

Teaching Purpose Over Process

by Brad Powell



*“I made it clear that we must always **love the value** over the **method**.”*

strategy to fulfill God’s purpose. Because of the leadership scars I have from such fights, I am now committed to keeping our people at NorthRidge embracing God’s eternal principles rather than our temporary practices.

For example, I began a ministry called Pastor’s Prayer Partners more than 15 years ago. It grew out of a season of personal brokenness. I had realized that I was acting and leading as if I could build the church. Of course, I was failing miserably. As a result, I wanted to make sure that both the church and I remained firmly aware of the truth that only God can build His Church. My personal prayer partner and I recruited more than 100 people, trained leaders, and scheduled a team to be praying on campus during every weekend service. I met with each team before the services to encourage and provide direction for the prayer time. People began growing in their ability and belief in the power of prayer. People started coming to faith and experiencing profound spiritual impact in our church services. Simply, God was fulfilling His promise to build His Church as we began honoring Him through prayer. It was a ministry that changed those involved, our church and me.

However, over the years, we found the strategy and structure of this ministry were losing their effectiveness in achieving the original purpose. Though our church grew by thousands, the Prayer Partners ministry stayed relatively constant in size. The average age of the ministry became signifi-

Q: As we head into another new year, I’m discouraged already. The people in our church love and are committed to the way we’ve been doing ministry, even though we haven’t been fulfilling the Great Commission for years. What should we do?

A: You’re not alone. In fact, when not intentionally addressed, this happens in every church, regardless of size or past effectiveness. When you face the problem head-on, your church can return to the right focus.

A Shift in Priorities

Here’s what happens. Congregants embrace God’s purpose and values for the Church. To fulfill them, they develop organizational strategies and structures. In the beginning, everyone knows that these man-made methods are only important if they help to achieve the church’s God-given purpose and values. However, as time goes by, a shift occurs. People fight with conviction to preserve the structures and strategies even if they no longer fulfill the purpose. They sincerely believe that they’re honoring

God by fighting against any changes to the way they’ve been doing ministry. In reality, they’re dishonoring God and preventing His purpose from being achieved.

Though I didn’t understand it at the time, this was the problem when I first came to NorthRidge. They had been in decline for more than three decades and had become ineffective at reaching new people for Christ, but they were committed to their way of doing things. They considered it God’s way to do ministry, and they were willing to fight to protect God’s way. They fought me over every change. I had people telling me that it was a sin for us not to use hymn books in our services. Though they couldn’t show me where it was in God’s Word, they believed it to be true. They felt the same about all of their long-used and much-loved strategies, no matter how ineffective they had become.

Redirection for the Church

When a leader successfully helps people embrace the right values, he or she will never have to fight people over a change of

cantly older than the average age of our congregation. People wrongly believed that we were a praying church because we had the Prayer Partners ministry. And finally, as our church grew, the proximity it gave people to me seemed to become more significant than the purpose of praying itself.

The Purpose in the Focus

To better engage the purpose and value of prayer today, we needed to discontinue the ministry that had accomplished that same objective yesterday. If I was going to lead them to continue embracing the value of prayer over the strategy we had employed, I had to address it head-on. I walked them through the Bible and showed them how God's work had always been accomplished the same way—by dependence on His power through prayer. However, the strategy employed was almost always different. One time Moses stood on a mountain and held out his staff, while another time he stood on a mountain and held up his arms. I made it clear that we must always love the value over the method. I then introduced our new strategy. Rather than making Prayer Partners something that happened in a particular ministry while on campus, we were going to unleash the value of prayer into all of our small groups.

Though some were disappointed, the ultimate goal was accomplished—leading our people to embrace God's eternal purpose and values rather than our temporary strategy and structures. Likewise, I believe you will be amazed at how easy it is to change what you do when your people are embracing the right values.



The senior pastor of NorthRidge Church in Plymouth, Mich., Brad Powell consults with church leaders to help them lead their churches through transition. Brad has authored Change Your Church for Good (Nelson). NorthRidge Church is No. 15 on The Outreach 100 list of Largest Churches in America. Got an opinion on this column? E-mail: TellUs@OutreachMagazine.com.



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