciples whose lives and Christian service will be enriched by these books.

Dr. Bernie Slingerland
Coordinator of Evangelism Mesoamerica Region

What Is the School of Leadership?

The **School of Leadership** is an educational program for lay ministry in different specialties to engage in the mission of the local church. This program is administered by the Theological Institutions of the Church of the Nazarene in the Mesoamerica Region and taught both at these institutions and in the local churches enrolled in the program.

Who Can Benefit from the School of Leadership?

It is for all the members of the Church of the Nazarene who have participated in Levels Saving Grace and Sanctifying Grace - Growth in Holiness of the discipleship program A Journey of Grace, and who, with all their heart, wish to discover their gifts and serve God in His work.

The Plan - A Journey of Grace

In the Church of the Nazarene, we believe that making disciples in the image of Christ in the nations is the foundation of the missionary work of the church and the responsibility of its leadership (Ephesians 4:7-16). For this, at all levels of the church, the implementation of progressive discipleship is promoted as “A Journey of Grace” (John 14: 6), a lifestyle of discipleship. The School of Leadership is part of the “Sanctifying Grace - Ministry Development” section, and is designed for those who have gone through the “Prevenient Grace” and “Saving Grace” sections of the discipleship path.



The work of discipleship is continuous and dynamic; therefore, the disciple never stops growing in the likeness of his Lord. This growth, when healthy, occurs in all dimensions: the individual dimension (spiritual growth), the corporate dimension (joining the congregation), the holiness in life dimension (progressive transformation of our being and doing according to the model of Jesus Christ) and the service dimension (investing our lives in ministry).

Dr. Monica Mastronardi de Fernandez
Managing Editor, The School of Leadership Book Series



How Do I Use This Book?

This book contains eight lessons of the School of Leadership program, along with activities and final evaluation of the course.

How are the contents of this book organized?

Each of the eight lessons of this book contains the following:

- ▶ **Objectives:** These are the learning objectives the student is expected to understand at the end of the lesson.
- ▶ **Main Ideas:** A summary of the key teachings of the lesson.
- ▶ **Development of Lesson:** This is the largest section because it is the development of the contents of the lesson. The lessons have been written so that the book can be the teacher, and for that reason the contents have been written in a dynamic form and in simple language with contemporary ideas.
- ▶ **Notes and Comments:** The information in the margins is intended to clarify terms and provide notes that complement or extend the content of the lesson.
- ▶ **Questions:** Sometimes questions are included in the margin that the teacher can use to introduce or reinforce a lesson topic.
- ▶ **What did we learn?:** The box at the end of the lesson development section provides a brief summary of the lesson.
- ▶ **Activities:** This is a page at the end of each lesson that contains learning activities, for individuals or groups, on the subject studied. The estimated time for implementation in class is 20 minutes.
- ▶ **Final evaluation of the course:** This is the last page of the book and once completed the student must remove it from the book and hand it in to a course instructor. The final evaluation should take about 15 minutes.

How long is each course?

The courses are designed for 12 hours of class over 8 ninety-minute sessions. Each institution and each church or local theological study center will coordinate days and times of the classes. Within this hour and a half the teacher or the teachers should include time for the activities contained in the book.

What is the role of the student?

The student is responsible for the following:

1. Enroll on time for the course.
2. Buy the book and study each lesson before class time.
3. Arrive for class on time.
4. Participate in class activities.
5. Participate in practical ministry in the local church outside of class.
6. Complete and submit the final evaluation to the teacher.

What is the role of the teacher of the course?

The professors and teachers for the School of Leadership courses are pastors and laity committed to the mission and ministry of the church and preferably have experience in the ministry they teach. The Director and/or the School of Leadership at the local church (or theological institution) invites their participation and their functions are the following:

1. Be well prepared by studying the book's content and scheduling the use of class time. When studying the lesson, you should have on hand the Bible and a dictionary. Although the lessons are written using simple language, it is recommended that you "translate" what you consider difficult in order to help the students understand. In other words, use terms that they can better understand.
2. Ensure that the students are studying the material in the book and achieving the learning objectives.
3. Plan and accompany students in the activities of ministerial practice. The local pastor and the director of the respective ministry must schedule these activities. These activities should not take away from class time.
4. Take daily attendance and grades in the class report form. The final average will be the result demonstrated by the student in the following activities:
 - a. Class work
 - b. Participation in ministerial practice outside of class
 - c. Final evaluation
5. At the end of the course, collect the evaluation sheets and hand them in with the form "Class Report" to the local School of Leadership director. Do this after totaling the averages and verifying that all data is complete on the form.
6. Professors and teachers should not add tasks or reading assignments apart from the contents of the book. They should be creative in the design of the learning activities and in planning ministry activities outside the classroom according to the reality of their local church and its context.

How do I teach a class?

We recommend using a 90-minute class session as follows:

- **5 minutes:** Review the topic of the previous lesson and pray together.
- **30 minutes:** Review and discuss the lesson. We recommend using an outline, chalkboard, cardboard or other available materials, using dynamic learning activities and visual media such as graphics, drawings, objects, pictures, questions, assigning students to submit parts of the lesson, and so on. We do not recommend lecturing or having the teacher reread the lesson content.
- **5 minutes:** Break either in the middle of class or when it is convenient.
- **20 minutes:** Work on activities in the book. This can be done at the beginning,

middle or end of the review, or you can complete the activities as you proceed in accordance with the issues as it relates to them.

- **20 minutes:** Discussion about the students' ministry practice that they currently do and that they will do. At the beginning of the course you will need to present the schedule to the students so that they can make arrangements to attend the ministry practice. In the classes when the students discuss their ministry practice, the conversation should be focused on what they learned, including their successes and their errors, as well as the difficulties they encountered.
- **10 minutes:** Prayer for the issues arising from the practice (challenges, people, problems, goals, gratitude for the results, among others).

How do I implement the final course evaluation?

Allocate 15 minutes of time during the last class meeting for the course evaluation. If necessary, students may consult their books and Bibles. Final evaluations are designed to be an activity to reinforce what was learned in class and not a repetition of the contents of the book. The purpose of this assessment is to measure the understanding and evaluation of the student concerning the class topics, their spiritual growth, their progress in the commitment to the mission of the church and their progress in ministerial experience.

Ministerial Practice Activities

The following are suggested activities for ministerial practice outside of class. The list below includes several ideas to help teachers, pastors, directors of local School of Leadership groups and local ministry directors. From the list you can choose the activity best suited to the contextual situation and the local church ministry, or replace these with others according to the needs and possibilities of your context.

We recommend having at least three ministerial activities per course. You can put the whole class to work on a project or assign group tasks according to interests, gifts and abilities. It is advisable to involve students in a variety of new ministry experiences.

Suggested Practical Ministry Activities for the Course: Keeping the Focus

1. Study the congregation in order to evaluate how many people are prepared to share the gospel with a friend or family member and to identify those who are interested in receiving training on personal evangelism and discipleship.
2. Organize a workshop or a course in order to teach a group of people to intercede for the unbelievers they know and to share the plan of salvation with them.
3. Organize a one-day retreat/workshop with the congregation's leaders (the board, teachers, ministry leaders, etc.) in order to make an evaluation based on the ten characteristics of a healthy church. Make a plan for strengthening these weak areas (Lessons 2 through 4).
4. Hold an event for teaching the congregation about the ten characteristics of a healthy church in order to show them the results of the evaluation carried out by the leadership team and to involve them in the projects they can be a part of to strengthen weak areas (Lessons 2 through 4).
5. Plan a prayer retreat to seek God's vision in regards to the growth and expansion of the local church's ministries in the next one to three years. Write down this vision, communicate it to all of the groups and ministries in the congregation, and present it in an attractive way in a visible place so that the people can see it every time they come to the church (poster, projection, etc.) (Lessons 5 and 6).
6. Work with the leaders and all those of the congregation who are interested to form a simple and attainable plan for reaching that vision (Lesson 7).
7. Organize a fundraiser (like washing cars, etc.) to raise funds for the projects the team has designed to reach the vision.
8. Organize a workshop or course for training disciplers of the new believers with the materials provided by the Discipleship ministry from the Church of the Nazarene. A brochure can be downloaded from the web page: http://nazarene.org/sites/default/files/docs/SDMI/ministry_brochure.pdf



Lesson 1

EVANGELISM: OUR PRIORITY



A person in a white shirt and dark pants stands on a beach, looking out at the ocean under a cloudy sky. The background is a vast, textured, light-colored surface that transitions into the sky and sea.

Objectives

- To know the characteristics of a healthy church.
- To reflect on the need to impact the world.
- To evaluate your evangelism ministry.

Main Ideas

- A healthy church makes evangelism as a priority.
- The local church needs to be alive, holy, growing, and united so that it can develop the ten characteristics of a glorious church.

Introduction

When a group of believers are united and decide to serve and obey God's will, the power of God descends on the church. The Holy Spirit descends in power when God's people are one in Christ Jesus. When a congregation embraces evangelism as a fundamental priority for the church's life, the impact in the community and in the world is incredible! We will see this throughout this book as an overriding characteristic of the "glorious church," that is, a church that grows in holiness and health, a church empowered by the Holy Spirit that testifies with its voice and with its life, and a church that serves and transforms its community.

In a conference in Texas, United States, I met with Dr. Larry McKain (Executive Director of *New Church Specialties*). After talking with him, it was clear to me that we needed a refocus for our churches in the region because in the year 2007, 80% of the churches had not grown in membership.

In 2007, the evangelism office launched the project Refocus. Three years later, the percentage of churches with little growth had gone down to 70% (10% more of the churches were growing in membership). We could see that various churches had embraced the program and were following through with the Great Commission. During those years, other projects were launched in the region, but we have no doubt that the project Refocus strongly contributed to changing the situation.

When the Caribbean Region and the MAC (Mexico and Central America) Region combined, the new Mesoamerica Region continued with this project and now new countries are being challenged to put the Refocus project into practice.

Refocus is a project that gives better results when each leader and member of the church participates. Refocus offers a new opportunity so churches can experience the power of God leading them to do great things for his kingdom.

This book will explain how your church can become an instrument of God's power. Being a glorious church is not optional: it is God's desire for each local church no matter the location. Every church needs to be a glorious church. Ask the Lord Jesus Christ to move in a new and refreshing way in the life of your church.

Bernie Slingerland, author of this lesson, served as Coordinator of Evangelism in the Mesoamerica Region from 2002-2018. Under his leadership, 153 missional zones were established, 723 new churches were organized and 6,157 new missions were started. Twelve new districts began under his leadership. He currently works with Jesus Film Harvest Partners in Olathe, Kansas.

Glorious Church: This refers to a church model that all churches should imitate. The Glorious Church should be a faithful reflection of the holy life and the redeeming ministry of Jesus Christ in the world. The church is glorious from her inception, is divine for her ministry, is backed by God and has eternal repercussions. The church also has an eternal destiny and a final reward that will be received in eternal life (Ephesians 5:27; Philippians 3:20-21; Revelation 3:12,21).

Are We Impacting the World?

Reconsider the reality of the world and the reality of the church.



God chose his Church to impact the world. We know that no church in this world is perfect, but we need to remember that Jesus Christ is perfect. The church of the New Testament was not a building; it was the people. When the members of a church have healthy spiritual lives, God can use them in great ways. However, if people are not spiritually healthy, it presents an obstacle for God's movement. For this reason, it is necessary that the churches that are sleeping have a spiritual awakening, or in other words, start living in the Spirit.

In recent decades, several tourism companies and international businesses have come to our region of the world. This has brought a huge boost to the economy. For instance, the communications businesses had a great impact on our countries, bringing cell phones, Internet, cable television and satellite, online education, video conferencing, etc. Currently, people who live in remote areas of Guatemala, Mexico, and other countries of the region can see and hear what the rest of the world sees and hears through their TVs or Internet. Today, these people have "windows" in their own homes, cafes, and offices, from which they can see what is happening in faraway places of the world.

These possibilities of seeing the world have influenced the lives of many people, principally in the way they dress, the music they listen to, the movies they watch, the decisions they make about what to study, etc. All of these changes have a positive side in the way they impact people's lives, but the huge mediums of communication also exercise a negative influence, especially on children and teenagers.

This same influence can be seen in members of the church. For instance, the congregation receives one to two hours a week of teaching from the church, but they spend between four to eight hours in the same week "learning" about the worldly and anti-Christian culture promoted by mediums of communication. Therefore, it should not surprise us that the impact technology has on Christians and non-Christians is sky-high, and what is worse is that only a few people are conscious of the intentions of the people who work in the massive mediums of communication.

This is no secret: the massive extent of technology has made the church a secondary place for learning life lessons. How can we face these problems in our churches? How can we, as Christians, counteract this anti-Christian teaching and present the eternal message?

Refocus:

refocus means to change the focus, like when we adjust a camera lens. Also, it signifies a change in priorities.

*What changes would God like to see in your community?
How would your community be different if it were impacted by your church?*

The Qualities of a Glorious Church

Now we will learn about four qualities of a healthy church.



Each local church should cultivate, with the power from God's Spirit, the four qualities of a "glorious church." We can say that these qualities are observable markers of good spiritual health:

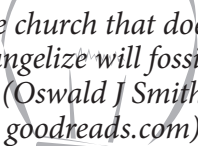
THE QUALITIES OF A GLORIOUS CHURCH

Alive

Growing

Holy

United



*"The church that does not evangelize will fossilize"
(Oswald J Smith, goodreads.com).*

- 1. Alive:** In this church, Christians are full of the Holy Spirit, sensitive to the Spirit's direction and always ready to obey God's will.
- 2. Growing:** In this church, each Christian is growing to be more like Jesus and working to add more people to the kingdom of God.
- 3. Holy:** In this church, people live victoriously in the power of the Holy Spirit and their lives are pleasing to God.
- 4. United:** In this church, people cultivate healthy relationships inside and outside the church.

For a church to live gloriously, it needs to be alive, holy, growing, and united. With the goal to maintain these characteristics, evangelism and discipleship should remain priorities; that is the only way for a congregation to grow in number and in spiritual maturity.

The Ten Characteristics of a Glorious Church

Next we will briefly see how the qualities of a glorious church are put into practice.



The four qualities of a glorious Church are best expressed through the following ten characteristics (of which we will speak about in more detail in the next lesson):

- *Active Compassion:* tending to the physical needs of the community in an intentional way.
- *Leadership Training:* shaping leaders to shape other leaders.
- *Fruitful Ministries:* guiding in the discovery and service of using spiritual gifts.

- *Passionate Spirituality*: spirituality founded in the Word, that is practical, alive, and holy, in daily communion with the Holy Spirit.
- *Functional Structures*: giving purpose and vision to guide the organization of the church.
- *Inspired Worship Services*: having messages and biblical worship that is centered in Christ.
- *Effective Discipleship Groups*: small groups for learning and reflecting together in order to apply the Word in daily life.
- *Loving and Caring Companionship*: having authentic and contagious relationships that attract new disciples.
- *Practical and Passionate Evangelism*: evangelism that reaches people where they are and that leads to transformation.
- *Sincere and Vibrant Prayer*: prayer is foundational to the people in the church and all ministries.

The North District in Costa Rica had not experienced growth for ten years. Some district leaders participated in a Refocus seminar, and then, under the leadership of the Superintendent Rev. Johnny Calvo, the district started to change. Johnny shared with the leaders that change is not easy and it takes effort. In 2008, the district saw a 28% growth rate and by the end of 2009 it had grown by 14%. One very important thing that resulted was that the district was shaping healthy leaders. It is natural for healthy churches to grow, and this happens when members are growing in Christ and are taking care of the “Father’s business” (Luke 2:49).

In examples like this one, we can see the ten characteristics of a glorious church in action. Later in the book, we will study how to evaluate the state of a local church, measuring each of these characteristics, and in doing so, the stronger areas and weaker areas which require more attention will be determined.

Dr. Christian A. Schwartz promotes eight of the ten characteristics in his book *The Eight Basic Characteristics of a Healthy Church*, as the fruit of a study he did in more than 1000 churches around the world. In our list, we have two more: prayer and compassion.

Even so, the ten characteristics of a glorious church are a model, a vision of what each local church should develop. Healthy churches actively present each of these ten characteristics. That is why each church is responsible for developing and perfecting these ten characteristics each year. Every church can develop these characteristics to become a glorious church with God’s power! This is our call and our vision, “*to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless*” (Ephesians 5:27).

“Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”
(Luke 2:49).

The Steps to Follow

In this section we will see how to achieve it.



Throughout the entire book, we are going to learn how to develop these ten characteristics. Let's take a look at the steps we will follow in the coming lessons:

1. Learn and teach the ten characteristics of a healthy church:

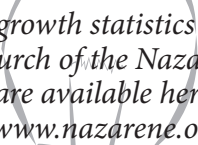
- Through classes, sermons, workshops. For instance, start with teaching the leadership group and members of the congregation who present the qualities and characteristics of a healthy church. You can design a PowerPoint presentation or distribute printed pages.
- Dedicate time to reflect on what is important for cultivating these characteristics.
- Research the history of your local church in the last five to ten years in terms of growth in membership and the characteristics of a glorious church.
- Present the statistics to the church.
- Evaluate the data with the congregation's help.
- Consider the three weakest and the three strongest characteristics of the local church.
- Allow the people to share what they feel and to give ideas for strengthening the weak areas.

2. Project a vision for the coming year. Where would you like the church to be in a year?

- Consider how to elevate the three weakest points to new levels.
- Do not repeat what has been done in the past with no results; look for a new vision from God for the church.
- Pray to know what God's dream is for the local church.
- Develop a clear and concise mission declaration that can be visible to remind and motivate everyone throughout the year. For instance, one church has this one: *"Equip Christians in excellence who, filled with the Holy Spirit, live united, extend Christ's church, establish God's Kingdom, and transform society."*

3. Make a plan to take the local church to wherever God wants to take it.

- This plan should be developed in stages that start with where we are and end with where God wants us to be. It should be explained in a simple way so that the entire congregation can understand it and follow it.
- Lesson 7 will teach you how to develop the plan.



The growth statistics of the Church of the Nazarene are available here: www.nazarene.org

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Evaluate the evangelism ministry in your local church by answering the following questions:

- a) Are we making an impact in our community? How?
- b) Is there fruit of transformed lives as a result of our efforts?
- c) Are we investing all we can in terms of human resources and materials for impacting the community?
- d) Do we have people trained for personal evangelism and discipleship? Are there enough? Are there more people who need to get involved?
- e) Do the people in our church know who has spiritual gifts for evangelism and discipleship? Are these the people who lead these ministries?
- f) What changes would you make in the evangelism and discipleship ministries in your church to make them more effective?

2. In groups of three or four students, evaluate the strength of the four qualities of a healthy church in your church. Use the following scale to evaluate:

(10) Very strong, it is natural in our church.

(7-9) It is being strengthened, we still need to cultivate this quality.

(4-6) Weak, but we are aware of it and are working to overcome this weakness.

(1-3) Weak, people have conformed to the situation, we urgently need to do something to improve it.

_____ **Alive:** A church of Christians full of the Spirit, sensitive to the Spirit's direction and always ready to obey God's will.

_____ **Growing:** In this church, each Christian is growing to be more like Jesus and working to add more people to the kingdom of God.

_____ **Holy:** In this church, people live victoriously in the power of the Holy Spirit and their lives are pleasing to God.

_____ **United:** A church where people cultivate healthy relationships inside and outside the church.

3. In the same groups, propose two or three ideas for strengthening the qualities that were seen as weak (1-6) and to continue cultivating the stronger ones (7-10) with new, creative ideas (that is, something that has not yet been done).



Lesson 2

THE TEN CHARACTERISTICS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

Objectives

- To define a healthy church from a biblical perspective.
- To understand more clearly the characteristics of a healthy church.
- To identify the weak areas of the church.

Main Ideas

- A healthy church is one that grows holistically.
- When we do not know God's purpose for his Church, we run the risk of getting used to incorrect, non-biblical forms of being a church.

Introduction

Without a model or something with which to compare, we have no way to know if churches are healthy from a biblical standpoint. When we do not know God's purpose for his Church, we run the risk of getting used to incorrect, non-biblical forms of being a church. The saddest part is if we do not know God's plan for the Church, we could be working hard and still be far from God's will.

Studying the concept of having a healthy church helps us to identify those areas that we need to improve in our local churches. This is what happened during an evangelism conference in the Dominican Republic, when we presented the ten characteristics of a glorious church to the pastors. The pastors were able to see the statistics of the local churches in the last ten years, and then were able to visualize the model of a glorious church as well as the historical reality of their churches. In addition, a survey was taken of the leaders in order to see what they thought about what was happening in their churches. That way, they could compare the health of their local churches with the model of a glorious church as if they were looking into a mirror.

In this lesson, we are going to study what it means to be a healthy church, and we will see the biblical backing of the ten characteristics of a healthy and glorious church.

A Healthy Church

"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies"
(1 Corinthians 6:19)

Next, we will study God's purpose for his Church.



In the letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul describes God's purpose for the Church. It says that Christ loved the church, "...and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:25-27). God chose to use the church to impact the world. Paul also declared that Christians are the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19). God

inhabits every believer, and so each believer must present his or her life to him as a daily act of worship. Christians are God's Church, and he empowers them to carry out the work of God's kingdom in the world. When the members of a church are healthy, God can use them in an incredible way.

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus said, "...and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (16:18b). Christ's promise is that he will build his Church and the enemy and his kingdom cannot stop it. It is interesting that Christ used the word "rock" in reference to Peter's confession and testimony concerning Christ's person. When Christ asks him, "But what about you... who do you say that I am?" (16:15), Peter responds, "You are the Messiah, the son of the living God" (16:16a). Therefore, we see that Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and it is on this affirmation and testimony that Christ promises to build his Church. Christ will do it, but he needs us to witness about who he is to a world that desperately needs him. A healthy church is a church that grows because it witnesses about God's lordship and confesses that only he is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Empower
means "to give power or authority to; authorize, especially by legal or official means: to enable or permit"
(Dictionary.com).

The Ten Characteristics of a Healthy Church

Next, we will examine the biblical foundation of each of these characteristics.



A healthy church is a church that grows holistically: it grows in number as well as in spiritual maturity, in companionship, service, leadership, etc. In all, we can highlight ten key areas in which every church should continually develop. We already identified them in the prior lesson, and now we will study the biblical basis for each one.

1. Active Compassion

"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them" (Acts 4:32-34).

The highest way to express compassion is when the church becomes the hands and feet of Christ and works to reach people and satisfy their needs. This does not refer to just doing big projects, like opening a medical clinic or another expensive project that few churches have the resources to implement. Instead, it refers to small projects, like caring for the neighbors' children, repairing the roof of an elderly person, etc. During his ministry on earth, Jesus met the physical needs of people. Is your local church serving the community, so that people will know God's compassionate heart through the love the members of the church show?

What is the difference between serving in accordance with one's giftings and serving only based on a commitment but without utilizing one's giftings?

2. Leadership Training

“Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:3-7).

In this example from the book of Acts, we can see that God used leaders so that his Church would continue to be united. This worked when each person carried out his or her function in the body of Christ. When the people of God work together, it piques the curiosity of the surrounding community. It is important that the eyes of the pastor are fixed on Jesus Christ, who is the head of the Church. God is always doing new things, and he wants to guide his people as we serve him. In your church, do the leaders direct the congregation in keeping God’s purpose in mind so as not to stray from it?

Passionate
means “having, compelled
by, or ruled by intense
emotion or strong feeling;
fervid”
(Dictionary.com)

3. Fruitful Ministries

“We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully” (Romans 12:6-8).

Each member of the Church of Christ has spiritual gifts and talents that express God’s love and care for the world. It is crucial that each person finds his or her place in service, because when God’s people do not participate in ministry, the impact of the church on the community diminishes. In addition, the church’s leadership should help people to discover and implement their spiritual gifts, so that the church can reach more people for the kingdom of God. Does everyone in your church have the opportunity to serve in accordance with their spiritual gifts?

4. Passionate Spirituality

“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (Romans 12:11-12).

“We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God...” (Colossians 1:9-10).

These passages talk about a relationship with the living God that needs to be cultivated at an individual and congregational level. God’s presence

should be evident in each aspect of the life of the church; this happens when Christians live in obedience to the will of God and look to serve God with their lives. Does your local church continually seek the Lord? Is it true of just the pastor or does every member of the congregation seek the Lord?

5. Functional Structures

“He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves” (Exodus 18:25-26).

The organizational structure is the frame that sustains all of the activities in the life of a local church. To tend to the ministries of a church, for example Sunday School, Nazarene Youth International, the services, administrative functions, maintenance of the installations, etc., it is necessary to have an organized structure that is functional. Good organization will allow efforts to be combined to reach a vision. What are the programs, projects, and ministries on which the efforts of your local church are focused? Does each activity have a clear purpose?

6. Inspired Worship Services

“Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord” (Psalm 150).

Congregational worship is very important in the lives of believers. The services should be well planned and should include congregational prayer, offering, Scripture reading, preaching, worship in song, etc. Worship is most effective when it involves the five senses. Worship has the purpose of putting God first and destroys the barriers that separate us, since we are all called to worship Christ. In the worship services at your church, do you feel like you will meet with God because his presence is there?

7. Effective Discipleship Groups

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common” (Acts 2:42-44).

Each local church is responsible for making Christlike disciples in the nations. The church should have good resources for guiding new believers as well as mature believers to grow in their spiritual lives. It is always better to use resources developed by our denomination, so that the teachings are in accordance with the church’s doctrine. The materials should be practical

Accountability
in discipleship refers to having a spiritual mentor to whom we are responsible to give an account concerning our relationship with Jesus. At the same time, this person is responsible to care for our spiritual health and growth.

so that they can be used in daily life, and they should encourage people to grow as disciples of Jesus. Disciples grow best when they have the chance to grow together, sharing their faith and experiences with others. That is why it is recommended to have small group meetings every week. Each Christian needs a big brother/sister (mentor) who keeps him or her accountable. Is the church helping believers grow in their spiritual lives? Does the church have groups where disciples can gather to study the Word and grow together? Does it have leaders to guide the disciples in their spiritual growth?

8. Loving and Caring Companionship

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Companionship and genuine love keep the church united. It is very important that new people who come to the church make friends, so that they will decide to stay permanently in the congregation. It is not healthy for the church to have activities that do not provide space for real relationships to be formed. People should know each other beyond superficial conversations; the church should be a place where people can find companions that will support them in their Christian walk. Warmth and love from the local church should be evident when a new person arrives to the church parking lot, enters the door, attends a cell group, eats lunch with a family or whatever other contact they have with Christians throughout the week. In a way, love is like water in that it needs to flow freely. Do the people in your local church show love to one another and to the new people who arrive?

9. Practical and Passionate Evangelism

“The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it.’ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked.... The eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?’ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:29-30, 34-35).

We are God’s instruments for sharing the gospel. He is the one who changes people’s hearts, but he uses people to transmit the message. It is not just about sharing the gospel: there should be continual training in the local church so that people continue evangelizing. Effective evangelism requires preparation before evangelistic events (personal testimony, personal evangelism, etc.) and responsible follow-up. Is evangelism actually being carried out in your church? When it is put in action, is it done with a sincere passion?

10. Sincere and Vibrant Prayer

“Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:30-31).

What is your understanding of sincere and vibrant prayer?



Lesson 3

THE TEN CHARACTERISTICS IN ACTION



Objectives

- To learn how to implement the ten characteristics.
- To study the process for making changes.
- To evaluate how we receive new people in the church.

Main Ideas

- It is not enough to just have church activities: instead, these activities should be used to serve God's purpose in the church.
- The ten characteristics of a healthy church can be put into action in the life of a church by following five steps.

Introduction

There was a local church that had Sunday School, worship services, and other activities throughout the week. A very dry oak tree stood in front of the church building for many years. When the members were asked about the tree's health, most of them remarked that it was healthy! It is as if the church had lost sight of reality. What really mattered was not the tree, but instead the fact that the church was carrying out traditional activities every week without realizing that the church was no longer alive. It had stopped growing years before and had become a social club. Just because a church does weekly activities does not mean that everything is okay. We need to be sure that each of the ten characteristics are alive and well in the church. In this lesson, we will study in more detail how the ten characteristics of a glorious church can become a reality, that is, how they can bring life to your local church.

The Ten Characteristics Bring Life

What are the opinions of those who work and live in your community concerning your local church?

We will see examples of the ten characteristics in action.



When evaluating each characteristic, we can see the situation of the local church and then identify which of the needs are top priority. Keep in mind that the list of characteristics does not have a necessary or specific order, but instead all are important and should be developed at the same time, although the areas that have not been given the needed attention in the past should be given more consideration.

1. Practice Active Compassion:

This refers to starting projects focused on satisfying people's needs. That way, with our actions, we can show people that they are loved and valued. When we observe people's needs and respond to them, compassion becomes a bridge for sharing the gospel message. Active compassion allows us to minister to the whole person, being the hands and feet of God.

On one occasion, while visiting some of the cities on the Mesoamerica Region, we asked a man on the street if he could help us find the Church

of the Nazarene. He answered, “It’s about two blocks south, and wow that it is a great church!” After hearing his response, we asked him if he attended that church and his answer was, “No, but if I ever wanted to find a church, I would go there because I have seen how they help people in the community!”

2. Promote Leadership Training:

Providing training for forming new leaders is something that should be done continually in a local church. The pastor and his/her congregation should be in agreement in regards to delegating to the new leaders various functions and ministerial tasks. These new leaders should not be alone; they should be put under the guidance of mentors who will supervise, evaluate, and continue to train them.

A pastor of a large church on our region said these words to me after starting to delegate more of his pastoral tasks: “Now I have less to do than ever before! These results can be reached when people are trained and involved in ministry. We should not wait too much time before involving our new members; it is best to involve them in God’s work early on in their Christian life, but there must always be training so that the ministries will be fruitful the way God wants them to be. It’s amazing what laymen can do when given the chance!”

3. Offer Fruitful Ministries:

The ministries of a church need to be developed in accordance with the spiritual gifts of the people in the congregation. It is crucial to be able to offer the opportunity for each and every person in the church to discover their spiritual gifts so that they can be involved in the ministries in which they will be most effective. Each member needs to know that his or her spiritual gifts and service are necessary and important for the development of the church’s ministries. They should also be assured that they will receive direction, support and training.

A pastor in the region said, “I used to do everything in the church, and sometimes to the point where I felt completely drained. Later, I learned the hard way that when I was too tired to continue, the laymen were the ones who kept the church afloat. That is when I realized that I had been suffocating the church. Now I try to help the church’s members find their spiritual gifts in order to involve them in a ministry where they can use them as God intended.” This pastor understood that pastors are not the only ones called to minister: rather, every single person is called to serve.

4. Create a Passionate Spirituality:

When a believer is filled with the Holy Spirit, this believer can experience spiritual growth. There are three fundamental spiritual practices that each member needs to cultivate: the personal spiritual disciplines, the corporative spiritual disciplines (congregational), and the personal expression of their faith.

In healthy churches, the number of leaders grows in proportion to the growth of the congregation. The larger the membership, the greater number of people necessary for training leaders.

Sunday's sermon. That's where I understand how to apply it. This really helps me to digest the message and make it mine. Plus, other believers in the group help me understand things I didn't understand before."

8. Form an Environment of *Loving and Caring Companionship*:

Relationships between Christians should be friendly and caring. Affection should be demonstrated in accordance with the accepted cultural norms. When affection in the church is authentic and contagious, it attracts people to God. How can such an environment of loving companionship be seen? For instance, it can be seen when there is genuine happiness from all the members when they see each other, when healthy friendships are formed between children, adolescents, teenagers, and adults, when these friendships contribute to reaffirming the personal value of each and every member in the church, etc.

One fellow believer said, "The reason I am in my local church is because the first time I went there, I didn't feel like an outsider!"

9. Carry out *Practical and Passionate Evangelism*:

Evangelism should transform and reach people wherever they live. The church has a chance to share with others their experience with God through personal evangelism or corporate evangelism. It is necessary that the church develops a sensitivity towards those who are seeking God, and that they know how to involve new believers. All of these elements are what permit effective communication of the gospel message.

There is a church in the region that trains all the laymen to evangelize. They believe that they are called to make Christlike disciples, so they train everyone in personal evangelism. "We don't do huge evangelism campaigns once a year, because we do personal evangelism every week. It may be the same, maybe we are having evangelistic campaigns every week when we do personal evangelism." Imagine if this happened in your church!

10. Practice *Sincere and Vibrant Prayer*:

Prayer should be practiced naturally in all of the church's ministries. This can be organized or spontaneous when the need arises, for people's salvation, and for transforming and strengthening believers. Prayer is not just for resolving personal needs.

A pastor once said, "We have everyone come to the altar on Sundays and have them pray for people that need to be saved. We believe that this is the church's mission. After this, we have a pastoral prayer for the needs of the church. The beautiful thing is that each week, we see new people that we have been praying for get saved!"

"The priority of God is that the world would be evangelized so that those who have never heard will receive the good news and be saved. This is our objective; and it will demand everything we have to do it"
(Daniel Bianchi, translated from Spanish).

"Work as if everything depends on you; pray as if everything depends on God"
(D.L. Moody, taken from St. Augustine).

Five Steps for Making the Change

Next, we will learn about the five steps for starting the transformation.



Are people in your church gentle about the way they introduce something new? What can we do to help people understand that we need to change some things in order to be a healthy church?

The ten characteristics of a healthy church serve as a model or vision that each local church can follow as a guide. It is important to evaluate whether or not these are active and present in the local church, because this will help you gauge the church's health. Why is this important to do? If the church is healthy, it means that the people in it are also healthy.

This is why we recommend that each church in the region do this evaluation each year. We have been called to present healthy churches to the Lord! This is, after all, the vision: "...and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:27).

The steps for applying these ten characteristics of a healthy church can be summarized in the following five words:

1. **Learn** the ten characteristics of a healthy church while *teaching* them.
2. **Observe** the church's *history*, and evaluate the present *reality* of your local church.
3. **Formulate** a *vision* with God's help on what the church will become in one to five years.
4. **Elaborate** a *plan* that will help the local church reach the vision this year.
5. **Go** and *make* the vision a reality!

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

When we put the ten characteristics for a healthy church into practice, the congregation and its ministers are strengthened.

Activities

Time



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. *Make a list of the ten qualities of a healthy church, and write practical examples of each one that can be applied in your local context.*

2. *Imagine that you are a new person and are attending a worship service at your local church for the first time: What would your first impression be? What would need to happen so that you would feel welcome? What does your church do now to give follow-up for visitors?*

3. *Make a drawing or diagram of a healthy church showing the ten characteristics studied in this lesson.*



Lesson 4

HOW TO STRENGTHEN WEAK AREAS

Objectives

- To know the steps to *The Power of a Glorious Church* project.
- To learn how to conduct a diagnosis of the church's health.
- To dialogue about solutions for church development.

Main Ideas

- The local church can carry out an evaluation in order to identify its weak and strong areas.
- The weak characteristics of a local church can be strengthened if the church elaborates a vision and a plan.

Introduction

Similar to what has been said in passed lessons, healthy churches grow naturally when people grow in Christ and go about the “Father’s business” (Luke 2:49). It is in a congregation like that where the ten characteristics of a glorious church are put into action.

Victor George, District Superintendent for Trinidad, made this comment: “This is exactly what we needed, and we are going to try to have all the churches in our districts do it.” George was referring to the project *ReFocus* that was later adapted and relaunched with the name *The Power of the Glorious Church*. Just like any other project, it requires a key leader to start the movement. The purpose of this project is to help every local church grow deeply and fully.

In this lesson, we will study the steps for implementing this project.

Step 1: Teach the Components of a Healthy Church

Next, we will see how to implement the first step of the project.



When we have a giant vision before us, the first thing we need to do is plan. Every big goal can be reached when the work is divided into stages, following a process that will take us from where we are now to where God wants us to be. In order to do so, we need to reach short-range goals. Next, we will find a plan that will take us step by step in order to carry out God’s dream for his church and make it a reality.

The first step will be to teach the church the concept of a healthy church or glorious church. Make a simple PowerPoint presentation or some pamphlets that will explain what a healthy church is like. Talk about the importance of having a church with the ten characteristics. Explain that each of these ten characteristics needs to be alive and active, not just existing. It is also important to emphasize that the state of the local church can be better evaluated when we have a reference point, such as a healthy church model that we can follow.

How would you define in your own words a “healthy church?”

All local churches have some characteristics from the list of ten in which they are stronger, and others that are weaker. The ten characteristics of a healthy local church should be presented as a model so that each church member can understand the ideal of a healthy church as the goal.

Step 2: Conduct a Diagnosis of the Church

Next, we will see how to implement the second step of the project.



The second step consists of conducting a complete diagnosis of the church's health. It is important that the local church's history is considered before any evaluation. Numerical statistics have the quality of being objective, but an evaluation based on the opinions and the feelings of the members of the local church on the ten characteristics allows the study of the local church to present authentic and up-to-date results.

In order to accomplish this, we need to do two things:

- a. Investigate the growth history of the local church in the last five to ten years.
- b. Evaluate the current state of the ten characteristics of the local church today.

It is important to involve the people in the congregation in this evaluation on the current state of the church and not just the pastor and the board members. The results of this study should be shared with the local church so that each member can recognize the situation at hand and have the opportunity to present solutions.

The following is a chart that can be used to evaluate the ten characteristics (instructions on the following page):

NAME OF THE CHURCH:				DATE:	
NAME OF THE PARTICIPANT:					
Characteristic	Points	Weak	Strong	Reality	Necessary Changes
Compassion					
Discipleship					
Evangelism					
Leadership					

The diagnostic allows one to identify causes and observe the symptoms in the present as well as in the past for today's problems in the local church. Doing a diagnostic helps one to more fully understand the problems and weaknesses of the church and to find an adequate treatment to change the unhealthy conditions into healthy ones.

To research the growth statistics of your local church or district in the last few years, you can go to this link: <http://nazarene.org/research-services>

Ministry					
Prayer					
Relationships					
Spirituality					
Structure					
Worship					
TOTAL:					

Instructions for completing the chart:

1. Evaluate each characteristic in the “Points” column. Use a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very critical shape, 2 is critical, 3 is good, 4 is very good, and 5 is excellent.
2. Identify the “Weak” column, these will be the ones that scored 1 or 2.
3. Identify the “Strong” column, these are all the characteristics that got a 4 or 5.
4. In the column “Reality,” briefly explain why you choose this score for each characteristic. In other words, from your point of view, what is actually happening in that area? Why does it deserve a 1 or 3 or 5?
5. Write an idea you might have for changing the situation in each “Weak” area in the “Necessary Changes” column.
6. Total up the “Points” column. This total reflects the opinion of each person on the general health of the local church. Let’s take a look at the scale to see what the totals show about the church’s health:

- 0-10 Very Critical Condition
- 11-20 Critical
- 21-30 Good
- 31-40 Very Good
- 41-50 Excellent

Once the people have completed this evaluation individually, gather all the filled-out charts and proceed to complete a fresh page with the chart with the all-around results. For example: starting with the first characteristic, find the average of the points each person put down and write the sum on the clean chart (add the points counted for “compassion” on all the peoples’

charts and then divide it by the number of charts filled out). Next, identify the three weakest and the three strongest characteristics in the church. At the end, share ideas for possible solutions for reaching a new level of effectiveness (health).

Present the diagnoses' results including the statistics of the local church and the evaluation's results of the ten characteristics. This experience is like looking at a photo album to see how the church has changed. However, remember statistics do not tell the full story, because there are always reasons for what happens in the church. Remember the objective of this evaluation is not to know if the church is growing in number or not, because this growth in itself does not mean that the other characteristics are healthy.

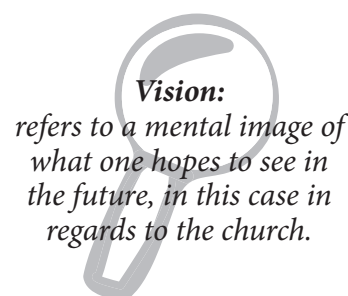
Step 3: Formulate a Vision

Next, we will look at how to implement the third step of the project.



Once the diagnosis is finished, the church can elaborate an ambitious but reachable vision that the local church can reach in a year if some changes are made that could strengthen the weak characteristics.

In order to formulate a vision, there are various things that need to be considered. We need to have a realistic idea of how each of the three weak characteristics can be improved in a year. God wants the church to know where it is going, but more importantly, he wants the church to have a detailed vision. Therefore, do not be carried away by what is easiest or most comfortable in the moment for elaborating your vision, but base it on God's vision for the church. Pray to know what God's dream is for your local church. Search for support for this vision in Scripture, and develop a slogan or attractive phrase that will remind you of the goal you have set. The vision should be clear so that the church knows where it is going!



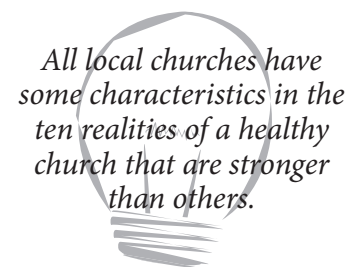
Steps 4 & 5: Elaborate a Plan and Put It into Practice

Next, we will see how to implement the fourth and fifth steps of the project.



After having a vision, the church can elaborate a plan that will explain step by step how it can be used to reach the vision. The projects always seem big and difficult until we begin them. However, when we have clear goals and stay on course, they can be made a reality with God's leading. When the church sees the vision becoming a reality, it is filled with new hope.

In order to elaborate a plan, we need to detail the steps in order to reach the vision. Think of the plan as a staircase. The plan needs to have stairs



When Jesus sees the local church, what do you think he sees?

in order to help us get to the very top, but this only works if we go step by step. For the plan to be effective, it has to be simple, easy to understand, and easy to follow for the local church. Each step of the plan needs to be clearly interconnected in order to advance towards the vision.

The fifth and final step is to put the vision into practice. Sometimes it is difficult to take the first step, but it is best to start as soon as possible. Choose a date to put things into action while the church is still excited about the plan.

Take into account that change is never easy, and it will take plenty of hard work to change peoples' habits. Follow God's direction and do not look back. Continue to constantly encourage the church to keep moving ahead with passion. Soon enough, the church will reach a new rhythm, and people will start to shape new habits.

Follow the plan, but be sure to revise it weekly in order to verify that it is all going smoothly. It is possible that some last minute adjustments will be necessary. We recommend that the church be held accountable to the District Superintendent and other pastors during this time by way of monthly progress reports, that way they can offer support through prayer and be able to motivate the church to continue.

Celebrate the achievements and the difficulties at each step. Neither of these will fail to appear. God wants each local church to be a healthy church! You could be God's instrument for renovating his local church, transforming it into a living, growing, holy, and united church!



WHAT DID WE LEARN?

There are five steps to follow for implementing the project *The Power of a Glorious Church*. After evaluating the reality of the local church and creating a plan for making necessary adjustments, the church should recover its health and follow through with God's plan.

Activities

Time



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In this activities section, each group of students will do an exercise in order to familiarize themselves with the use of the chart. First, each student (individually) should complete the chart in order to evaluate the ten characteristics of a healthy church by following these instructions from the lesson:

1. Evaluate each characteristic in the “Points” column. Use a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very critical shape, 2 is critical, 3 is good, 4 is very good, and 5 is excellent.
2. Identify the “Weak” column, these will be the ones that scored 1 or 2.
3. Identify the “Strong” column, these are all the characteristics that got a 4 or 5.
4. In the column “Reality,” briefly explain why you got this score for each characteristic. In other words, from your point of view, what is actually happening in that area? Why does it deserve a 1 or 3 or 5?
5. Write an idea you might have for changing the situation in each “Weak” area in the “Necessary Changes” column.
6. Total up the “Points” column. This total reflects the opinion of each person on the general health of the local church. Let’s take a look at the scale to see what the totals show about the church’s health:

0-10 Very Critical Condition

11-20 Critical

21-30 Good

31-40 Very Good

41-50 Excellent

NAME OF THE CHURCH:				DATE:	
NAME OF THE PARTICIPANT:					
Characteristic	Points	Weak	Strong	Reality	Necessary Changes
Compassion					
Discipleship					
Evangelism					
Leadership					
Ministry					
Prayer					
Relationships					

Spirituality					
Structure					
Worship					
TOTAL:					

2. Once each student has completed the evaluation, get a new chart and fill it out with the group results.
- Starting with the first characteristic, total the average points, adding the individual points and dividing them by the number of people who filled out a chart.
 - To finish with the ten characteristics, identify the three weakest and the three strongest in the church.

NAME OF THE CHURCH:				DATE:	
NAME OF THE PARTICIPANT:					
Characteristic	Points	Weak	Strong	Reality	Necessary Changes
Compassion					
Discipleship					
Evangelism					
Leadership					
Ministry					
Prayer					
Relationships					
Spirituality					
Structure					
Worship					
TOTAL:					

3. To finish, take time to pray, putting the church's health in the Lord's hands. Ask the Holy Spirit to use you all as instruments to change the situation in your congregation and for wisdom to find the best strategies to do so.

A black and white photograph of a camera lens, viewed from a low angle, with a textured, cracked surface overlaying the top half of the image. The background shows a sunset over the ocean, with the sun low on the horizon and dark rocks in the foreground.

Lesson 5

OPTIMIZING THE LOCAL CHURCH

Objectives

- To acquire ideas for optimizing each of the ten characteristics of a healthy church.
- To know what other churches did who experienced good results.
- To reflect on the changes that need to be made in the local church.

Main Ideas

- Change and improvement are never easy, but they are necessary.
- God wants us to make the necessary changes for the health of the local church.
- When we pray for wisdom, God guides us to make the congregation's vision a reality.

Introduction

Improvement is always possible, but there are times that things are so bad that they require special attention. Churches are not perfect in this world, but God wants to use his church as his instrument to minister to everyone.

A few years ago, the music pop star Michael Jackson sang a song called "Man in the Mirror." It is doubtful that his intention was for it to be used in theological reflections, but the words of the song definitely evoke theological phrases such as, "Who is that man in the mirror?" "take a look" and "c'mon, make that change." Applying these phrases to the life of the church, we can reflect on the following statements: "Who is that local church in the mirror?" "Church, take a good look" tell us what the Holy Spirit shows you. Now, go forward local church, and make the changes God is showing you! "C'mon, make that change!" "C'mon, make that change!"

Making God's Vision a Reality in the Local Church

Next, we will take a look at how we can improve the situation in our context.



Change and improvement are never easy, but they are necessary. Let's take a look at the ten realities of a Glorious Church and the steps we can take to improve the local church. Each of the ten characteristics can be optimized by implementing specific plans. It is recommended to take time to meditate on these proposals and see how to implement these changes in the local church and thus make God's vision a reality for the church.

1. Optimizing Compassion

The ministry of compassion is key for obtaining the community's attention. These are some suggestions for optimizing the ministry of compassion in the local church:

- Go from house to house in the neighborhood of your church to learn about the needs in the community.
- Start a group that will study the School of Leadership program in the Compassion department at your local church in order to be trained in the implementation of compassion projects.
- Develop a compassionate ministries center for your local church to assist with the needs of the community.

To optimize means "to make as effective, perfect, or useful as possible" (Dictionary.com).

A certain church, after having completed *The Power of a Glorious Church* workshop, started a project for providing food for the neighborhood children after Sunday School. Projects like these allow compassion to be a fundamental element for carrying out the Great Commission.

2. Optimizing the Leadership

Developing a group of leaders is necessary for being able to implement a vision, since the pastor cannot do it nor should do it alone. Here are some suggestions for optimizing leadership in the church:

- Contact your District office to find out what books are available for shaping your leaders.
- The School of Leadership books published by the Mesoamerica Region are a great way to develop new leaders.
- You can also get books on leadership written by John Maxwell and organize training sessions with your leaders. *The 360 Degree Leader* and *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader* are good books to use.

There was a pastor who was in the habit of choosing new laymen to receive leadership training every couple months in the local church. After ten years, this pastor had around 130 leaders who could be counted on to work in the various ministries every week.

3. Optimizing Ministries

The ministries in the local church are essential for Christ's body to put their gifts and talents into practice. Here are some suggestions for optimizing the ministries:

- The book *Discover Your Vocation in Christ* from the School of Leadership series contains orientation and teachings on different spiritual gifts. This book can help people find their area of service.
- Your regional website is a great place to learn about the various ministries within the Church of the Nazarene in the local church.
- Organize two or three annual events with displays of the different ministries in the local church along with other kinds of activities so that the people in the local church can be informed as well as be excited to participate.

I met a woman whose spiritual gift was not the gift of singing. She also was not very good at speaking in public, but when anyone went to eat at her house, every person felt welcome. She had the gift of hospitality, and she found it through one of these kinds of events at the local church. The result is that now she invites new people over to her house every week. She loves it, and it is an essential ministry in her church!

4. Optimizing Spirituality

Spirituality is a relationship that the church as a whole as well as each individual person has with God. Here are some suggestions for optimizing the spirituality in the local church:



- Organize a holiness summit or campaign as a weekend event.
- Emphasize the importance of having a healthy devotional life, and teach people how to implement this discipline in their lives.
- Place an emphasis on weekly accountability groups that will encourage people to obey God’s Word.
- Prayer and fasting should be practiced individually and congregationally.
- Teach the practice of the spiritual disciplines that can be found in the training manual *To Be Like Him*.

A young man witnessed, “I didn’t become a Christian through an evangelism program. No, I became a Christian because when I watched the people at the local church, I saw that they had something I needed. Their faith was contagious and it brought me to Christ!”

5. Optimizing the Structure

The church’s structure refers to the organization that facilitates the various ministries. The following suggestions help in optimizing the church’s structure:

- The leadership should examine each ministry in the church to make sure it has a clear vision and an effective, functional plan.
- Communication in the church should be fluid in order to ensure that information gets to the entire congregation easily.
- The administrative structures should provide support for all the ministries so they can advance and not be stagnant.
- Evaluate the following questions: What is the visible fruit in the structure of the church? Are the ministries coordinated and working together?

A new pastor came to be in charge of the new congregation and he asked the people why they programmed prayer services every Wednesday if only three people would go. The answer? “Because we’ve always done it that way.” He then asked, “Why do we have a sign outside that says the service starts at 9:30 AM when the services actually start at 10:30 AM?” They answered, saying, “It’s been like that for a long time.” The new pastor and the board looked over the church’s ministries and stopped all the ones that were not active. Now, 40% of the structure has disappeared; however, the parts of the structure that do exist have started to work together and have supported the new vision of the church with greater efficiency.

6. Optimizing Worship

The worship service is the most visible element of the local church and should be a blessing for the church. Here are some suggestions for optimizing worship:

- Observe other Churches of the Nazarene that have inspiring worship services and see how they do it.
- Take time to organize the programs of the worship services.
- Organize the best quality music and singing as possible.

What are the characteristics of a blessed worship service?

- Evaluate the program from the perspective of a new person entering the service. Would they be confused or would they know how to participate?
- Are the messages both biblical and relevant to the lives of the people who attend?
- The worship program should flow from one moment to the next naturally.

One teen said, *“In my local church, I can’t deny that God is with us in a special way. The music is great, but more than that, God is there. We have seen people be healed. There are people coming to Christ regularly. What else can I say? God is there!”*

7. Optimizing Discipleship Groups

Discipleship groups help establish interpersonal relationships and facilitate accountability. Here are some suggestions for improving discipleship groups:

- Make Sunday School dynamic by dividing the time into 15-minute segments: 15 minutes of presenting the topic, 15 minutes in group discussion, and 15 minutes in prayer groups for applying the teaching.
- Use the church’s doctrinal materials.
- As much as possible, plan topics for the lessons that correspond with the sermon the pastor has planned for each week or with the monthly emphasis.
- Organize the discipleship groups so that they can gather throughout the week with three objectives:
 - A time for testimonies
 - A time for dialogue about the sermon topic for daily life applications
 - A time to close in prayer for the needs of the group.
- Have special groups that will invite new people with the intention of evangelizing and beginning the process of discipleship.

A young couple talked about how even though they had attended the worship services of a local church for years, they could enter and exit without anyone really noticing. One day, they became interested in attending a cell group, and that is where they made commitments for Christ because they faced truth in a loving environment.

8. Optimizing Companionship

Love among members of the church is the best testimony of God’s Kingdom. The following are some suggestions for improving companionship in the church:

- Welcome people when they enter the door.
- Invite new families in the church to activities or to eat at someone’s house.
- Call or visit new people.
- Do all you can to make sure people find a place to minister and to be ministered to.

Accountability:
In Christian discipleship groups, the members stimulate the spiritual growth of others by sharing in their struggles, and by offering prayer support and advice so the person stays close to Jesus and far from sin.

How can we make feel welcome those who visit the church?

- Have an intentional plan to reach visitors.
- Each church should have a database with the information of the new people and their progress in the life of the church.

A local congregation decided to give out bottled water to people who were walking on the street. The bottle had a Bible verse with an invitation to the church. Many people in the community responded because they saw that many people in the church were kind when they met them.

9. Optimizing Evangelism

Evangelism should be constant and intentional. Here are some suggestions for improving evangelism in the local church:

- There should be an intentional strategy for sharing the gospel.
- It can include personal evangelism with the EvangeCube, evangelistic cards, evangelism campaigns, Jesus Film, etc.
- Carefully choose an evangelism strategy like *Each One Win One*, *The Power of One*, *To Be Like Him*, etc.
- Evangelism should be continuous and in connection with discipleship for forming members, leaders, and disciples with maturity in Christ Jesus.

In south Mexico, we had a training session and then immediately sent the participants out to the streets with the EvangeCube. Thirty minutes later, everyone had returned, and 15 people had heard the gospel and six accepted Christ.

10. Optimizing Prayer

Every relationship with Christ should be strengthened by prayer. It is the best way to know God's direction. Here are some suggestions for improving the prayer focus of your church:

- Prayer in the church should flow naturally and not be done out of obligation.
- Prayer should be encouraged in the teachings and the preaching.
- Form prayer groups with the people who have intercession as a gift to pray for the church's needs.
- Form groups that will pray constantly for the pastor and leadership team.
- Have prayer services for healings, where people can pray for unbelievers and for people who are experiencing spiritual difficulties.
- Create prayer networks with groups that will come to the church building in the morning, afternoon, and night.
- Each individual should have a prayer list and pray over it, listening to God's voice.

In a certain church, a couple told their pastor that they wanted to pray for him every day and they wanted him to let them know if he had any special needs. Other people heard about what was happening and felt that

Activities

Time

20'

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Imagine that the local church needs to improve in the ministry of compassion: what steps could be taken to optimize this ministry in the church?

2. Imagine that your local church needs improvement in the area of discipleship and small groups: what steps could be taken to optimize this ministry in the church?

3. Imagine that your local church needs to improve its prayer life: what are some steps can be taken to optimize this ministry in the church?

4. What obstacles can be faced when applying these steps? How can we overcome these obstacles?



Lesson 6

**EVANGELISM, DISCIPLESHIP
AND MULTIPLICATION**

Objectives

- To understand how Christ draws people to know him through the church.
- To become familiar with different sermon styles.
- To keep in mind that discipleship is part of evangelism.

Main Ideas

- Christ draws the world to himself through the Church.
- The Church's job is to preach the gospel message and make disciples.

Introduction

The following is what the Article of Faith XI from the Church of the Nazarene Manual 2013-2017 says about the Church:

“We believe in the Church, the community that confesses Jesus Christ as Lord, the covenant people of God made new in Christ, the Body of Christ called together by the Holy Spirit through the Word. God calls the Church to express its life in the unity and fellowship of the Spirit; in worship through the preaching of the Word, observance of the sacraments, and ministry in His name; by obedience to Christ, holy living, and mutual accountability. The mission of the Church in the world is to share in the redemptive and reconciling ministry of Christ in the power of the Spirit. The Church fulfills its mission by making disciples through evangelism, education, showing compassion, working for justice, and bearing witness to the kingdom of God. The Church is a historical reality that organizes itself in culturally conditioned forms, exists both as local congregations and as a universal body, and also sets apart persons called of God for specific ministries. God calls the Church to live under His rule in anticipation of the consummation at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Church participates in Christ's evangelistic ministry when it preaches the Word and makes disciples. In this lesson, we will study the importance of this task of allowing Christ to bring people to himself through his Church.

The World's Attraction to Christ

The Church is what Christ uses to bring the lost to himself.



There is an old hymn that says, “They’ll know we are Christians by our love.” Jesus prayed so that his Church could draw the world to himself through the unity and communion that his spiritual children would have: *“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we*

Rhonda Slingerland, co-author of this lesson, and her husband Bernie served as missionaries from 2002 until 2018. Rhonda worked as the Regional Finance Coordinator for the Mesoamerica Region. She practiced law for nine years in Colorado, USA before responding full time to the missionary call. Currently, she is the Regional Finance Coordinator for USA/Canada.

Simone Twibell, co-author of this lesson, is an Associate Professor of Christian Ministry at Olivet Nazarene University. She also serves as Prayer Pastor for the Kankakee First Church of the Nazarene where her husband, Andrew, is the Lead Pastor. They have served as volunteer missionaries on the Mesoamerica Region, organizing and leading Jesus Film teams.

are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:20-23).

Whether we talk about the Church around the world, about a denomination of Christian churches, a local church or individuals who form part of a local church, we should pray that our unity and testimony in the community would bring others to Christ. As Christians, we should be aware of the possibility that our testimony might be the only evangelistic message many of the people who surround us will ever hear. If our lives do not reflect the love of Christ, our words are meaningless.

Paul was burdened by the fact that the church in Corinth was divided and did not reflect Christ’s unity. That’s why he said in his letter, “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1 Corinthians 1:10). And later on, he describes them like this, “Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?” (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

Paul’s advice for the church in Ephesus should be considered even today. “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:1-6).

The churches of a certain community got together to work with and minister to those around them to provide for their needs after the devastation of a hurricane. A young man asked, “What led these churches to be the first to respond? Why are doing this?” The testimonies of the churches working together out of love made this man want to know about the message of Jesus Christ.

“We should pray that our unity and testimony in the community attracts people to Jesus.”

What is the responsibility of the church leaders concerning the preparation of each person in the church so they can serve as disciplers?

Preaching the Message

The Church preaches the salvation message so that the world will know the truth.



The preaching of the Word is something that the Church has done since the very beginning of its history. In the book of Acts, we can see that on the day of Pentecost, Peter went out into the streets to preach the Word of God after receiving the power of the Holy Spirit. “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day” (Acts 2:41).

In past centuries, the Church continued the preaching ministry; Paul himself told Timothy, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching” (1 Timothy 4:13). Today, it continues to be important for the Word to be preached starting with church pulpits, proclaiming the truth about sin and salvation so that people can come to understand God’s grace and mercy through Jesus Christ.

The preaching should include a complete message of salvation, presenting the problem of sin, the solution put into place by God through his son Christ Jesus, our response to the gift that has been offered us, and the way in which the Lord responds by forgiving our sins and giving us salvation in Christ. We should make sure that the people to whom the Holy Spirit speaks have the chance to respond. We should guide them in prayer, give them time to pray, and not pressure them in this immensely important moment in their lives. *“Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction”* (2 Timothy 4:2).

A pastor was asked to preach more often about social themes, ethical problems, and about financial blessings that come with being a good Christian steward. After a while of preaching these messages, the pastor started to lose joy in ministry and realized lives were not being changed in the church. From then on, the pastor has gone back to preaching the salvation gospel and once again, the lives of the new people coming to the congregation are being changed.

The Church needs to equip the members of its body to be able to go and individually share the good news. The Church should send people to spread the Word. This is a task for all Christians, not just for pastors in services on Sundays.

That was the custom of the early church. *“So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off”* (Acts 13:3). They followed Christ’s example, who trained his disciples to go from town to town, taking the good news. He trained them, gave them instructions, and then sent them out. *“When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick”* (Luke 9:1-2).

A group of people in a church were told they would be taught how to share the gospel. They attended a class and were given tools so that they could have the confidence to share the gospel. They went out into the streets and started sharing the gospel to everyone who would listen. These members in the church were surprised to see the way the people responded. At the end of the day, they not only felt encouraged and motivated, but they also witnessed people accepting the Lord and entering the Kingdom of God, all because they dared to speak.

Evangelism is the ministry of all the Christians that take part in the church. It is both an individual and a collective call at the same time. This is how the early Christians understood it. *“Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling*

them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:20-21).

Sermon Styles

Next, we will study the most common sermon styles.



There are various sermon styles we can use for evangelism, but the basic and most common are the following four:

1. Expository Sermon: This style is probably the one most used by preachers. In this type of sermon, the preacher selects a biblical text and explains it verse by verse. This is the style that presents the biblical text "exegetically" or in other words, through critical and complete interpretation of the text. The word "exegesis" comes from Greek and it means "to explain." The purpose of this type of sermon is to communicate the meaning of what was written and make it applicable to modern listeners. Illustrations and examples for application are used to transition biblical truths to teachings for present day sermons. This sermon style is also known as a "textual" sermon, since it explains the biblical text and analyzes it, not just to extract information but to extract teachings for daily life.

Exegesis:
"critical explanation or interpretation of a text or portion of a text, esp. of the Bible"
(WordReference.com).

2. Topical or Thematic Sermon: This sermon style, as the title suggests, is about the topic or theme that is being covered. For instance, let's say the sermon is about the grace of God. It would be done like this: instead of starting with a passage, the preacher focuses on a theme and teaches based on various verses throughout the Bible that teach on grace. In this case, we could choose various Scripture references, like Romans 5:15, Ephesians 2:18, and 2 Timothy 1:9. Stories or examples from real life about God's grace at work in someone's life can be used as well. There are many evangelistic themes and even biblical passages that can be preached and used thematically instead of choosing to explain verse by verse.

3. Biographical Sermon: The biographical sermon is a narration about someone's life. It is generally about part of the life of a biblical character; for example, the blind man Jesus healed who then believed in him (John 9), the woman who touched Jesus' cloak (Mark 5), Paul's conversion (Acts 9), etc. This style allows the preacher to be more creative in the presentation: it can be preached in first person, so that the preacher acts like the character and speaks from their point of view. It can be in third person, where the preacher simply tells the story as it was told in the Bible, and the same story will serve as a testimony to the audience of what Christ can do in the lives of those who believe.

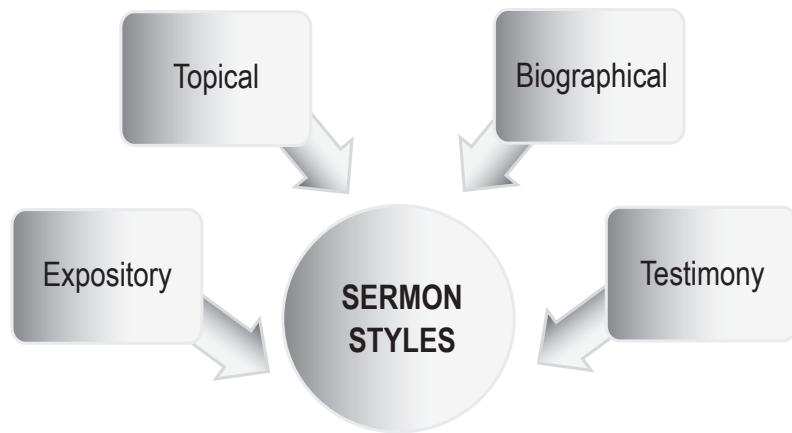
4. Personal Testimony: Finally, we have this sermon style where the preacher simply tells their testimony and includes Bible verses, illustrations, and connecting points with other biblical passages or stories to proclaim the gospel. This style is rarely used alone for preaching, but

Which preaching style most attracts your attention when you listen to a preacher?

“Effective preachers are those who learn to proclaim the Word of God to different audiences and in different styles.”

the evangelist generally uses it as an illustration within an expository or thematic sermon. On the other hand, some preachers have an extreme and impacting testimony, like a witch who converted or someone miraculously healed, that can be used alone. Nothing is more effective than using your own testimony for preaching the gospel.

Each sermon style has advantages and disadvantages. What matters most is that the message corresponds to the audience hearing the message and that it is preached in accordance with the preacher’s own style. No one style is better than another. Effective preachers learn to proclaim the Word of God to different audiences and in different styles as the apostle Paul did. “...To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22b).



The Church Makes Disciples

Next, we will see the Church’s role in discipleship.



The congregation in the early church played an important role in the formation of new believers by training, teaching, and helping the new Christians to mature in the faith so they would be capable of teaching others to be disciples of Jesus. “Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year, Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch” (Acts 11:25-26).

In Guatemala, a woman accepted Christ as her Savior and started to attend a local church. She started to go to a class where she learned more and more about the new faith, about Christ and his Word. After having attended the class for six weeks, she had a good foundation and regularly chose to be alone with the Lord and study the Bible daily. Years have gone by and since then, she

Activities

Time

20'

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. *Is there unity in your church that will attract the community? How can the community see the church's unity?*

2. *What do you commit to do to help your church become more united?*

3. *Do you know how to share the gospel message about sin and salvation? In your own words, write how you would share the gospel with someone.*

4. *How would you explain to an unbeliever what it means to be a disciple of Christ?*

5. *Explain the way you would disciple a new believer.*



Lesson 7

THE PLAN FOR REACHING THE VISION

Objectives

- To define and distinguish between these two terms: vision and plan.
- To understand that the plan is the way to reach the vision.
- To value the importance of having a vision, and then to elaborate a plan for your local ministry.

Main Ideas

- A properly formulated vision will inspire others to be a part of the plan.
- The vision and the plan are tightly linked, but the plan should always lead to making the vision a reality.

Introduction

Bill Hybels is a pastor in a mega church in the United States. He defines the word vision in the following way: “a vision is an image of the future that produces passion!”

Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, offers another perspective and says there are five secrets for success. Let’s take a look at them:

1. Passion: believe in a great product.
2. Purpose: know what you are trying to achieve.
3. People: build a powerful team for executing the vision.
4. Product: it changes everything.
5. Partnerships: powerful partnerships will stimulate the imagination and energize execution.

These perspectives would transform our congregations if we applied them to the local church. Imagine what the people of the Church could do if they knew what God wanted and had the passion to make it happen. The vision would be reached! The vision is carried out through strategic planning. In this lesson, we will study how to formulate a plan for carrying out the vision God has given us.

“Where There is No Vision, the People Perish”

Next, we will see how to obtain a vision.

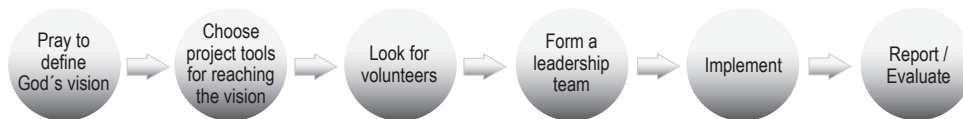


The title of this section comes from Proverbs 29:18a, where the author says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish...” The vision plays an important role in the life of the congregation, and generally it comes from the pastor. However, each of the members should pray that God will show them a specific vision in the ministry he or she works in, and each person should pray for the passion to carry it out. With a vision for the evangelism ministry, the same thing happens: it’s not about just setting up goals of how many people we want to reach or how many Maximum Mission programs we want to do in the district. Having a vision in evangelism means looking beyond the present reality. The same thing can be applied to the vision for each of the ten realities (evangelism is just one of them).

What is the difference between a leader with vision and a leader without vision?

In order to develop a vision, we need to start with prayer. The vision comes from God, and we can only discover it when we talk with our Heavenly Father. After discerning God's will, projects should be chosen that will implement tools for reaching the vision. In other words, the projects are going to be the action plan for reaching the vision. Later, we will need to recruit people to support these efforts, and from this group select willing leaders who show dedication in these areas. After each project or event, it is important to report the number of people who were impacted and what other results were obtained through the work. This same process can be developed with each of the ten realities.

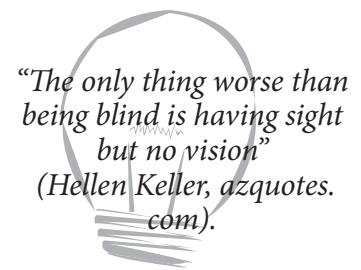
PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING THE VISION



Let's take a look at some examples in the region. The Church of the Nazarene in Cuba was organized into one district, but the leaders had a vision of organizing a new district in 2013. They started to plant new churches all over the island using the Jesus Film. Throughout the course of seven years, they started 725 new house churches. After several years of hard work and investment, they reached their vision.

David Ac, director at the Bible Institute in Coban, Guatemala, had the vision of starting a new district in the Quiche province of Guatemala. How did he do it? He developed a missional zone strategy with the students from the Bible Institute and the cooperation of two districts in the area. Today, they have formed two new districts that were organized in February of 2014; Reverend Ac was the superintendent in both.

As we can see, the vision can be carried out when a strategic plan is designed and when there is interest and dedication. With the Holy Spirit, we can go much further, and we can dream of a better future. God has great things planned for the Church, more than we can even imagine! Just as the Lord says in Isaiah 55:9, *"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."*



Creating the Plan

Next, we will see how to develop a plan for carrying out the vision.



Moises Lucas is the superintendent in the North Peten District in Guatemala. One day, he had a vision of developing missional zones in the southwest zone for expanding the kingdom of God in those areas and reaching souls for Christ. The district developed a plan for planting churches through the Missional Zone Strategy, and in March of 2014, a new district was organized. In another district in that country, Reverend Daniel Solis,

This does not mean that we will not reach the vision, but just that the goals need adjustment or maybe the calendar needs adjusting. Once the adjustments have been made and the goals revised, the final stage will be...

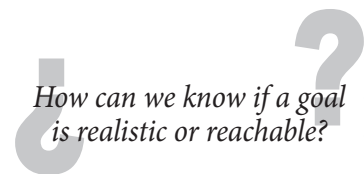
5. Write down the steps for reaching the goals

This is the most detailed step for creating a plan, because it shows us exactly what we need to do. It is important to instruct each person that will be visiting the homes to follow the same strategy. For instance, the plan could be something like this:

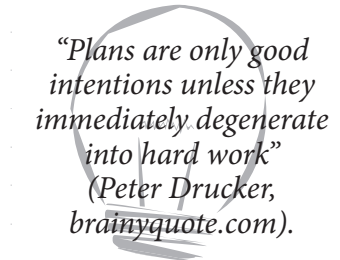
- Visit the families in the community after praying. Go to the first house and talk with whoever comes to the door.
- Take a pencil and paper for taking notes about the visit. For instance: address, person's name, their interest in the church, etc.
- Present yourselves and explain why you are visiting.
- Once contact is made, if there is interest, use the EvangeCube or a brochure from the church for presenting the gospel, or ask if there are any specific needs in the family so that the church can be praying.
- For the next visit, remember to ask how God responded to the situation.
- Once the initial contact has been established, go to another house.
- When interest is shown or a decision for Christ is made, give immediate follow-up to the new Christian in discipleship in the local church.

Another strategy that can be used when visiting homes is to offer something special like school supplies or a food package, etc. in accordance to the needs. Uniting compassionate ministries with evangelism is very effective.

After designing the steps, we need to pray asking God to bless the strategy and give much fruit. Once the plan has been formulated, it is time to bring the vision to life! Each one of us can be collaborators in the ministry, and it is time to start to carry out what God has shown us we need to do.



How can we know if a goal is realistic or reachable?



WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Any solid vision begins with prayer. Involve others and form a team of key leaders for the implementation of the plan. It is necessary to plan the goals, the strategy, and the calendar with great anticipation. This helps to communicate the vision, so we can inspire and involve others to make it a reality.

Activities

Time

20'

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. *Imagine that your local church needs to improve its leadership development. What are some steps that can be taken to be able to optimize this ministry in the community of the church?*
2. *Formulate a vision for your local church for leadership development by answering the following questions:*
 - a. *What projects will you use?*
 - b. *How many events will there be?*
 - c. *Who will get involved?*
 - d. *How many people will be impacted?*
 - e. *What results do you hope for?*
3. *For practice, design an action plan for a congregation that is going to plant a church in a new city or community where there is no Church of the Nazarene. Keeping the ten realities of a healthy church in mind, complete the following plan by responding to these questions:*

The 10 Realities	Who will do it?	How will it be done?	Where will it be done?	When will it happen?
Active Compassion				
Leadership Training				
Fruitful Ministries				
Passionate Spirituality				
Functional Structures				
Inspired Worship Services				
Effective Discipleship Groups				
Loving and Caring Companionship				
Practical and Passionate Evangelism				
Sincere and Vibrant Prayer				



Lesson 8

**WHAT CHANGES DOES GOD
NEED TO MAKE IN OUR CHURCH?**

Objectives

- To understand that growth implies change.
- To recognize that fear of change impedes full trust in God.
- To learn to defeat resistance to change that impedes obedience to God.

Main Ideas

- The Lord can give us the courage to defeat our fears and make necessary changes in the church.
- Change is not easy because it makes us feel uncomfortable and requires effort, but when it is God's will, it is something necessary and is a chance to grow.

Introduction

Change is difficult for everyone. The laws of physics tell us that things stay in a state of rest until the moment a force provokes a change. The same thing happens with people, and the same thing happens in the church. When we face change, many of us opt to keep things the same as they have always been. However, even though change is definitely difficult, it also becomes something essential for creating new opportunities in life. Imagine if someone had not wanted to invent the lightbulb so that we could have electric light! We can't imagine our lives today without electricity. Therefore, change is good.

People change throughout their lives. Our babies grow and change before our very eyes as they go through different stages in their lives, and as observers, we feel like time is flying by. If we had the power to make our sons and daughters be kids all their lives, we would stunt their growth, and we would be hurting more than helping them. Truly, any organism that doesn't develop, dies.

Has your church been challenged to grow? The human reaction is to resist and maybe even fear change. But it is necessary to look beyond where we are now in order to be able to see where we could be, if we dare to change with the Holy Spirit's leading.

The Courage to Change

Let's retrain our capacity to change...



Joshua was terrified when the people's leader, Moses, who had been face to face with God, died and left him in charge of the Israelites. This was a weight he could not imagine taking on. How could he manage to lead a group of people so large, not to mention the need to conquer a new land? How could he take Moses' place? While he was trying to face the fears of things to come, God spoke to him gently and encouraged him saying, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be

discouraged. Because the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9). Many of us know the end of this story: Joshua led the people of Israel in conquest of the Promised Land. What would have happened if Joshua (or the leaders of the people) had resisted the change because of fear? It would have meant they did not trust God.

When fear makes us resist and not obey God’s voice, when it makes us reject the change God is directing us to make, it shows that we do not have enough faith in our God who is good, all-powerful, and faithful to fulfill his promises. When we let our fear be greater than our faith, we are allowing our thoughts to convince us that we are wiser than God and that we know the better path, which is why we justify our resistance to change that God has for us. Proverbs 3:5-7 says that we need to trust God with all of our hearts and not trust in our own understanding. He will prepare our paths if we submit and obey him. He will give us the courage we need to keep going in his power. All that is left is for us to ask him.

A local church was being challenged to make some changes that would obligate them to get out of their four walls. Some members were scared of the dangers in the neighborhood. Others were scared of feeling uncomfortable. Others were scared of the way it would affect their routines. There were some new people coming to the Lord, and some young couples started attending the church. They started to meet on Sundays for an afternoon dinner and little by little, the majority of the congregation began to see it as a vital ministry that was growing exuberantly. God gave them the courage to take a leap of faith.

The Church is the Lord’s

Jesus promised to edify his church, not our church.



One thing we have to remember each time we face a change is that the Church belongs to God not us. Matthew 16:13-20 teaches us that Jesus is the foundation, the purpose, the rock on which the Church is edified.

A pastor told his leaders that God was moving the church in a new direction. The leaders nodded their heads and smiled. They even said “Amen!” The next Sunday, a family came to visit the church, but when they tried to sit up front, they were told that the seats were reserved for the Sunday School superintendent and that they couldn’t sit there.

There are some occasions where we are used to a certain routine to the point where we get defensive of any change. This tends to happen in the church when a small group of the congregation does the majority of the work and sustains the ministries financially. We thank God for these people who maintain the building and keep the doors of the church open, but we also recognize that the temptation exists of feeling like we own the church. This is not true; the church belongs to God. The problems it faces and the decisions about its future belong to God, and our responsibility is to seek his will, his direction, and to obey him as he guides us.

When we let our fear be greater than our faith, we are allowing our thoughts to convince us that we are wiser than God and that we know the better path, which is why we justify our resistance to the change that God has for us.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

If we resist God's directing us to a change, this is disobedience! This resistance is sinful in the sense that it is in opposition to God's will for our lives and for the church. Nehemiah 9:29 warns us about this: "You warned them in order to turn them back to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, of which you said, 'The person who obeys them will live by them.' Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen." We should pray asking for strength and courage to do what the Lord asks of us!

Change is an Opportunity

When God leads us to make a change, it is always for our good.



In your opinion, why are people so afraid of change?

Remember when you accepted Christ for the first time? This brought big changes to your life. But now you can look back and realize that it was the best change you could have hoped for, and that God was responsible for this change. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

We can trust in God, because he is good. We can also trust in his motives because they are good, too. He knows all of the opportunities, all the possibilities, all the questions, and all the difficulties.

What illustration or story could you use to teach the people of your church about the benefits of accepting and being a part of the changes?

There is a story about a very large and powerful warship that traveled through the Mancha Canal on a stormy night. The helmsman saw a light ahead of them and decided to try to communicate with the little boat shining the light, saying, "Emergency! Move your boat 15 degrees to the east to avoid getting hit!" Immediately, he received an answer, "Emergency! Move your boat 15 degrees to the west to avoid getting hit!" The helmsman was bothered by this response, answering with a commanding voice, "This is the USS Constitution—a war vessel of many tons with the most advanced military weapons. Move your boat 15 degrees to the east to avoid collision." The answer was fast and brief, "This is a simple lighthouse, but if you don't move your boat 15 degrees to the west immediately, you will hit hard ground." How many times do we think we know the best solution to something when in reality God is the only one who can see the entire picture and knows what is best for us and his church?

Opening Our Minds

Next, we will briefly see how we can be more flexible.



As mentioned at the beginning of this lesson, every natural change is difficult for people, because we are creatures of habit and so it is difficult for us to break routine. However, let's look at some ways we can be more flexible to change, especially in the church, when we see God directing us to new things:

Activities

Time

20'

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. *Explain in your own words the importance of knowing that the Church belongs to God.*

2. *Describe a change you think God would like to see occur in your local church.*

3. *Do you think this change would make you feel uncomfortable or scared? In what way?*

4. *What would you do to defeat the resistance to change in the members of the congregation?*

Final Evaluation

Time



15'

COURSE: KEEPING THE FOCUS

Name of Student: _____
Church or Study Center: _____
District: _____
Instructor: _____
Date of this evaluation: _____

1. *What is the key to keeping the church focused on the priority of evangelism?*

2. *Mention three of the ten characteristics of a healthy church and give an example of how to strengthen these areas.*

3. *How did this course help you to have a clearer vision of the will of God for your local ministry? Mention one example.*

4. *What have you learned in the practical ministry component of this course?*

5. *In your opinion, how could this course be improved?*

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