



New Ideas for Growing Churches

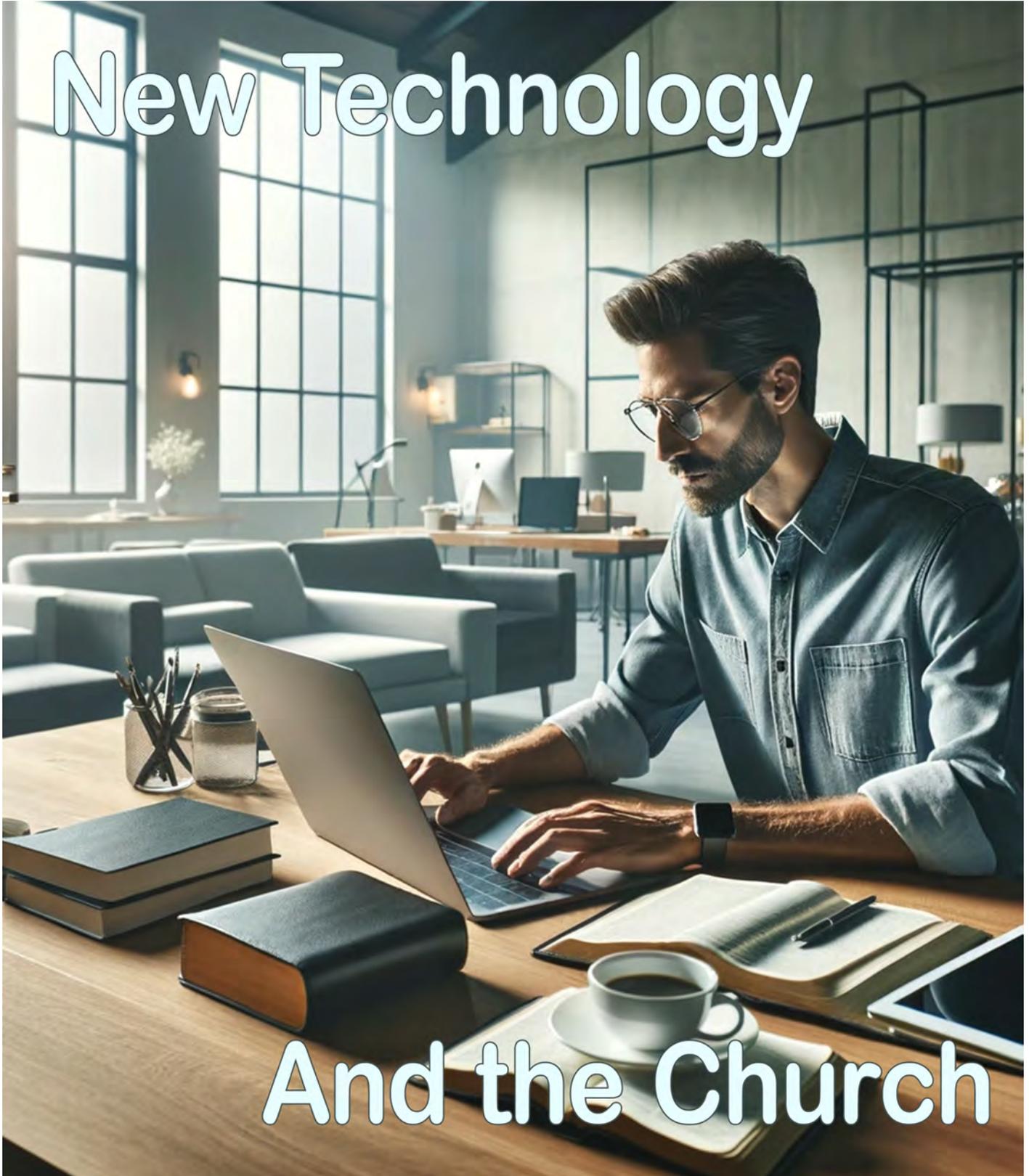
NETResults

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Since 1980

New Technology



And the Church

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Reflections

By Bill Tenny-Brittian

THINGS I'VE LEARNED ON THE WAY TO REVITALIZATION

MOST OF MY forty-plus years of professional ministry have been spent either starting new churches or turning around existing churches. To be fair, it's a lot easier to start from scratch, and if you have a choice, church planting is my best advice for those idealists who believe, as I do, that the local church is the best hope for the gospel. Church planting is still hard work, but it's a walk in the park compared to church revitalization.

If you're a regular reader of *Net Results*, you've already been exposed to the reality that there is no ministry more difficult than turning a church around and that there is no ministry that is more likely to damage your professional career. Revitalizers put their career and personal lives at risk whenever they put their hand on the turn-around plow, but for some of us, there is no higher or more noble calling. I work with church turnarounds as a practitioner, consultant, and coach because I have no choice. It's not a calling I would wish on anyone, but it's a calling I wish was visited upon more strong-willed and savvy leaders. With over 60 percent of US churches in some state of decline, our Lord knows we need more laborers in this particular field.

Having said that, let me share a couple of things I've learned on my way to church revitalization.

1. John Maxwell was right – everything really *does* rise and fall on leadership. If you're the lead pastor of a turnaround church, if things aren't progressing, the best place to discern where the problem is is in the reflection of your bathroom mirror.

It's easy to blame the culture, limited resources, and either the congregation as a whole or the bullies in the congregation. But as the church's out-front leader, you are the chief influencer – and if you're not, then you're either in the wrong job or in the wrong place (and a key to effective leadership is having the discernment to recognize the potential in a situation and the courage to make the hard call: fight, flight, or change careers).

The most important tool a leader has at their disposal is the ability to cast a compelling vision. It turns out that's one of the key differences between successful church revi-



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talizers and those who try and fail. I'm not talking about just the overarching vision – although that's critical. However, effective and successful leaders must have the ability to cast visions for the smaller steps that are between the current circumstances and vision fulfillment. You've got to be able to cast a vision to buy the new sound system, to change the vocabulary of the bulletin, to eliminate your office hours, and to get support for your spending *no* time doing hospital visitation in favor of spending significant time with Chamber of Commerce or at the Jr. College's student center. I've been known to say that if a leader can't cast a vision to hire a coach, they won't be able to cast a vision inspiring enough to revitalize their church.

2. Culture really does eat strategic plans for breakfast *and* lunch. Although no one has been able to find the direct quote, Peter Drucker gets credit for coining the phrase. Business has been taking his axiom seriously for years, and there's plenty of research and anecdotal evidence to prove the point. The statement's no less true in the church—in fact, it could have been written about the church.

With few exceptions, I've never known a pastor who's taken the helm of a church with the intention of crashing it on the rocks. Instead, virtually every pastor has developed strategies and plans designed to grow their church by serving and reaching people in the community. I currently serve a church that's experienced a forty-year decline. During those forty years, there have been five pastors who have tried to turn the ship around. Each one of them experienced a short season of success followed by an escalating decline. Of these five church leaders, each one came in with their own unique strategies ... and each one failed. It would be easy to point at their strategies and conclude that each of them was clueless about how to grow a church, but each of them was able to bring about short-term growth. In other words, their strategies had merit. So, why did the church fall back into decline each time?

The church's culture literally ate its strategies for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. In other words, the leaders were able to attract new people, at least for a time. However, the church's culture was problematic enough that it couldn't retain them long-term.

Because your church's culture will eat your strategies, successful revitalizers understand that job one isn't necessarily church growth. A revitalizer's most critical job is to

revitalize the church's culture from one of stagnation and decline to one of positivity, welcome, unity, and connectedness.

3. There's More Opposition than You Think. Don't get me wrong, I don't think search committees *mean* to lie or to shade the truth, but sometimes it seems like they just can't help it. Every search committee I've ever spoken to has assured me that their church really *does* want to grow, and they're willing to make the changes necessary to grow. I believe in my heart-of-hearts that they really believe that too, but what they don't seem to understand is that waiting in the wings of the church is a loosely organized group of people who will do nearly anything to ensure that the necessary changes won't make it out of the starting gate.

I know this sounds pretty jaded, but here's the reality. After coaching, consulting, training, and actively participating in turnaround attempts from coast to coast, I find that the vast majority of church pastors are unprepared to face the level of opposition they encounter in their turnaround work.

When I teach Pastoral Leadership at Phillips Seminary, there's always pushback from my students when I introduce them to the concept of building alliances in order to ensure their agenda gets accepted and implemented. It seems underhanded or disingenuous to intentionally stack the deck to ensure the right decision gets made. But remember, it was Jesus who told his disciples to be as shrewd as snakes (Matthew 10:16) and to use money to make friends (Luke 16:9). If you're going to lead a turnaround successfully, you're going to need to have a cadre of folks you can count on to move your strategies forward and who will have your back when the opposition arises – and it *will* arise. When it's time to challenge the status quo, the opposition will organize. Make sure you have too.

4. Turnaround will take longer than you think. A church that's been in decline for decades isn't going to turnaround by the end of eighteen months. This is one of the reasons so few churches survive a serious turnaround effort – they don't have the resources to hang on long enough to change their culture *and* implement a church growth strategic plan.

When I speak with pastors who want to commit to turning a church around, they seem to think that they can whip the church into shape in three to five years. The re-

ality is that it nearly always takes that long just to lay the groundwork. You've got to reset the mission and vision; discern the values; rotate bullies, controllers, and antagonists out of leadership; wrest control of the day-to-day decisions from the fists of the board; launch a church member discipling process; connect with the community; and initiate the inklings of culture change – all that *before* any church growth strategy has a prayer of a chance.

Generally, building a foundation you can build on takes three to five years. It takes another two to five years to implement a church growth strategy. I suspect this is why Aubrey Malphurs used to say to his church planting classes that no one was young enough to successfully turn a

church around. If you're seriously planning on implementing a complete revitalization, plan on no fewer than seven years, and you might as well figure out how long it will take to be there for twelve or so because it's going to take longer than you think.

If you're still committed to revitalization ministry after all that, you're probably crazy enough to pull it off. As you travel the road, let me know how it's going ... I've always found it good to travel in packs.

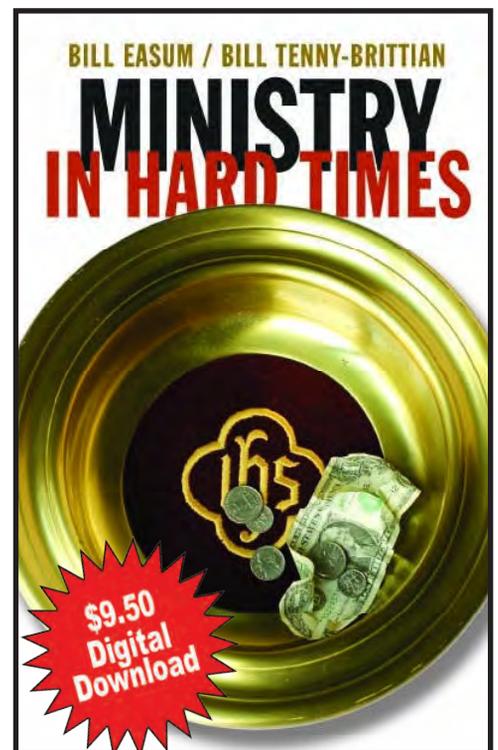
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- Leadership in a Wildcard World
- It's a Waste of Time if ...



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TOOLS OF THE TRADE

By Andy Romstad

BACK IN THE early 1900s, an old usher in a Norwegian Lutheran country church fussed about their new pastor, who was fresh out of the seminary. “The sermons are too short!” he said. (His complaint: The ushers no longer had time to finish smoking their cigars outside during the sermon.)

“Worse yet,” he said, “when you arrive at church, the pastor wants us to pass out little sheets of paper with all the names and numbers on it, sort of like a bus schedule.” Today, we call that little sheet of paper a “bulletin.”

Yesterday’s innovations are today’s relics.

Fast-forward seventy-five years. In the 1980s, archaically slow modems connected via your landline phone to a hub called LutherLink, part of Ecunet, an electronic religious bulletin board allowing pastors to “post” comments about whatever the ministry topic of the day happened to be. Getting a second dedicated landline for modem use became the rage.

My father, a pastor, would print LutherLink posts using his dot-matrix printer (using paper with perforated tearable edges with sprocket holes mounted onto the printer’s tractor feed) so that he wouldn’t have to read posts online.

Around this time, I remember reading a pastor’s Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) thesis about what would later be called the Internet. He argued that the future of ministry connections via these modems (including “LutherLink”) would change everything. “Dubious at best!” I thought. I found “LutherLink” intriguing, distracting, and often argumentative. (And I wasn’t even in the seminary yet.)

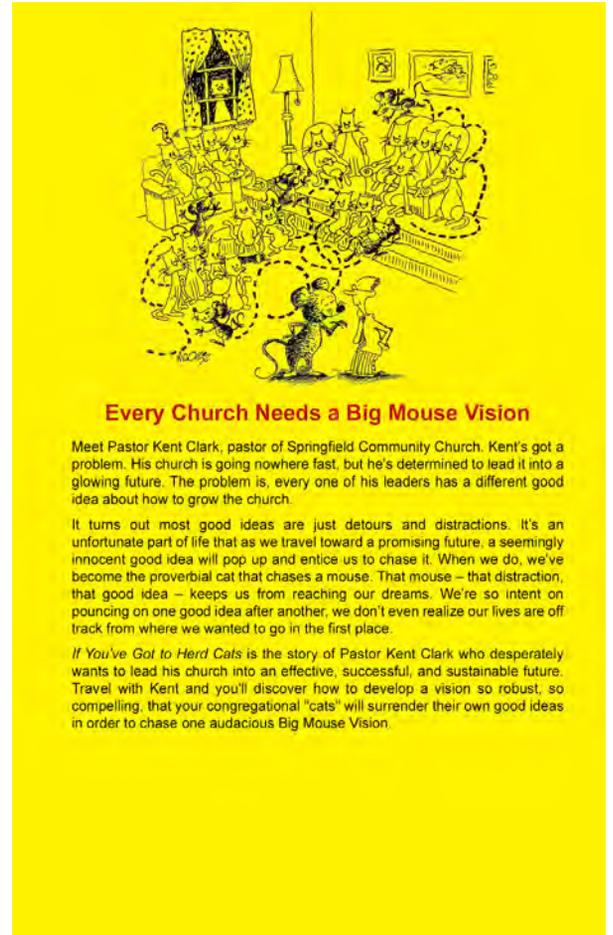
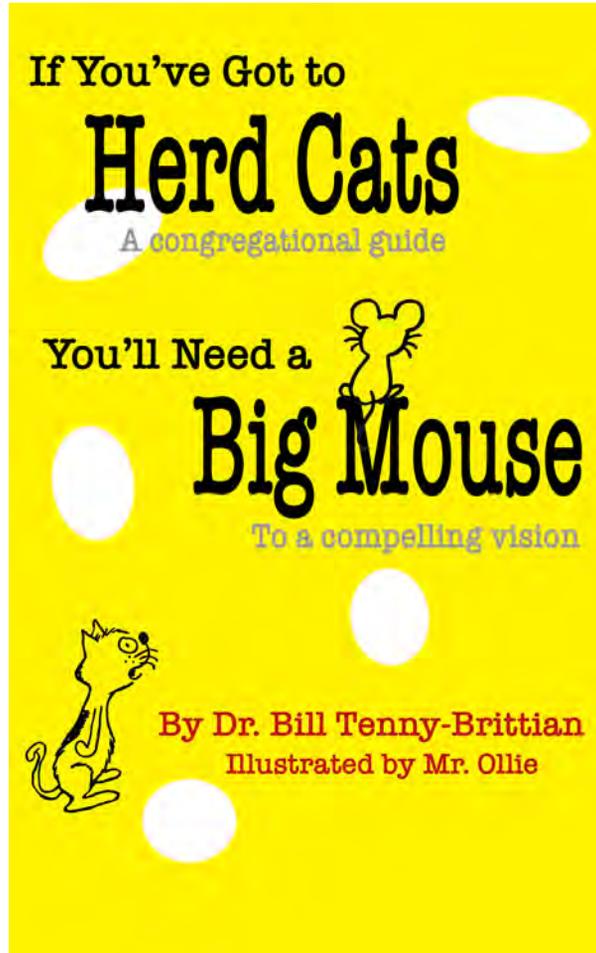
Nowadays, “LutherLink” is long gone. Our telephone lines aren’t busy due to modems. We don’t even have one landline, much less two landlines. If anything, the D. Min. thesis underestimated the radical changes that would occur as technology reshaped ministry. No one could have known.

Today, the debate is this: Tell me again why you need paper “bulletins”?



Andy Romstad has served as Sr. Pastor, Cambridge Lutheran Church, Cambridge, Minnesota since 2005. (Avg. weekly worship: 530.) He has also served as an ELCA Mission Developer and Associate Pastor in urban, suburban and exurban settings. In addition to an M.Div. from Luther Seminary ('94), he has a Masters in Organizational Management.

Is Your Church's Vision Big Enough to Captivate Your Congregation?

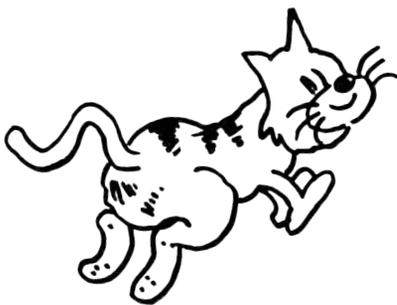


Every Church Needs a Big Mouse Vision

Meet Pastor Kent Clark, pastor of Springfield Community Church. Kent's got a problem. His church is going nowhere fast, but he's determined to lead it into a glowing future. The problem is, every one of his leaders has a different good idea about how to grow the church.

It turns out most good ideas are just detours and distractions. It's an unfortunate part of life that as we travel toward a promising future, a seemingly innocent good idea will pop up and entice us to chase it. When we do, we've become the proverbial cat that chases a mouse. That mouse – that distraction, that good idea – keeps us from reaching our dreams. We're so intent on pouncing on one good idea after another, we don't even realize our lives are off track from where we wanted to go in the first place.

If You've Got to Herd Cats is the story of Pastor Kent Clark who desperately wants to lead his church into an effective, successful, and sustainable future. Travel with Kent and you'll discover how to develop a vision so robust, so compelling, that your congregational "cats" will surrender their own good ideas in order to chase one audacious Big Mouse Vision.



Available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Paper is mostly for flat-earth society members who've rejected computers or traditionalists who like the little sheets of paper reminiscent of old bus schedules.

Our church used to have a full-time secretary whose primary job was producing paper bulletins, paper newsletters, handouts, inserts, scheduling forms, etc. Fresh electronic "clip art" was exciting. Oddly, we no longer have a secretary, focusing those funds on other staff positions. The remaining paper functions are outsourced or handled by other staff members.

Nowadays, at our two services in two different rooms, we need eight tech volunteers a Sunday. It is difficult to be without even one role covered.

We've moved from dependence on paper to dependence on technological know-how. I'm unsure if that is better or not.

Finding the Best Tech

Like artisans seeking the perfect tools, pastors scour websites, social media boards, and publications and talk to other pastors to figure out what tech to use. What we

want to know: "What helps? What is easy? What costs the least? What is the least hassle?"

Pastors with a tech "bent" – there are always a few – love to try all the new tools of the trade. Figure out who those people are. Ask them questions. They love to be the "expert." I've seen this for 30 years, but I've been told it's an age-old reality.

Early & Late Adopter Dynamics

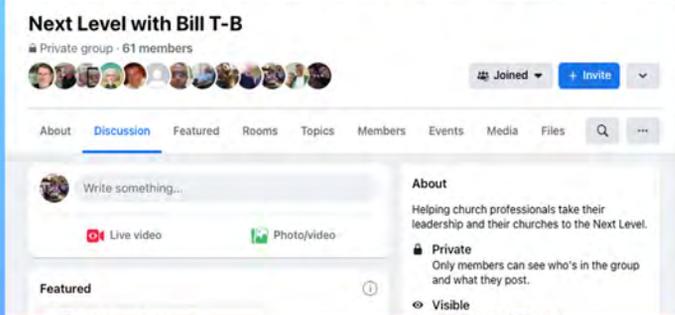
I remember when screens and LCD projectors were "new." They were expensive, low quality, and clumsy to use. You never knew when they'd break down. (Our first one wouldn't function, of all days, on "Fall Kickoff Sunday!" Drat!) It turned out to be a minor error discovered after worship.) We used a backup overhead projector.

Regarding projection, middle and late-adopter pastors would comment, "My people prefer the hymnal. They like to have the notes." (No, the truth is they've probably never tried screens.)

I remember a tech leader in the mid-1990s complaining when Willow Creek in Chicago's suburbs switched from

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- Codify Your Congregation's Behaviors
- Set Your Priorities

fb.com/groups/next.level.with.billtb

35mm slide projectors to LCD video projectors. It's amazing that at Willow World, the church leader in all innovations, someone was mourning the loss of slides!

Back in 2004, we put screens in the worship space for our traditional worship service. We expected a backlash that never came. Finally, one day, a woman named Marian, almost 90, told me how much she loved the screen: "I can actually see the words," she said. All her elderly friends agreed. They couldn't hold their hymnals still (shakes) nor see the words in the hymnal. One of them used to put magnifying lenses over her glasses. Older folks loved the tech!

Interesting.

Good Tools Make a Difference

Curious, I went searching for people who didn't like the screens. ("I know they're out there.") They were all in the age range of 45–60. Someone explained it like this: "People aged 45–60 just want stability. Meanwhile, people who are retired? They've seen so much change, they've quit caring."

That observation has been helpful to me ever since. Such rules are never absolute, but they help us understand how the bell curve operates in the church.

Resistance to technology is nearly always from our insiders. It is nearly always a preference. When you change methods, you're perceived as messing with someone's experience of the holy. (This causes reactions akin to that of a caged tiger.) Change anyway. It's a necessary art.

Nowadays, I've found that I don't even like change, being in that age group. But over the years, we've had to adapt and find the technology that helps our staff the most.

What do we like? Here is our current list: Gmail, Google Docs, Macbooks, Breeze, ProPresenter, TeamUp, YouTube, Zoom, Facebook, and Worship Channels.

Meanwhile, we canceled our radio broadcast years ago, and the local public access Cable TV never fixed their broken equipment, forcing us off the air. (Interesting.)

My Preferred Tools

Google Docs

Free is good. Switching over from Microsoft Word took time. Now, I can't even compare the two because I don't even pay attention to what Word offers. When Word

went to a subscription model, the decision got easy. Free Google Docs it is.

What I love best about Google Docs is that I no longer have to carry computers with documents around. Wherever I go, I can access my work.

MacBook Air

The opposite of "free" is a Mac product. I've used Macs since the late 1980s. There was a decade in there somewhere that I went over to the dark side (PCs) for cost reasons. But as soon as I could, I went back. Why? It is pure preference. PC's felt clunky. Loud keyboards (which odd people like), for starters. Nowadays, this decision is basically Coke or Pepsi.

I'll admit. There are aspects of Macs that are far from user-friendly. Apple Music felt nearly impossible to me, as did other programs. That said, the beauty is that with apps in the cloud, I can use whatever software I want.

Breeze Church Management

We've explored and tried most of the database programs. Here is why we use Breeze. It is designed for a church our size. Fellowship One was initially designed for very large churches (and it felt odd when we checked it out). ACS felt expensive for us (a dozen years ago). We explored others like Roll Call or Servant Keeper. We switched to CCB (Church Community Builder) for a while. Then we went to Breeze for the following reasons: Cost, ease of use, and cloud-friendliness.

Full disclosure: We recently threatened to quit because response time (from the cloud) temporarily became slow. We were told it was due to the integration of Tithe-ly (which we do not use) into their system. Oh, and I love having the Breeze app on my phone.

ProPresenter

We use Macs for projection. ProPresenter is the best option. Years ago, when we tried MediaShout for Mac, we often crashed. (It might be better now.) There are other options. It is interesting to me how no one uses PowerPoint, the first-mover, in worship projection.

Once you get your team adjusted to a projection software, you don't want to change. We have very part-time tech help for worship. And a lot of volunteers. ProPresenter has proven learnable and workable.

YouTube

Our older demographics watch online worship on Facebook. Our younger demographics watch on YouTube. Facebook online, every few months, would change codes or something that caused our feed not to work that morning until someone reset it. That has become frustrating enough that we will stop using it for online worship and focus strictly on YouTube. The older demographic mostly moved over with us.

Worship Channels

However, Worship Channels make it easy and cost-effective for those who wish to broadcast on multiple channels simultaneously. They also set up a free Church Online hosting site for you (from Life.Church). I wanted that for years. But by the time we got to it, I learned that everyone simply used the social media platforms they were already familiar with. Worship Channels also help you troubleshoot issues in real-time. It was only a few times a year, but in the moment, the urgency made this worth every dollar when using Facebook and YouTube simultaneously was a “have to” for us.

Zoom

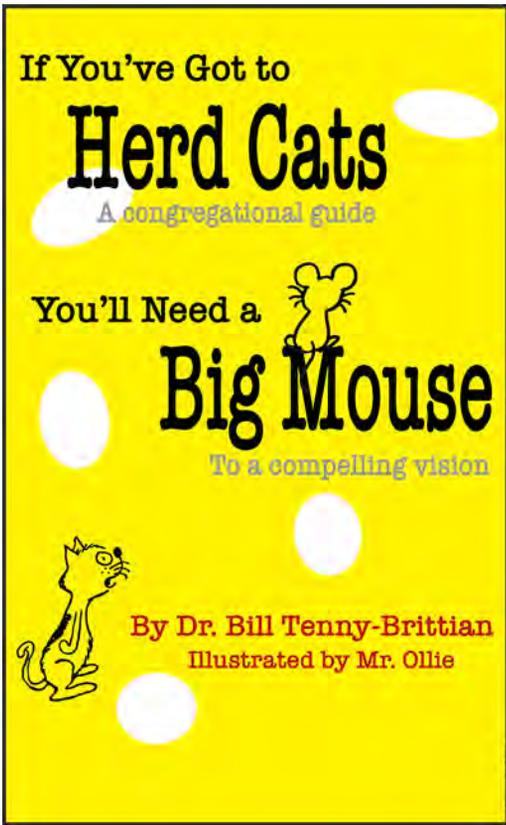
During the pandemic, everyone was trying something different for live meeting software. Compared to Zoom, the other apps felt clunky. When I record my weekly podcast, my co-podcaster captures the audio of our Zoom meeting, and away we go using the podcasting host, which is ...

BuzzSprout

Why do we host on BuzzSprout? I don't know. I do know that neither my co-host nor I are techies, and this one seems to do the trick just fine. People can access podcasts from the host site or their favorite podcast app.

Facebook & Instagram

Hating Facebook is common. (Maybe even justified?) But that is where our social media users (old people) are—along with 3 billion of their closest friends. We've begun linking our FB posts to Instagram posts, which (mostly) works. (We've also found using Meta Business Suite to schedule posts clunky.) We run boosted ads for major holidays, posts on upcoming sermon series, and pictures



If You've Got to Herd Cats
A congregational guide

You'll Need a **Big Mouse**
To a compelling vision

By **Dr. Bill Tenny-Brittian**
Illustrated by **Mr. Ollie**

**Without a big ol' vision
Revitalization will never
become reality**

If You've Got to Herd Cats is the story of Pastor Kent Clark who desperately wants to lead his church into an effective, successful, and sustainable future. Travel with Kent and you'll discover how to develop a vision so robust, so compelling, that your congregational "cats" will surrender their own good ideas in order to chase one audacious Big Mouse Vision.

Available at Amazon.com

of ministry. Ministry pictures seem to be the most popular.

Our main goal: Let's tell the world about all the great things going on at our church (even if only a tiny slice sees it). They'll talk. And the more they talk, the more people Facebook serves the post to. It's a never-ending circle called "going viral."

I also use Facebook for personal posts. People are curious and interested in what happens in the pastor's life and family. For those who want to know about me, it works amazingly well.

I hear all the time about younger demographics connecting elsewhere. (We're not doing TikTok.) I'll leave that to others. There is only so much you can do.

Gmail

Last but not least, we cut costs years ago and switched to Gmail. I have the same email address I had back in the early 2000s, and I don't mind that one bit. For a slice of the old days, all I need to do is search my Gmail. It is all still there.

Filmstrip Projectors

I'm unsure how much historical value one of the old modems has. It is sad to think about how excited we were for the technology that we mock today.

I just searched for Ecunet. Ecunet.org, the website created to remember this early online adopter, is now a dead link. Nobody bothers with it anymore. The last substantive post about it on Facebook was from 2011, about RSS (Real Simple Syndication), which is used to gather posts from various formats. Posts more recent were merely obituaries of Ecunet pioneers.

Perhaps the same will be true of us someday. What we excitedly helped pioneer will be forgotten. We know this: Only the gospel will survive.

Sometimes, it is fun to drag out the old tech. It is a good reminder of all the effort we once put into doing tasks we take for granted today. I found an old film strip projector, at least forty years old, about six years ago. I put it on the conference table in my colleague's office. "This was once the latest in tech!" we'd tell people. "We're bringing it back!"

He left it on the table. It weighed at least twenty pounds and basically served as a paperweight.

Perhaps we could say this to and about all the shiny new tech hardware we get excited about: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

It is Lent, after all. And it's true.

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FROM A NON-TECHY PASTOR

By John Patterson

I'M SIXTY-SEVEN AND retired after forty-one years of being a Pastor. When I began in the ministries, we used typewriters and duplicating machines to create bulletins, newsletters, and letters sent via the United States Postal Service. We used an overhead projector if we wanted something up on a screen during a worship service. If we wanted people outside the church to hear the worship services, we purchased radio time, which was expensive. If we wanted people to see our church services, we bought T.V. time, which is even more costly. We didn't have a radio or TV presence. The list of the technologies that have changed since my first years in ministry is too long to list here, but one thing I can say, looking back, is that often, the churches where I served were too late to some of the technologies that could have helped us in our primary mission; bringing the Good News of Jesus to more people.

So I'm probably not the best person to advise you on the best tech or how to use it. However, having said that, I do have some advice for those of you who might be a little or a lot like me. You're trying to keep up with all the new tech toys and how to use them to the best advantage in ministry.

First, admit what you don't know. I've known too many pastors (and yes, I've succumbed to the temptation from time to time) who feel they need to be the experts on all subjects. If you don't know, admit that you don't know. Yes, learn all you can, but remember that you have more

important things to do than be the expert in all new technology. Find someone (there probably is someone in your church) who understands that technology (whatever that tech is) or is willing to take the time to learn about it.

Second, empower the people that you find to lead the movement into that new technology. When we needed to replace the sound system at Gainesville Church (1 year after the building was built because the Architect overrode the Sound Engineer that HE hired and installed a system that didn't work), we had a person in the church who had a great deal of knowledge of live sound. We empowered him to make it happen. He also had the wisdom not to pretend he knew everything about live sound. He had found a resource at a local university that was a professor of live sound. Between these two people, we found a great new sound system that worked at a great price.

When I decided in January 2019 that it was time for us to livestream our services, I turned the project over to my Associate Pastor. It's a challenge to your ego as Lead Pastor to turn over something new and important to your associate. But did I mention that his undergraduate degree from the University of South Carolina was in Broadcast



John Patterson has been a United Methodist Pastor for almost forty-one years. Every church he served as Lead Pastor has grown significantly. In his current appointment at the Gainesville Church attendance has gone from an average of 50 in worship in 1997 to a little over 600 in 2020. Contact John at JohnPatterson@vaumc.org.

Journalism? He spent four years learning about how the big broadcast companies got their programs on the air. I empowered him to get the job done because he knew a lot more about broadcasting than I could learn in several years. Besides, I had more important things to do. And yes, I celebrated his accomplishment and made sure that the congregation knew that he was the reason why we could “livestream” our services.

What a great blessing it was to our congregation that we were already “live streaming” in March 2020. Again, I give him all the credit for allowing us to continue with our worship services without a hiccup when the pandemic happened.

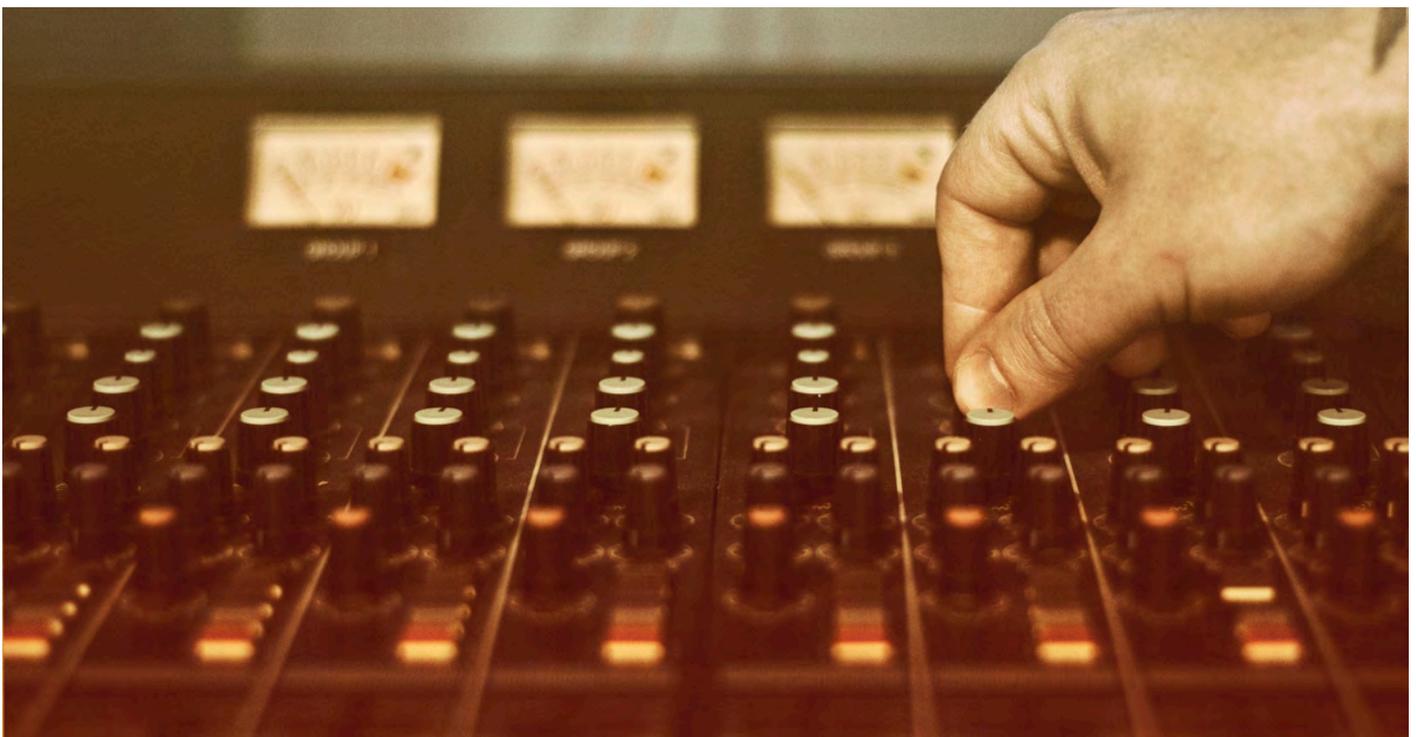
Third, resist allowing your music director to have too much input on your sound system – unless they have actual expertise in sound engineering. I’ve found that many music teachers (and when churches are looking for music directors, we often go to public school music teachers) think that they are experts in live sound because they have put on musical performances at their local school.

I had a Choir Director who, on her own, got a family to put up the money to purchase a soundboard for the back of the choir loft because she said the sound didn’t carry well in the sanctuary. Remember that we had just gotten a new sound system that carried through the whole space shortly after we brought in the “Worship Doctor,” Craig Gilbert, to come work with our Worship Band and our Choir. Craig is a nationally known worship consultant.

He took one look at that soundboard and said, “What is this doing here? This is for outdoor performances.” Our Choir Director had gone behind my back and purchased something that not only didn’t help with sound but was made for an entirely different purpose. Most of the time, in my experience, Choir Directors think they know much more about sound than they actually do.

Fourth, ensure your technology is doing what you say it is doing. I think we all learned this lesson with websites. It’s better not to have one if the one that you have is out of date. Maybe that is a bit of hyperbole, but if a website is outdated, are you still listing your Christmas Eve services? Then, your website will be outdated and a turn-off to those you are trying to reach. Also, make sure that your website accurately reflects your church. Don’t use stock photos that give an inaccurate picture of who you are.

If you stream or record your services, make sure that a visitor can view your worship service before attending, and make sure that your website efficiently directs new people to those services. Resist the temptation to make your website for the people already in your church. If your members can’t find something on the website, they can ask somebody next Sunday. If a visitor (in retirement, I am one of those visitors who has visited many websites) has to work too hard to find your past worship services, they will stop trying in about five minutes and move on to another church.



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These visitors don't care about your next potluck dinner, the youth going to a local theme park, or even the next new member class. Put a tab at the top with the title "Worship Services" or "Live" with a drop-down menu and make the most prominent thing your previous Sunday's service. I don't want the first thing I see to be a ticking clock telling me when your next Sunday's service will begin. I know from your home page (I hope) that your services are at 8, 9:30, and 11. That 8 and 11 are traditional, and 9:30 is contemporary. That's all on your home page. What I want is to watch a previous worship service. Make it easy for me to find several.

To make it as easy as possible for people to find our services at Gainesville Church, my sound engineer (yes, we hired a person who had a university degree from that same university that we consulted with in getting our new sound system in live sound and it was a great hire) he posted all of our services to Youtube after the last service. Older people with hearing issues loved that they could easily watch our services on a giant screen TV with enhanced sound. My parents were two of them.

With all the technology out there, one of the simplest things is to have a good watch. Today, many are GPS watches, and their time is exact. If you don't have one, find someone in your church who does, and use it to start your streamed services on time. If you advertise at 9:30 and 11, begin at 9:30 and 11, not at 9:33 and 11:05. Studies have shown that the average person will change a radio station or TV channel after three seconds of dead air. You probably won't get negative feedback if you do start late because those who are already a part of your congregation are used to your late start and may not even log on until 9:33 or 11:05. The people who left your website won't let you know that they were visiting for the first time and when you didn't start on time they went to another church's website.

If the people who are charged with starting your services (I think it's best to start with music, which means your worship leader or your choir director) don't have a good watch, then get someone in the congregation who does and stands near them and gives them a count down. If there is some tech problem, have the pastor there to do some improv about your church and welcome those watching online to your worship service. If it becomes a chronic problem with these worship leaders, then a contract must be drawn up, and consequences must be outlined if they continue to start the service late.

As you grow, the music people you had as a small church who struggled with new technology aren't the people you will need when you become a much larger church. Yes, try bringing them along, but often, they will become an anchor that stunts your ability to reach new people. I started to write, "stunt your growth," but I don't want the reader to think this is solely about growth for growth's sake. For me, it will always be about reaching "one more" for Jesus.

I never used Facebook as a pastor because of the size of our church. We grew to 400 in worship while the only staff I had was a part-time secretary and a part-time Choir Director. I was still doing the bulk of the congregational care, and I didn't want to take the hit of someone saying that they were in the hospital and Pastor John didn't visit me; after all, it was on my Facebook page. I know that being the only person doing pastoral care was something I should have changed when we reached 200 in worship, but I was caught in a perfect storm. We were growing exponentially; we were building a new building, and because of the cost of the building, we couldn't hire staff. I was doing it the wrong way, but you can learn more about how to do it the right way at effectivechurch.com.

However, that didn't mean we don't use Facebook or Instagram. It just meant that I turned that over to someone else. Even if you are a small church and don't have a staff member to hand this over to, I'm 99.9 percent sure that you can find someone to handle this aspect of tech for you. I know this because everywhere I go, there are people on their phones, and most of the time, it is Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, or whatever the next new thing is.

One piece of technology that I do recommend is the "Planning Center." We did away with bulletins about a decade ago. Yes, I took some hits for this, but when I showed those who complained that 85 percent of all the bulletins were left on the two pedestals in the back of the sanctuary and that all of the information that was in them was easily found on our website, they eventually got over their, "that's not how we always have done it" mindset. Planning Center is an excellent tool for your worship team(s) to stay on the same page when planning and running your worship services.

If you can use these technologies, and you are like me and aren't a techy, train the people who handle these beautiful tools for you. You don't need to get into the weeds. Rather, let them know that whatever tech you ask them to use, they are in charge. Empower them to do the job;

your responsibility isn't to know all the details; you are there to ensure it will be done well. Live streams start on time. The website is up to date, and a new visitor can find your worship services easily. Facebook has up-to-date info and is visitor-friendly. You should have two Facebook pages, one for visitors and one for your church people. Don't overload your public Facebook page with too much info that is of no interest to a visitor. If you are the Pastor, you are all about quality control.

Each bit of technology is also an excellent place to share your vision for your church. Gainesville Church was always about reaching "one more" for Jesus Christ. Our eyes were focused on those who weren't coming to our church, on those who didn't have a life transforming relationship with Jesus. So not only did we use these new technologies to make it easy for them to find us and to find out about us, but we also communicated our vision to our existing congregation.

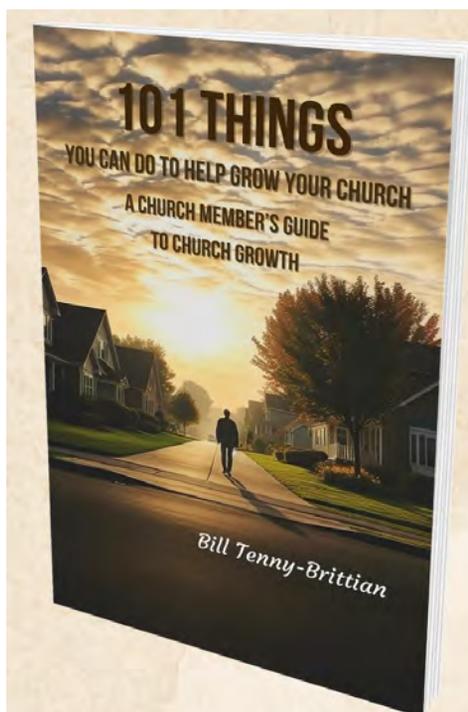
The more I could communicate my vision of reaching "one more" for the Kingdom, the more my congregation would start using their eyes to look more outward and less inward. To transform most Christians into "outward lookers" is a never-ending task. It's one of the four stages

that all Christians go through (another article for another time); it's the *Little Shop of Horrors* stage of a believer's life; it's the "feed me Seymour" stage. It's the time of spiritual growth when everything is about them and what they want. Never miss an opportunity to share Jesus' vision for the church. It really is about "one more."

We used technology to help people want to be part of us. So we would ask how these new techs, which were already part of their lives, could make it easier for people to take the "next steps" to become a part of Gainesville Church. It wasn't about having the glitziest presentation for presentation's sake, but how we could reach "one more."

Finally, don't be afraid to embrace new technologies even if you don't understand them. There are people out there who do or are willing to learn all about them. It might be a fifth grader but don't worry if you aren't smarter than that fifth grader. In the end, it's about reaching people with the life-transforming gospel of Jesus. These are my non-techy thoughts.

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BIBLE STUDY BASICS FOR SERMON PREPARATION

By Christopher L. Scott

A *BIBLE THAT'S falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't*, said the Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon. Navigating the Christian life requires you to clasp your Bible and use it for guidance in relationships, work, and spiritual life. When you study God's word, you obey God. He told his people, "Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do" (Joshua 1:8, NLT). As you prepare to preach God's Word, you know that you must study it, but perhaps you are not sure how. One way you can study the Bible is by following a simple three-step process that I would like to show you. The first step is observation.

Observation: What Does the Text Say?

For the three-step Bible study process to begin, the first question to ask is, "What does the text say?" This is called "observation." In his book on Bible study methods, *Searching the Scriptures*, Chuck Swindoll writes, "Just as a knowledge of the ingredients is a prerequisite for making a delicious meal, a careful reading of the Scriptures is required for proper understanding." In this critical first step of Bible study, you describe what you see in the text.

I'd like to show you an example of how to make observations from even a well-known verse. Below is the verse with some of my observations.

OBSERVATION EXAMPLES: "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." (Romans 8:28, NLT)

- "And" is a conjunction that connects to equal parts of speech.
- "God" likely refers to God the Father, because the Holy Spirit is mentioned in verses 26 and 27 and the Son is mentioned in verse 29.
- "Causes" is in the present tense, which means it is going on continually. It's not something God does occasionally or just when he feels like it. It's a constant action.

When I was studying this verse for a sermon I recently preached, I filled up an entire sheet of paper with more than 17 different observations.

The first step of Bible study is basic. You're not trying to solve Bible mysteries or discover truths unknown to oth-



Christopher L. Scott serves as senior pastor at Lakeview Missionary Church in Moses Lake, Washington and hosts The Daily Sermon Podcast. Through his writing ministry more than 100,000 copies of his articles, devotions, and tracts are distributed each month through Christian publishers. Learn more at ChristopherLynnScott.com.

ers. Nor are you trying to apply things to your life. You must discover what the text says. The goal is awareness of what is in the text, not what it means (step two) or how to apply it (step three).

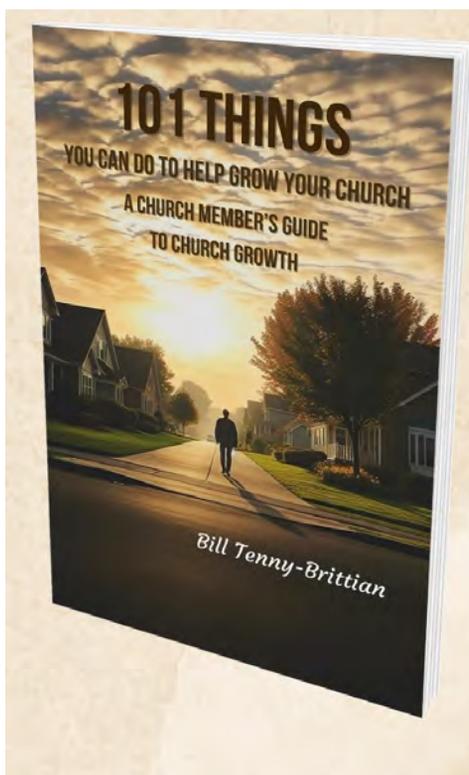
Interpretation: What Does the Text Mean?

In this step, you go deeper in your Bible study. In the interpretative phase, you ask, “What does the text mean?” Some resources to help you better study the interpretation are 1) a Bible concordance; 2) a Bible dictionary; and 3) a commentary where other well-known or popular theologians share their deeper knowledge of their long-time study of the text. If you prefer technology to hard copy, you can purchase Bible study software such as Logos (which I use) or Olive Tree. If you don’t have all these types of references at your fingertips right now, that’s okay too – there are also several good phone apps and other free software available online that you can access immediately such as YouVersion, Bible Gateway, or E-Sword.

Interpretation of a passage requires hard work, which is why you use a Bible study process to accurately study

God’s Word. Often when we approach Scripture we jump to the question, “What does this passage say to me?” But instead, we should be asking, “What does this passage say” (observation) and then ask, “What does this message mean to the original audience it was intended for?” And since the Spirit has been active and present in every cultural moment of the church’s history, we could also ask, “How has this passage been interpreted by the Church throughout history?”

Each person comes to a Bible passage with his own culture, language, and historical understanding. Sometimes we use these to interpret the Bible, but the hard work of Bible study requires that you get rid of those things and interpret the passage by allowing it to speak for itself in its own language, cultural context, and historical background. In other words, interpretation is hard work because you are trying to discover what the passage meant to its (original) audience 2000 years ago (even though we are reading it today). Helpful for getting more out of your interpretation is reading in context, as in not only isolating one passage in your study. Even though my example is outlining the work on a single passage of scripture, make sure to also read around each passage to gather the full



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breadth of what is being said and to bring out the fullest enrichment and overall meaning of the text.

The late Howard Hendricks, who taught Bible study methods at Dallas Theological Seminary, used to teach his students that, “Meaning’ is not our subjective thoughts read into the text, but God’s objective truth read out of the text.” Having a specific Bible study method, such as the one I am describing for you in this article, helps you discover one meaning of the passage.

INTERPRETATION EXAMPLE: “And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.” (Romans 8:28, NLT)

Through studying, we might reflect on our Triune God, i.e. the Father sent the Son, and the Son sent the Holy Spirit (John 15:26). While all three members of the Godhead are equally God and submit to each other, Jesus told us, “I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will” (John 6:38 NLT). So one interpretation is that when our life situations are worked out for good, we have God to thank for orchestrating that goodness in our lives.

While this process may feel extensive, detailed, and difficult, you must remember that you have a helper for Bible study. He’s a personal tutor, of sorts. He’s there to guide you along and to step in when you get stuck. He’s the Holy Spirit.

This is the doctrine of illumination. Illumination is the Holy Spirit’s ministry helping you understand God’s truth. The Holy Spirit was at work in you as you became a Christian and now as you seek to grow in God’s word. Shortly before Jesus died, he told the disciples, “There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can’t bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, ‘The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me.’” (John 16:12–15, NLT)

This is how the Holy Spirit works through our lives in Bible study. When we study his word, he shows us its meaning and how it applies to our lives (2 Corinthians 2:12,14). Like I said, interpretation is hard work. Because it is hard work, the Holy Spirit helps us to understand God’s truth.

Now that you have made many observations of the passage and discovered the interpretation, the final step in the Bible study process is finding an application.

Application: How Do I Apply the Text?

The last step gets personal. “How do I apply the text to my life?” This third step is based on what you see (observation) and what the text means (interpretation). Howard Hendricks said, “Scripture was written not to fatten geese, but to train athletes and equip soldiers for the realities of life.” Good Bible study ends with application.

Find specific applications. Don’t say, “I will stop worrying.” That’s too general. Say, “When I start to worry about something, I will quote Philippians 4:6–8 and focus on God.” Here’s an example from the verse I’ve already showed you observations and an interpretation from:

APPLICATION EXAMPLE: “And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.” (Romans 8:28, NLT)

I am going to memorize this verse so that the next time I talk to a Christian who is in a difficult situation, I can share it with her and encourage her.

Some say Bible study without application is not Bible study, but we also can’t discount the potential of the Holy Spirit to shape and change us merely by our engagement with the Word of God – such as devotional reading. But what makes application so important is that it adds an element of choice and desire for growth or change on our part. This type of study is not like the years of formal education that taught you to learn what will be on the test at the end of the semester. When you study the Bible, the question you ask should not be, “God, what do I need to know for your exam?” It should be, “God, how am I supposed to live?”

Start Your Bible Study Process

Bible study is hard work. It requires time and focus. God chose and used Ezra to restore his people in the city of Jerusalem “because Ezra had determined to study and obey the Law of the LORD and to teach those decrees and regulations to the people of Israel.” (Ezra 7:10, NLT)

There are many things that pull for our attention as pastors: board meetings, discipleship groups, hospital visits,

leadership development, and community needs. But when we direct our attention to God's word and study it, it's worth it.

Time won't magically appear for you to study the Bible. So, wake up early in the morning and study or stay up late after everyone is asleep. Do whatever it takes to carve out time for your study.

A child of the president of the seminary I attended told a story of how their family was staying in a motel during summer vacation. The child woke up during the night and noticed the bathroom light on. He approached the door and opened it to find his dad sitting on the edge of the bathtub in his pajamas with a pad of paper, pen, Bible,

and various Bible study tools laid out. Do whatever it takes to find the time to study your Bible.

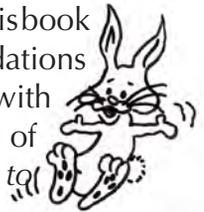
In addition to time, focus is also required for Bible study. Silence your cell phone and turn off the TV. Grab a journal, pen, your Bible, a couple resources to help you study, and a cup of coffee, and focus on God and his Word. This Bible study methods provides a step-by-step process that will help you prepare sermons based on God's Word that meet the needs of your church.

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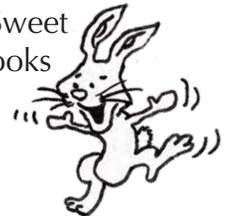
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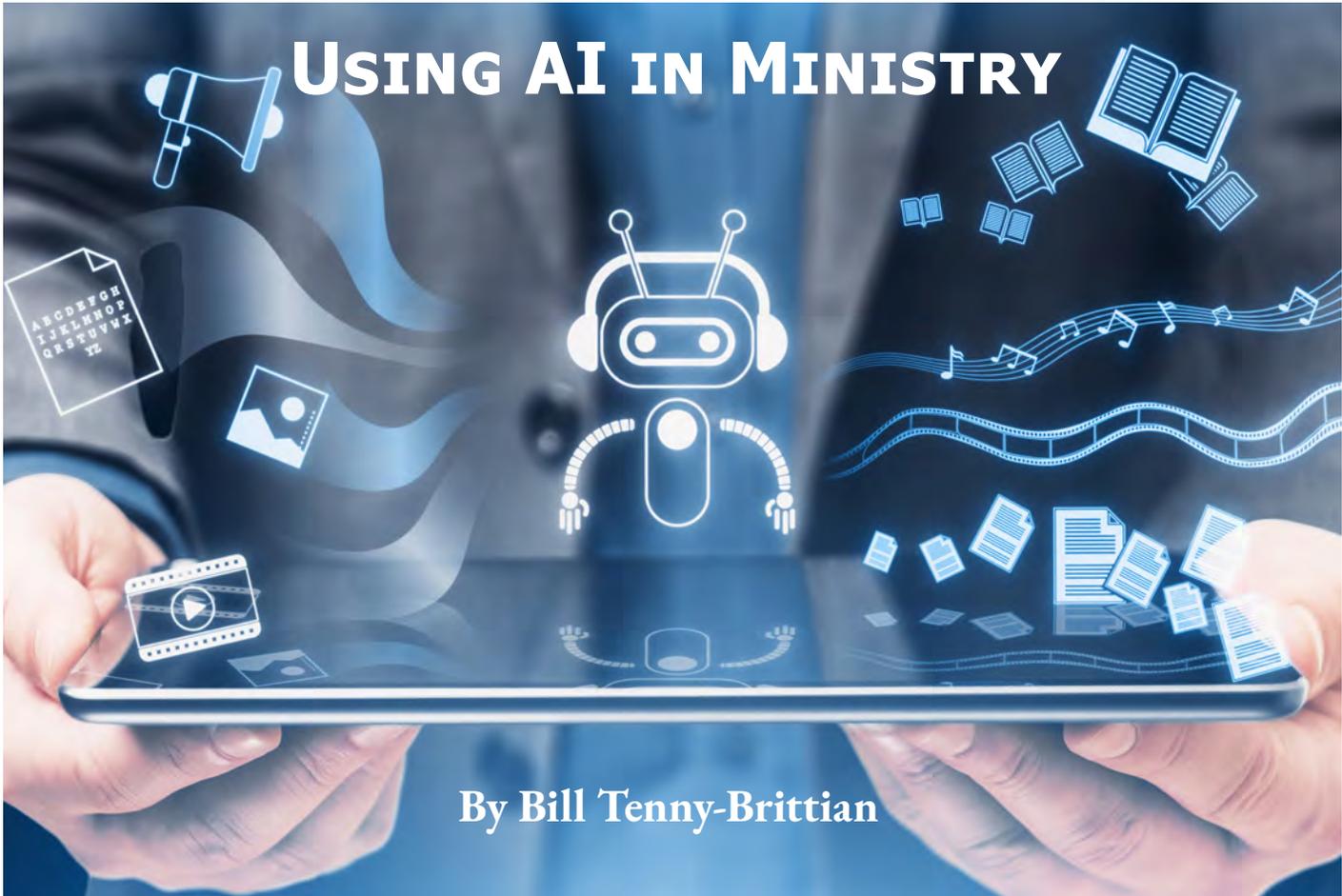
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USING AI IN MINISTRY

By Bill Tenny-Brittian

I'VE BEEN USING ChatGPT since its inception and public release. In other words, I've got some pretty extensive experience using AI as a tool to help me in ministry. When I retired from congregational ministry, my use of AI, and in particular ChatGPT, skyrocketed. Today, I use ChatGPT and AI literally every single day of my life. It helps me to brainstorm, refine my writing, to help me write emails, create social media posts, and create images that I use in my webinars, ChurchTalk.TV, blogs, and even Net Results magazine. Since this issue of Net Results involves using the tech tools of the trade, I thought it would be fun to let AI write an article. But to make it more interesting, I put ChatGPT 4 and Claude Opus into a competition to see which one wrote the best article.

Those of you reading this may or may not be familiar with prompt engineering. Prompt engineering is simply the practice of creating good prompts for AI so that you get good results. One of the biggest complaints I hear from pastors is that they tried to use ChatGPT or another AI, and all they got was generic platitudes. In those cases, the problem wasn't the AI platform they were using but their prompt engineering. When I teach pastors how

to use AI in the Growing Church Network and in my conferences, we spend significant time going over how to create an effective prompt. In a nutshell, I'll let them know that they should treat the AI as if it is a ten-year-old that has almost unlimited knowledge but only thinks in concrete terms. If you don't tell the AI exactly what you want, you're doomed to get whatever it "feels" like giving you. And when it gives you what it feels like, it's not going to give you much. So, for this contest, I created a series of six prompts to write the article – and I've included the prompts I used, word-for-word, with no corrections for spelling or grammar or anything else. I used the exact prompts for both Claude 3 and ChatGPT 4 so I could compare responses.



Bill Tenny-Brittian is the Managing Editor of *Net Results* magazine, the author of a dozen books, and a congregational coach and consultant. He's the Managing Partner of The Effective Church Group and he works with hundreds of pastors each year. His passion is helping pastors in stuck churches to become their congregation's Church Growth Catalyst so they can spend less time managing members and more time transforming lives.

You can reach him at billtb@NetResults.org.

In addition, I have pasted the results into the following article side by side so you can see the differences. I did no editing whatsoever other than format editing, so it's easier to read. But I didn't change grammar, I didn't add any of my own comments, etc. It's worth reading both articles because both AIS provided their own insights into the articles. But the primary purpose for putting these side by side is so that you can see what AI writing looks like, you can see the advantages and the disadvantages of each of the two AIS, and you can see why it is absolutely necessary that once you've created something with AI that you edit it and personalize it to make it yours.

Finally, I want to let you know that I'm using the professional version of both ChatGPT and Claude. I'm using

chat gpt4, sometimes called the pro version, and I used Claude 3, also called the Opus version. Both of them are approximately the same price (approximately \$20 a month), and on a personal level, I find the amount of time I save each week on content creation, writing emails, brainstorming, and all the rest that makes it well worth the investment.

I hope you enjoy both articles and learn something about how to leverage your sermon for Maximum Impact. (BTW, I didn't write any of the above using AI other than using Grammarly to correct typos, grammar, etc. To be honest, I'm not sure what we did before we had all these varieties of AI!)

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LEVERAGING YOUR SERMON



By ChatGPT-4

WHEN THE TIMELESS wisdom of the pulpit meets the cutting-edge advances of artificial intelligence, something extraordinary happens. As leaders dedicated to nurturing faith and community, we've always sought out ways to make the Gospel resonate more deeply with those who trust us to share it. I'm thrilled to share insights into how AI can not only amplify our message but also create a more dynamic, interactive, and personalized spiritual journey for our congregations.

Let's embark on a journey where your weekly sermons transcend the walls of the sanctuary and continue to inspire and engage your community throughout the week. We'll start by setting up your AI with the essence of your message – uploading sermon notes, identifying scripture passages, and weaving in the context of your audience and the overarching narrative of your sermon series. This isn't just about technological integration; it's about enriching the spiritual tapestry of your church in ways we could only imagine before.

From there, we'll explore creating tactile handouts to engage those who absorb knowledge through action and interaction, ensuring every member of your congregation has a touchpoint that resonates with their learning style. Then, we'll dive into the design of a follow-up Bible study – a seamless extension of your sermon that stirs thoughtful reflection and practical application. The culminating question in this study isn't just another query; it's a call to action, echoing the core of your message into the lives and hearts of your parishioners.

And as Sunday approaches, the buzz begins. We'll craft a series of compelling Facebook posts that not only an-

nounce your upcoming sermon but intrigue and invite the scrolling eyes of social media users. The aim? To turn passive viewers into active participants, eager to join the next chapter of your church's story.

So, grab a cup of your favorite coffee, settle in, and let's navigate these new waters together. With each step, you're not just preparing a sermon; you're curating an experience that extends the reach of your pulpit into the daily lives of your congregation, making every word count in the grand narrative of their faith journey.

Preparing Your AI for Sermon Impact

In an age where our daily lives interweave seamlessly with technology, integrating AI into your sermon preparation can revolutionize the way you communicate God's word. It's about crafting a message that not only touches the heart on Sunday but also becomes a part of the daily rhythm of life for your congregation. Here's how to prepare your AI to ride alongside you in this mission.

Upload with Intention

Begin by uploading your sermon notes or manuscript into the AI system. Be as detailed as possible – the AI is thorough, but it works best when guided by your specific intentions. Consider the AI an extension of your pastoral team, one that requires the same kind of directive clarity you would provide a human collaborator.

Scripture and Context

Pinpoint the Scripture passage central to your message. Context is crucial – if the verses are part of a larger series, make that clear. The AI can then provide nuanced in-



ChatGPT-4

sights or source material that can help you draw deeper connections for your audience.

Know Your Flock

Detail your target audience within the AI's parameters. Are you addressing seasoned believers, new converts, or perhaps the curious skeptics? Maybe it's a diverse mix. Your AI needs to know who it's speaking to, just as much as you do. This ensures the generated content is tailored, sensitive, and resonates with the life experiences and spiritual maturity of your listeners.

Beyond the Pews

Inform the AI whether your sermon is a standalone message or part of a series. This guides the system in determining how to approach the content – is it building on a previous message, laying the groundwork for what's to come, or designed to be a potent, self-contained proclamation? Each sermon plays a unique role in the spiritual narrative you're weaving within your community.

By meticulously aligning your AI with the heart of your sermon, you're setting the stage for a message that has the power to reverberate well beyond the amen.

Next, we'll focus on creating that kinesthetic connection for your congregation with the hands-on handout. Stay tuned for an exploration into crafting materials that will ensure everyone – no matter their learning style – walks away with something tangible from your sermon.

Crafting an Engaging Fill-in-the-Blanks Handout

Imagine sitting in a pew, sermon washing over you, when suddenly, you're not just a listener; you're a participant. Rick Warren of Saddleback Church understood this well when he popularized fill-in-the-blank handouts as a tool to engage congregations more deeply with the sermon. This simple yet transformative approach beckons every mind to action, to engagement, to become a fertile ground where the seeds of the sermon take root and flourish.

Less is More

In designing your fill-in-the-blank sheet, remember that simplicity is key. Aim for no more than three or four blanks per handout. This isn't about creating a test of attention; it's about forging a pathway for engagement. Each blank should serve as a stepping stone, leading the listener through the critical points of your message, culminating in a deeper understanding and personal application.

Designing with Purpose

As you draft your handout, consider the pivotal points of your sermon that would benefit most from active listener participation. These are the moments you want to crystallize, offering a blank for the listener to fill in and, by doing so, to claim as their own discovery. It's these "aha" moments that embed themselves in memory, transforming passive hearing into active listening.

Inclusive Tools for Diverse Learners

Recognize that while not every member of your church will use the handout, there are many who will relish this tool. It's for the kinesthetic learners among us, those who grasp more tightly to words they write themselves, those who find truth in the tactile experience of pen meeting paper. This handout is an acknowledgment of the diverse ways in which your congregation engages with the Word.

The Call to Action

Perhaps most crucially, do not forget to incorporate a call to action within your handout. This goes beyond the sermon's content; it's about what happens next. It's the "so what" factor that should resonate with every heart in the room. Your call to action might be a practical step of faith, an encouragement to serve, or a challenge to love more boldly. It should be clear, compelling, and, above all, a direct application of the Scripture and sermon points you've led them through.

By equipping your congregation with this interactive tool, you're not merely handing them a sheet of paper; you're offering them a key to unlock a more profound engagement with your message and, ultimately, with their faith.



ChatGPT-4

Next, we will take a step beyond the Sunday service and into the week that follows, looking at how to sustain the sermon's impact with a well-crafted follow-up Bible study. Stay with me, and we'll explore how to keep the embers of Sunday's fire burning bright long after the congregation has left the building.

Fostering Reflection and Action with a Post-Sermon Bible Study

The sermon's end doesn't have to mean the end of the spiritual journey for the week. In fact, it's just the beginning. On the back of the fill-in-the-blanks handout, we're providing a tool that's not just a study guide but a spiritual incubator for the week ahead—a Bible study designed to deeply embed the truths and applications of your message into the fabric of daily life.

Crafting Thought-Provoking Questions

This study will consist of 7 to 10 open-ended questions that encourage introspection and dialogue. The beauty lies in the blend—intermingling questions that delve into the Scripture with those that draw from the sermon's content, ensuring a rich, varied exploration of the topic at hand. By having the AI shuffle these questions, we ensure a dynamic study experience where the sequence of discovery is unique each time. This approach keeps the mind alert, the heart engaged, and the conversation fresh.

The Final Push: A Call to Action

Every study culminates in a call to action, the crucial question that translates learning into living. It's a question designed not just to be answered but to be acted upon, taking the truth from the page to the pavement, from the sanctuary to the streets. This is where your members are challenged to be doers of the Word, putting feet to their faith in practical, tangible ways.

Adaptable for Community Growth

Moreover, this Bible study isn't confined to personal use. It's crafted to be just as effective in small groups, fostering community and conversation within your church. As members gather to discuss and digest the material together, they're not just understanding the sermon better—they're building bonds with one another, becoming an active, living body of faith in action.

In this way, the sermon becomes a living thing, a catalyst for growth and change that lasts far beyond Sunday. It becomes the soil from which personal transformations and communal ties flourish throughout the week.

Crafting an Effective Facebook Post for Sermon Promotion

Promoting your sermon via Facebook is more than just an announcement—it's about creating anticipation, engaging your audience, and starting conversations even before the first scripture is read. Here's how to create an effective post using the sermon titled "Big Fish: Seeing Jesus in Your Everyday" from John 21:1-14.

The Hook: Capture Attention

Your post should begin with a hook—an eye-catching question or statement that piques interest and makes the scroll stop. For "Big Fish," consider:

"Have you ever missed a message that was meant for you? #BigFishMoments"

This hook does a few things: It draws in the reader with a relatable question and introduces the hashtag for continuity and discoverability.

The Content: Provide Value

This is where you elaborate on your hook, offering a glimpse into the sermon's theme and its relevance to everyday life.

"Join us this Sunday as we dive into John 21:1-14 and explore how divine interventions might be weaving through the mundane moments of our lives. Learn to spot the #BigFish moments where Jesus is reaching out in the ordinary. 🐟 ✨"

Here, you've provided a snapshot of what to expect, making the sermon relatable and intriguing, and reinforcing the hashtag.

The Hashtags: Extend Your Reach

Hashtags connect your post to a larger conversation. They're not just tags; they're invitations for engagement and exploration.

"#SeeingJesus #EverydayMiracles #ChurchLife"



ChatGPT-4

Each hashtag broadens your reach, linking your post to these larger thematic umbrellas under which your content becomes discoverable.

The Explanation:

- The hook grabs attention in a noisy social media landscape.
- The content delivers the value proposition, explaining why someone should be interested in your sermon.
- The hashtags act as connectors, linking your message to broader themes and conversations, increasing the visibility beyond your immediate followers.

The Benefit of Promotion:

By promoting your sermon in advance, you're building anticipation, which is crucial. It gives time for the idea to resonate, discussions to form, and commitment to attending (physically or virtually) to solidify. Advanced promotion also allows for the message to be shared, multiplying your reach exponentially.

An advanced promotion might look like this:

Facebook Post Example:

[IMAGE OF A FISHING NET OR OCEAN SCENERY]

“Ever feel like life’s full of ‘ordinary’ moments? What if some of those held extraordinary messages? 🌟 This Sunday, we’re casting our nets into John 21:1–14 to uncover the #BigFish moments—those times when the divine surfaces in the daily grind.

Don’t miss out on “Big Fish: Seeing Jesus in Your Everyday.” Let’s learn to recognize the signs together.

Join us and bring a friend along—someone who might need that spark of revelation in their everyday encounters.

 Sunday |  9 AM |  [Link to the Service]

#SeeingJesus #EverydayMiracles #ChurchLife #FaithInAction #CommunityConnection”

In this example, the imagery, combined with an engaging caption and strategic use of hashtags, aims to stir curiosity and engagement, encouraging your audience not just to attend, but to be a part of a bigger conversation.

Conclusion: Transforming Sermons from Monologue to Dialogue

In harnessing AI and social media to expand the impact of your sermons, you’re not simply adopting new tools; you’re pioneering a transformation in how spiritual teachings are interwoven into the everyday lives of your congregation. Let’s recap the profound benefits this approach promises both for you and your flock:

For the Pastor:

- 1. Enhanced Engagement:** By introducing interactive sermon notes and follow-up Bible studies, you’re inviting your congregation to engage with the Word on a deeper level, fostering a more active and participatory worship experience.
- 2. Broadened Reach:** Social media promotion, specifically tailored for engagement, extends your sermon’s reach beyond Sunday services, tapping into daily digital spaces where your congregation already spends their time.
- 3. Richer Feedback:** With congregation members reflecting on sermon applications throughout the week, you gain valuable insights into how your message is resonating, guiding you to tailor subsequent teachings more effectively.

For the Congregation:

- 1. Deeper Learning:** Fill-in-the-blanks handouts cater to kinesthetic learners, providing a tactile element to the learning process, while the shuffled Bible study questions challenge members to think critically and reflectively.
- 2. Daily Integration:** The call-to-action questions ensure that the lessons of the sermon are not just heard but lived out, encouraging members to seek and recognize divine interactions in their day-to-day encounters.



ChatGPT-4

3. Community Building: Promoting sermons on social media not only increases visibility but fosters a sense of community as members share, comment, and invite others into the conversation.

Putting It Into Practice:

Imagine a congregation that not only hears the sermon but carries it into their week. Picture a church where Sunday's message becomes a topic of conversation on social media, in Bible study groups, and in personal reflection. Envision the ripple effect as each member takes action, inspired by the transformative potential of recognizing the divine in the mundane.

By integrating these dynamic tools into your sermon preparation and delivery, you're not just preaching; you're empowering. You're providing multiple entry points for

the Word to enter and impact lives. You're fostering a culture where the echo of Sunday's message reverberates throughout the week in the hearts and minds of your members.

In this collaborative space between technology and tradition, we find not just growth in numbers, but growth in spirit, understanding, and community. It's here that we see the Gospel come alive, not just in our words, but in our daily actions. This is church revitalization in the digital age — where every message has the potential to be a movement.

NET Results



Take Your Small Group From Participants To Leaders In Only Eight Weeks

The Apprentice Workbook is an eight week tool you can use to train small group participants in small group leadership. From being an excellent host to leading prayer, Bible study, handling offerings (if taken during the small group), and even basic pastoral care of the membership. In addition, during each week the apprentices are introduced and experience a new spiritual disciplines, so that they grow as quickly spiritually as they do in leadership.

Topics Include:

- Your Prayer Place
- Hospitality: Set Up and Serving
- Developing a Worship-Filled Life
- Small Group Worship
- Accountability
- Solitude and Retreats
- Inviting the Neighborhood
- Following-Up with Guests
- Mentoring
- ... and much more!

A book by Managing Editor
Bill Tenny-Brittian



LEVERAGING YOUR SERMON



By Claude-3

H EY THERE, PASTOR! Do you ever feel like your sermons are falling on deaf ears? Like you're pouring your heart out, but your congregation just isn't connecting with the message? Well, I've got some good news for you. With the power of AI, you can take your sermons to the next level and make a lasting impact on your church.

Now, I know what you might be thinking. "AI? Isn't that just for tech geeks and robot overlords?" But hear me out. AI is simply a tool, and like any tool, it can be used for good or for evil. And when it comes to preaching the Word of God, I firmly believe that AI can be a force for good.

Imagine being able to create custom handouts that help your congregation follow along and retain key points. Or providing a follow-up Bible study that reinforces the message and encourages deeper reflection. And what about promoting your upcoming sermon on social media in a way that actually gets people excited to attend?

All of this is possible with AI. But before you start dreaming of becoming the next big thing in preaching, let's start with the basics. In this post, I'll walk you through four key ways you can use AI to maximize your sermon's impact. So grab a cup of coffee, fire up your computer, and let's dive in!

Point 1: Preparing Your AI for Crafting the Perfect Sermon Aids

Alright, pastor, let's get down to business. The first step in using AI to maximize your sermon's impact is to make sure your AI is well-fed. And by that, I mean you need to

give it all the information it needs to create truly helpful and relevant sermon aids.

So, where do you start? It's simple. Grab your sermon notes or manuscript and upload them into your AI tool of choice. Now, I know that might sound a bit daunting if you're not particularly tech-savvy, but trust me, it's easier than you think. Most AI tools these days have a simple upload function that even the most technologically challenged among us can handle.

But don't stop there! To really get the most out of your AI, you'll want to provide some additional context. Start by referencing the scripture passage that your sermon is based on. This will help your AI understand the biblical foundation of your message and ensure that any content it creates is scripturally sound.

Next, think about your target audience. Are you preaching to a congregation of long-time believers or a room full of newcomers? Are you addressing a specific age group or demographic? These details will help your AI craft content that resonates with your specific audience.

Finally, consider the bigger picture. Is your sermon part of a larger series? Are there any overarching themes or messages that you want to emphasize? By providing this context, you'll help your AI create sermon aids that not only support your individual message but also contribute to the larger narrative of your church's teaching.

Now, I know this might seem like a lot of work upfront, but trust me, it's worth it. By taking the time to properly prepare your AI, you'll set yourself up for success and ensure that the content it creates is truly valuable for your



Claude-3

congregation. So go ahead and gather up that information, pastor. Your AI is waiting to be fed!

Point 2: Creating a Fill-in-the-Blank Handout for Kinesthetic Learners

Now that your AI is well-fed and ready to go, it's time to tackle our first sermon aid: the fill-in-the-blank handout. This handy tool, popularized by none other than Rick Warren at Saddleback Community Church, is a game-changer for those in your congregation who learn best by doing.

Here's the thing, pastor. Not everyone in your church is an auditory learner. Some folks need to engage with the material in a more hands-on way. That's where the fill-in-the-blank handout comes in. By providing a simple outline of your sermon with key words or phrases missing, you give your kinesthetic learners the opportunity to actively participate in the message.

Now, I know what you might be thinking. "Won't this be a distraction? Won't people be so focused on filling in the blanks that they miss the bigger message?" And to that, I say, not if you do it right. The key is to keep your handout simple and focused. Aim for no more than three or four fill-in-the-blank opportunities throughout the entire sermon. This way, you keep your congregation engaged without overwhelming them.

But here's the really important part, pastor. Don't forget to include a call to action on your handout. This could be a question for reflection, a challenge to implement the message in their daily lives, or an invitation to join a small group or serve in a ministry. By including a call to action, you encourage your congregation to take the message beyond the walls of the church and into their everyday lives.

Now, I know that not everyone will use the handout. Some folks prefer to simply listen and absorb the message. And that's okay! The fill-in-the-blank handout is just one tool in your arsenal. But for those in your church who need that kinesthetic engagement, it can make all the difference.

So go ahead and fire up your AI, pastor. Input your sermon outline and let the magic happen. With a well-crafted fill-in-the-blank handout, you'll be able to reach and

engage every member of your congregation, no matter their learning style. And that's a beautiful thing.

Point 3: Reinforcing the Message with a Follow-Up Bible Study

Alright, pastor, we've covered the importance of engaging your kinesthetic learners with a fill-in-the-blank handout. But why stop there? Let's take it a step further and really drive home the message with a follow-up Bible study.

Now, I know what you're thinking. "Another thing to prepare? I'm already swamped!" But hear me out. By including a Bible study on the back of your sermon worksheet, you're not only reinforcing the message but also encouraging your congregation to dive deeper into God's Word.

Here's how it works. Take your scripture passage and your sermon content and craft a series of open-ended questions. Aim for between seven and ten questions that really get your congregation thinking. Now, here's the key. Make sure to mix up questions directly from the Bible passage with questions that relate to your sermon content. This way, you're encouraging your members to engage with both the Word and the message.

But don't forget the most important part, pastor. Always, always, always include a call to action as your final question. This is where you challenge your congregation to put feet to their faith and actually live out what they've learned. It could be something as simple as committing to pray for a specific need or as bold as volunteering to serve in a new ministry.

Now, I know that crafting a thoughtful Bible study can be time-consuming. But here's where your AI comes in. Simply input your questions and let the AI shuffle them randomly. This way, you get a nice mix of scripture and sermon questions without having to spend hours agonizing over the perfect order.

But the best part? This Bible study is incredibly versatile. Not only can your congregation work through it individually, but it can also easily be adapted for use in small groups. Imagine the impact of having your entire church diving deeper into the message together, encouraging one another and holding each other accountable.



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So go ahead and give it a try, pastor. Craft that follow-up Bible study and watch as your congregation grows in their faith and understanding. And who knows? You might just find that the insights and revelations that come from these studies inspire your next sermon series. It's a beautiful cycle of growth and learning, all made possible by a simple sheet of paper and the power of AI.

Point 4: Promoting Your Sermon with Engaging Facebook Posts

Alright, pastor, we've covered how to reinforce your message after the fact. But what about building anticipation and excitement before the sermon even happens? That's where social media comes in, specifically Facebook.

Now, I know that social media can feel like a bit of a mystery, especially if you're not particularly tech-savvy. But with a little guidance from your trusty AI, you can create engaging Facebook posts that will have your congregation counting down the days until Sunday.

Let's dive into an example, shall we? Let's say your upcoming sermon is based on John 21:1-14, and you've titled it "Big Fish: Seeing Jesus in Your Everyday." The theme of your sermon is that we often miss divine interventions in our daily lives because we're not actively looking for them.

To create an effective Facebook post, you'll want to include three key elements: a hook, content, and relevant hashtags. Your AI can help you craft each of these sections. Here's a sample prompt:

"Create a Facebook post promoting a sermon titled 'Big Fish: Seeing Jesus in Your Everyday.' The post should include:

1. A hook that grabs attention and relates to the theme of recognizing divine interventions.
2. A brief description of the sermon's content and the scripture passage, John 21:1-14.
3. Relevant hashtags to increase visibility."

Let's break down each section:

The hook is designed to grab your audience's attention and make them want to learn more. It could be a thought-provoking question, a relatable statement, or

even a bit of humor. For example: "Ever feel like God's trying to get your attention, but you're just not seeing it?"

The content section is where you give a sneak peek of what the sermon will cover. This could include a brief summary of the scripture passage, a key point from the message, or a thought-provoking quote. For example: "Join us this Sunday as we dive into John 21:1-14 and explore how to recognize Jesus' presence in our everyday lives."

Finally, hashtags are a great way to increase the visibility of your post and connect with a wider audience. Choose hashtags that are relevant to your sermon theme and your church community. For example: #BigFishSermon #SeeingJesus #EverydayFaith #[YourChurchName]

But why bother with all this social media stuff, you might ask? Well, pastor, promoting your sermon in advance has some serious benefits. Not only does it build anticipation and excitement among your regular attendees, but it also gives you the opportunity to reach new people who might not otherwise walk through your church doors.

By leveraging the power of social media, you can extend your message beyond the walls of your church and into the daily lives of your community. And who knows? That one Facebook post might just be the thing that brings a new face to your service on Sunday.

So go ahead and give it a try, pastor. Craft those engaging Facebook posts and watch as your congregation (and maybe even some new folks) come eager and ready to hear what God has to say through you. With a little help from AI and a lot of heart, you can make your sermons truly unforgettable.

Now, let's review the key points we covered and discuss how they all work together to maximize your sermon's impact.

Conclusion: Maximizing Your Sermon's Impact with AI

Alright, pastor, we've covered a lot of ground today. From preparing your AI with sermon notes and scripture to crafting fill-in-the-blank handouts, follow-up Bible studies, and engaging Facebook posts, we've explored a variety of ways to use AI to maximize your sermon's impact.



Claude-3

But here's the thing. These aren't just random tactics or gimmicks. When used together, these tools create a powerful system for engaging your congregation, reinforcing your message, and extending your reach beyond the walls of your church.

Think about it. By providing a fill-in-the-blank handout, you're giving your kinesthetic learners a way to actively participate in the sermon. By crafting a follow-up Bible study, you're encouraging your congregation to dive deeper into God's Word and apply the message to their lives. And by promoting your sermon on social media, you're building anticipation, excitement, and the opportunity to reach new people.

But the benefits don't stop there. When you consistently use these tools, you'll start to see a transformation in your church community. Your congregation will become more engaged, more committed, and more excited about growing in their faith. They'll start to see the relevance of your messages in their daily lives, and they'll be more likely to invite others to come and experience it for themselves.

And let's not forget about the impact on you, pastor. By leveraging the power of AI, you'll be able to create

high-quality sermon aids in a fraction of the time it would take to do it all manually. That means more time for you to focus on what really matters: preparing your heart and mind to deliver a message that will change lives.

But perhaps the greatest benefit of all is the opportunity to partner with God in the work of ministry. By using these tools to maximize your sermon's impact, you're not just delivering a message. You're creating space for the Holy Spirit to move in the hearts and minds of your congregation. You're planting seeds that will grow and bear fruit in ways you might never even see.

So go ahead and give it a try, pastor. Embrace the power of AI and watch as your sermons take on new life. With a little creativity, a lot of heart, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, you can create messages that will transform lives and build the Kingdom of God, one sermon at a time.

Remember, your words have the power to change lives. Make them count.

NET
Results





PROMPT ENGINEERING

I HOPE YOU got a lot out of those two “parallel” articles. If I was using AI to generate full articles and/or blogs, I’d be happy to start with either one of those two AI generated articles, but then I’d spend the next few minutes – maybe even an hour – reworking, rewording, adding anecdotes, making corrections, and so on. Given that it typically takes me about four hours to write a first-draft of a 2000 word article, you can see how much time using some preliminary help can save. Sure, as you can see, you *could* publish either one of those articles “as-is,” but in the end, you’d not only “get caught,” in the same way *Sports Illustrated* got caught a few months back. But worse, at least in my opinion, you run the risk of putting something “out there” that may be factually inaccurate or actually harmful to the church.

That said, I wanted you to see what well-crafted prompts look like. Below I’ve literally cut and pasted the six prompts I engineered to create the articles. Again, these prompts are *exactly* like I created them. I have not edited them for content, spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc. (And as you read through them, you’ll see how bad they really are!) In my own defense, I used the Google Chrome extension *Voice In* to dictate the prompts, so you’ll get a taste about how accurate (or inaccurate as the case may be!) that program “translates” my dictation.

One Note: Before I set out to create any content using AI, I always begin by educating it with background informa-

tion. Over the years, I’ve created four documents that I use for that purpose and I uploaded those documents as PDFs into both ChatGPT and Claude prior to using the prompts below. Those four documents were: (1) A description of my ideal client (my readers); (2) My Bio with some anecdotes; (3) My writing style guide; and (4) A collection of my writing samples. By educating the AI, it produces content that is more in line with what I’d create myself.

With that said, below are the six prompts I created (dictated) to get the two articles you’ve perused.

The Six Prompts

Introduction

We’re going to write a blog post together. The topic will be how to maximize your sermon’s impact using AI. The article have an introduction, the first point will be basic instructions on how to prepare your AI for riding the article which will include uploading your sermon notes or manuscript and referencing your scripture Passage and any other details about the sermon that you would like to include such as target audience and whether it’s part of a series or not. The second point will be how to create a brief fill in the blanks hand out to help those who learn kinesthetically to pay attention and follow along in your sermon. The next point will be how to help the sermon

Bill Easum AND Bill Tenny-Brittian

FOREWORD BY Ed Stetzer

EFFECTIVE STAFFING
FOR VITAL CHURCHES

The ESSENTIAL GUIDE
to Finding + Keeping the Right People

There's More to Staffing than Hiring and Firing

- Discover the Four Core Processes every effective church must staff.
- Uncover the secret to effectively staffing the small church by "hiring" unpaid staff.
- How to not make the #1 staffing mistake almost every church makes.
- Ask the right questions so you can hire the right people with confidence.
- Master the skill of coaching your staff ... including how to hold them accountable for results.
- Discern when it's time to hire the next staff member, and what position you need next.
- Explore the skills you need and the personal values that must change as you lead your church through each growth barrier.



"This book is a winner!"
Rick Warren, Saddleback Church



"A tremendous help for church leaders."
Dave Ferguson, Seacoast Church



"I wish I had this book when I started."
Darrin Patrick, The Journey Church

**Available
Almost
Everywhere!**

be remembered throughout the week by creating a ten question follow-up Bible study with five questions from the scripture passage that you used, for questions from the sermon content, and a final question which is a call to action based on the scripture and the sermon. And the last point will be how to create a series of three Facebook posts that promote the sermon on the upcoming Sunday. Please reference the articles that I have uploaded that will give you back around on my ideal client, who I am, my preferred writing style, and examples of my writings. Then create the introduction which should be about 250 words long.

Point 1

Good job. Please create the next point. Use whatever length is necessary to effectively communicate the points outlined above.

Point 2

Go ahead and write the Second point on how to create a fill in the blank sheet. Be sure to mention that Rick Warren at Saddleback Community is the pastor who popularized this particular tool. In addition, please emphasize the reality that not everyone will use the handout to take notes, but that your church has members who will get a lot more out of the sermon if they are given the tools to take notes with. The fill in the blank sheet should have no more than three or four fill in the blanks, however, remind the pastor that they should not forget to include a call to action in addition to the fill in the blanks.

Point 3

Let's do the next point. In the section mention that I included a bible study on the back of the sermon worksheet that we just spoke about. The Bible study should include between 7 and 10 open ended questions, and the last question should always be a call to action so that your members will put feet on what you taught them in the sermon

and from the scriptures. When I created the Bible study, I always have the AI Shuffle the questions randomly so that the first nine questions have Bible study questions in sermon topic questions intermingled. And of course, the last question is always the call to action. Mention that this Bible study can also easily be adapted for use in small groups.

Point 4

Now create the fourth point. In this section give them example prompts for how to create an effective Facebook post that promotes the sermon. Use an example sermon from John 21:1-14 with a title "Big Fish: Seeing Jesus is Your Everyday." the theme of the sermon is that we don't often recognize divine interventions in our day-to-day lives because we're not really looking for them. The call to action for this sermon is to make a list of our interactions with people at the end of the day and reflect on whether or not there were any that may have been Divine interventions that provided us with an opportunity to in some way share our faith. In this section, share a good prompt to create a Facebook post that promotes the sermon that includes a hook, the content, and relative hashtags. Please explain what each of those sections in a Facebook post accomplishes. In addition, remind the reader about the benefits of promoting their sermon in advance.

Conclusion

Excellent. Go ahead and write the conclusion and include a summary of the benefits that the pastor and the congregation will experience as a result of putting this into practice.

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Results



TEXTING FOR CONNECTING

By Kyle Ermoian



IN A TIME when people feel distanced from one another, we as church leaders need to find ways to better connect with the people we serve. Texting is an important way to do that.

Although I no longer pastor a congregation, I still communicate with hundreds of people every week. I send encouraging text messages to pastors and other church leaders weekly, and I am confident they connect.

According to Soprano Design, 85 percent of smartphone users prefer mobile messages to emails or calls. Fifty-five percent ignore marketing emails because they get so many of them. Texting is the preferred method of communication. Most people, 90 percent, open a text within three minutes compared with 20 percent of people who even open an email. Texts have a response rate of 45 percent compared to email's 6 percent. And even more tellingly, people respond to a text message within 90 seconds – by contrast, they respond to emails after 90 minutes, if at all. It amazed me that text messages boast a 98 percent open rate and a 45 percent response rate.

When I pastored my denomination's largest congregation in my state, I used text messaging weekly to inform, encourage, and promote upcoming events for my people to attend.

Here are some ways I used texting in my local church.

First Time Guest Follow Up

I encouraged everyone in the congregation to fill out a Connection Card, a must for effectively following up with visitors and staying up to date with members. We called ours a Welcome Card, and on it we asked for name, phone number, e-mail, and street address as well as any prayer requests. One of the very first contacts with a first-time guest who attended my church was a text message.



Kyle Ermoian is a former church planter and megachurch pastor who offers over forty years of church growth experience to the Effective Church Group as a coach/consultant.

His latest book, *Church Turnaround A to Z* is available at Amazon.com.

The Get More Visitors Checklist

You Can't Grow Your Church If You're Not Getting Visitors



How Our Clients Are Growing Their Churches Quickly and Effectively

I don't want to mislead you. Getting new people to show up to your church takes more than running a Facebook ad and stretching an Everyone's Welcome banner in the church yard. But you CAN get a steady flow of visitors and The Pastor's Get More Visitors Checklist has the tools and tips to make it happen in your church.

The Training Includes

- Networking Your Way to Church Growth
- Marketing Secrets for the Church
- Leveraging Church Events to Hook New Visitors

Click Here Now



I say one of the first contacts after the service because I also count greeting your guests after the service on the way out the door as an important part of the follow-up process. Another post-service Sunday contact was when I or a volunteer would drop off a gift on the porch of a guest that Sunday afternoon. We gave a small plant with a note saying, *"We were glad you worshipped with us today. People are like plants; they need love, care, and nourishment to grow. Come grow with us at Celebration Community Church."* Later that afternoon, we would send a text message with a similar welcoming message, a reminder that there was something on their porch, and if they had mentioned any prayer request, a commitment that our prayer team was made aware of. People often commented positively that they were warmly followed up with even before they went home from church.

At the end of the week, after a combination of handwritten notes, an e-mail highlighting the following Sunday's need meeting message title, and a highlight of upcoming events, I would send out another brief text on Saturday inviting the first-time guest back again to worship on Sunday.

Build a Solid Pastoral Ministry

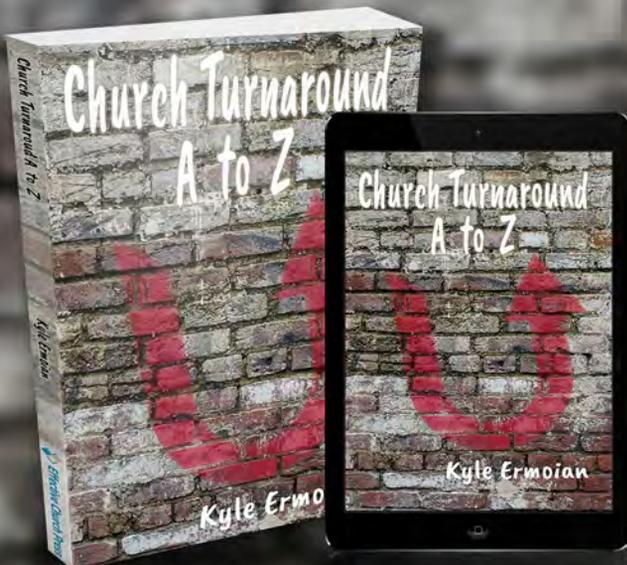
Texting allows ministers or volunteers to respond quickly to the requests made on Sunday morning's Connection Cards. It is also the most efficient way for two-way communication about prayer concerns throughout the week.

Do you need to check in on a member who mentioned a death in their family at the door? Text them. Someone wants to know, "What scripture verse talks about tithing?" (You wish they did) Text them Malachi 3:7-12. Want to wish the Little League Mom or Dad good luck on the big game this Saturday? Text them. Messaging is a great way to send simple, intentional mid-week check-ins and resources and a simple way to reach out to someone who may need to feel heard.

Communicating Updates and Messages

Whether you're pastoring a church of 50 or 500, communicating time-sensitive information to a group of people can be a complex, stressful task. Since 90 percent of people open a text message within three minutes of receiving it, texting is the best choice for large-group communica-

More Than the Basics: Turn Your Church Around Starting Today!



Kyle Ermoian loves the Cubs, Chicago Style Hotdogs, and the local church (not in that order). In fact, for over thirty years he's devoted his life to breathing new life into congregations and helping them to attract, connect, and develop new members. Learn from this effective church planter, pastor, consultant, and coach his valuable and practical methods to turn around your plateaued or declining church.



Available through [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

tion. I have used texting to communicate power outages; time changes due to weather concerns, and significant incidents, like a member needing prayer after an accident. These events can't wait to be communicated, and a message on a member's phone gets the job done.

Texting helps church leaders connect with visitors, cultivate a stronger community within their congregations, and ensure that no one's needs go unaddressed. It is the

most efficient way to stay in touch with your people throughout the week and build strong, lasting relationships from Sunday to Sunday.

There are numerous church texting service providers, some even free.

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By: Bill Tenny-Brittian

Things You Can Do to Help Grow Your Church

Ideas for Everyone In Your Church

BE A FLOWER MISSIONARY

YOU'VE PROBABLY HEARD of Greeting Card Holidays. You know, those holidays that supposedly were created by Hallmark and American Greetings in order to sell more cards. There's Mother's and Father's Days, Grandparent's Day, and even National Greeting Cards Day – to be honest, I seriously wonder about the legitimacy of that last holiday!

Buy you've probably not heard as much about the Flower Holidays. Mother's Day and Valentine's Day top that particular list, but coming up third is Easter and Christmas isn't far behind it.¹ When it comes to showering others with flowers, one of the main differences between Mother's Day and Easter is who gets the flowers. Mom obviously gets the bouquet in May, but when Easter and Christmas roll around the big winner is ... the church!

Every year, churches receive almost 10 million Easter Lilies² and a whopping 35 million poinsettias.³

¹ <https://www.bestfloristreview.com/floral-spending-top-floral-holidays/>

² <https://theproducenews.com/just-how-big-easter-trade-it-ranks-fourth-holiday-floral-sales#:~:text=Despite%20having%20a%20sales%20window,is%20more%20than%2010%20million.>

³ <https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2021/12/poinsettia-how-a-u-s-diplomat-made-a-mexican-flower-an-international-favorite/>

That's a lot of flowers!

Many churches encourage their members to purchase Easter and Christmas flowers in memory of their loved ones, as well as in honor of people they admire. On Easter Sunday, the scent of lilies perfumes the air and during Advent the red and white poinsettias add their cheery blooms to the church's Christmas celebrations.

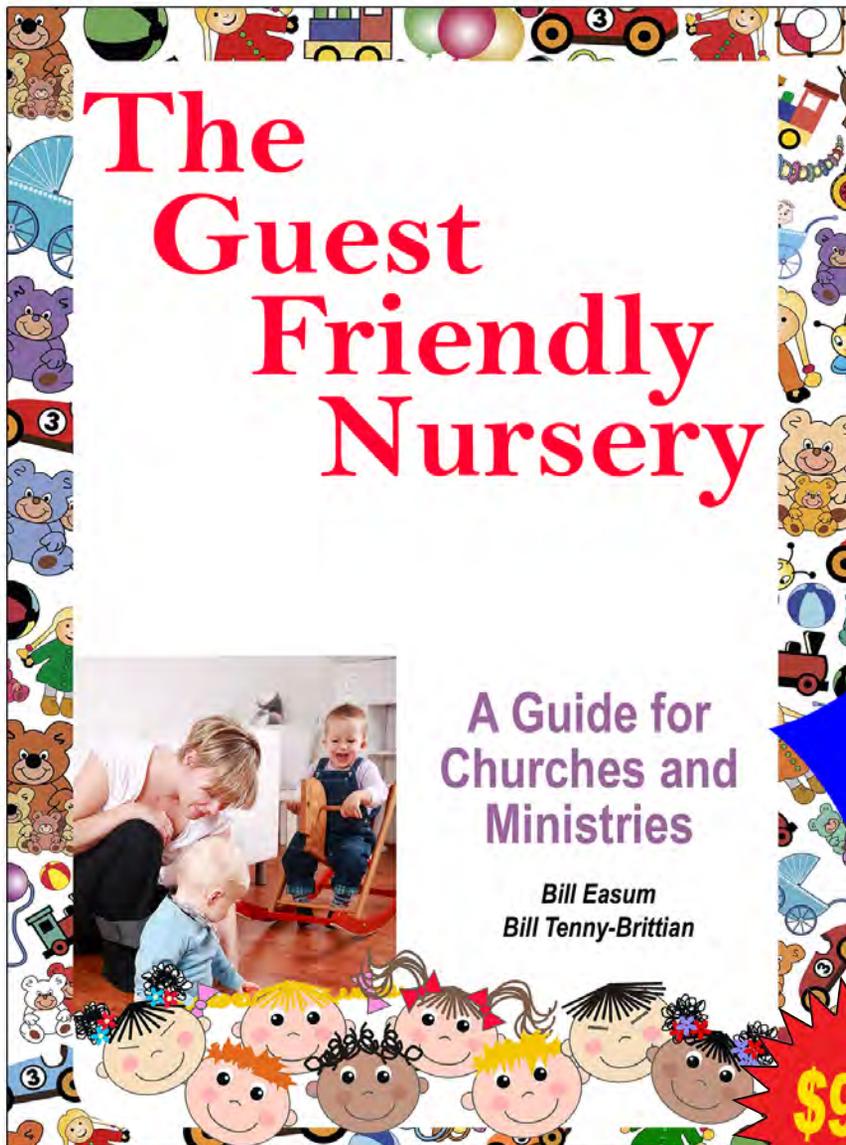
But come Easter Monday and Boxing Day (the day after Christmas), the leftover flowers become a problem in many churches. What to do with all those blooms that no one took home.

And that's where you can come to the rescue and help grow your church all at the same time.

If your church has surplus blooms, you can become a Flower Missionary to your friends, relatives, acquaintances,

101 Things You Can Do to Help Grow Your Church is the first Church Growth Book written exclusively for church members! Between its covers, there are literally 101 things that your members can do to connect with their neighbors and the community to help them find their way into the church. This is one of those books that every church member ought to have in their hands. Available in print and digital formats at Amazon.com





The title says it all!



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tances, neighbors, co-workers, and pretty much everyone else – at least until you run out of potted plants.

But before you drive your truck and trailer to the church to pick up all those extra plants, there are a couple things you should do first to ensure the best possible results.

First off, make sure that the church office is okay with you scooping up all the extra flowers. It would be heartbreaking if a shut-in didn't get the Christmas poinsettia their grand-niece had promised but forgot to pick up on Sunday. This is one of those times when permission is better than forgiveness.

Second, it's nice to drop off flowers with a neighbor, but let's make sure we take Matthew 5:16 seriously and ensure the glory goes in the right direction. At least be sure to include one of your Church Business Cards (Chapter 04), but you can really help the church grow by including an invitation or a flyer to an upcoming event the church is hosting, preferably something your neighbor can relate to. And don't forget, your pastor's upcoming sermon series might be exactly what your neighbor needs.

Finally, if you *really* want to be a neighborhood missionary hero, print out instructions for how to keep the church flowers alive for more than a week or two. Google has plenty of instructions available. However, I've included two sets of instruction that you can use.

Keeping Poinsettias Alive Until Next Christmas

1. Poinsettias don't love heat in the winter. Keep them between 60 – 70 degrees.
2. They **do** love light and need about six hours of indirect sunlight. Grow lights work, but refrain from keeping the lights on all the time.
3. Remove the pretty foil pot cover and put the pot in a watering tray. You can repot it if the industrial plastic pot is too ugly for you.
4. Don't overwater – this is one of the top killers of poinsettias. The soil should never be parched, but don't water the plant until the soil has lost most of its moisture. And don't let the pot sit in a pool of water for more than a few minutes.
5. In March/April prune the poinsettia to about eight inches tall. It will probably look bare, but if you keep up with the above, it'll start growing again soon.

6. You may want to repot your plant into a larger pot before it gets root bound.
7. When the outside temperature is over 60 degrees (day **and** night), put the plant outside in full light. Remember to keep the soil not wet and not dry.
8. Fertilize you poinsettia every two weeks – Miracle Gro works well.
9. If you want the plant to have the beautiful leaves that it had last Christmas (the red/white “flowers” are actually specialty leaves), then you'll have to manage the light.
 - » During the first week of October, the plant must have **at least** fourteen hours of darkness every night. Put it under a box or in a closet.
 - » Your poinsettia also needs between six to eight hours of bright sunlight every day. If you're using artificial light, keep the light and the plant close enough to each other so that bright sunlight is simulated.
 - » Follow the instructions religiously and the plant should be in “full bloom” sometime in November or early December.

Keeping Easter Lilies Alive Until Next Easter

1. Easter lilies don't love heat in the winter. Keep them between 60 – 70 degrees and out of direct sunlight to keep them blooming as long as possible – typically two or three weeks following Easter.
2. At that point, you have a choice to make. You can keep the lily as a house plant, you can plant the lily outdoors, or you can have a lily that blooms next Easter. Each of those choices are mutually exclusive, so choose one.

Keeping You Lily as a House Plant:

- Remove the pretty foil pot cover and put the pot in a watering tray.
- Lilies need moist soil, but the bulbs will rot if the soil is wet. Keep the soil consistently moist, which is to say, don't let the soil dry out.
- Lilies love humidity. You can increase the humidity for the plant by putting pea gravel in the watering tray and keeping a small pool of water in the tray. The water should not be deep enough to reach the

bottom of the pot, though, otherwise the soil will suck up the water and the bulb will rot.

- Remove the blooms when they become wilted or discolored. If you're going to keep the lily past its blooming cycle, lightly fertilize the plant once a week.
- If you keep the plant at 60–70 degrees and out of direct sunlight, the green stems and leaves will remain vibrant until early summer, but then the lily will begin to go dormant. At that point, cut the stems down to about an inch above the ground and stop watering it so the soil will dry.
- When the soil is completely dry, remove the bulb from the soil and store it in a cool place, such as a basement, until fall. It is possible that the bulb might have multiplied. Gently prise the splits apart to use as additional plants next year.
- Replant the bulb in a pot later in the fall and begin the watering and temperature control to enjoy your lily once again.

Plant Your Lily Outdoors:

- Follow the instructions for keeping the lily as a house plant, including the weekly fertilizing – this will help nourish the bulb so it's ready for next year's glory.
- Lilies need well-draining soil that's rich in nutrients and kept moist during the whole spring growing season. They also like a good bit of sun, so choose your growing place wisely.
- Plant the bulb two or three weeks prior to your regions first-frost date. This will let it get a head start on the spring growing season. It's best to plant the bulbs on the deeper side (about four-times the height of the bulb). Lilies are notoriously a leggy plant and

when in full bloom are prone to leaning over. A deeper planting will allow the stem to use the ground for more support. (You may need to stake the plant, though, depending on how tall it gets.)

- Again, keep the soil moist during the growing season and lightly fertilize the lily every week or two.

Force Bloom the Lily for Easter:

- This is the tricky part, but if you'll follow the instructions carefully, you should see good results.
- Again, follow the instructions for keeping the lily as a house plant.
- Once the dried bulb is removed from the soil, keep the bulb in a cool, dark place.
- Math Time! The rest of the process should be started 162 days before Easter.
- Exactly 162 days before Easter, put your lily bulb in a refrigerator that's set at 35–40 degrees. ***Do not let the bulb freeze!***
- Keep the bulb in the fridge for forty-two days and then remove it and plant it in a pot with well aerated soil. According to Musselman Greenhouses in Cashtown, Pennsylvania, keep the potted plant at 63 degrees.⁴
- After four weeks, they lower the temperature to around 57 degrees to force the bloom for Easter Sunday.
- I know that's a lot of work, but there's something pretty awesome about blooming your own lily year after year in celebration of Jesus Christ's resurrection!

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⁴ <https://musselmangreenhouses.com/if-folks-only-knew-what-goes-into-growing-an-easter-lily>





SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION: IS YOUR CHURCH READY?

FEW SITUATIONS ARE more upsetting for a church than when a child and their family come forward with allegations of sexual abuse against a staff member, volunteer, or another child. Your first thought, “How horrible!” may be followed closely by, “How in the world could this have happened at our church?”

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month—an excellent time to look at how your congregation protects children (and adults, too) - from sexual assault. Church Mutual’s 2022 “Risk Radar Report – State of Volunteerism in America” showed discrepancies between what people thought should be happening in their organization and what was actually happening.

In the report, respondents with children expected that 41 percent of organizations checked the sex offender registry before allowing an individual to work with children. In reality, only 16 percent of volunteers surveyed say their organizations had taken this step. Similarly, they expected that 36 percent of organizations provided sexual abuse training and reported sexual abuse, while only 13 percent of volunteers received that training.

So, what about your church? Are you taking active steps to prevent sexual abuse from happening in your congregation? Here are eight thoughts you may not have considered:

You should provide supervision and oversight at all times.

Never leave a child alone in a room with a non-related adult. Some organizations, such as Scouts BSA (formerly Boy Scouts of America), have a “two-deep leadership” requirement, meaning there always needs to be at least two adults with one or more children.

There may be unavoidable circumstances that prevent you from having more than one adult available, but there should be at least three children in those situations. This policy protects the children from potentially abusive situations and the adults from misconduct allegations.

Children need as much protection in the digital world as they do in person.

When the world shut down four years ago because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Christian education efforts went online, and teachers began to connect with their students via videoconferencing. However, sexual abuse

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CM0539 (03-2021)

can happen even when the perpetrator is not in the same room as the child. “Grooming” occurs when someone builds a relationship with a child so they can exploit them—and this is just as likely online.

To avoid this, never allow an adult to be alone with a child in an online chat room. Similarly, adults should not text a child or teenager without copying another adult on that exchange.

You should use more than just background checks to screen staff members and volunteers.

According to David Finkelhor, director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center, less than 10 percent of sexual offenders are ever criminally prosecuted. This means more than 90 percent of offenders have no criminal record to check.

While background checks are vital for all staff members and volunteers, you can also take other steps to protect children. Before someone who will be working with children comes on board, ask them to provide references who can give you a sense of their character and request they

participate in an interview with several individuals in your church.

Sexual abuse awareness training is a must for any adult in your church who works with children.

A key part of this type of training is knowing and understanding the grooming process—the steps a sex offender takes to prepare a child for inappropriate sexual conduct. Those steps include:

- **Gaining access** – They get other volunteers and staff members to trust them by appearing kind and helpful. They also may seek to communicate with the child both online and offline.
- **Selecting a child** – An abuser may seek out a child who is on the fringes—perhaps one from a single-parent home who is looking for extra attention.
- **Introducing nudity and sexual touch** – They may “playfully” touch the child and make jokes about sexual topics.
- **Keeping the victim silent** – The child may feel like they need to keep everything about their rela-



“You could shave five minutes off your sermon by removing all the sports metaphors.”

tionships with this adult secretive, possibly feeling shame or embarrassment.

You need adults in your congregation to know what to look for—and, most importantly, to know whom they should tell when they notice something is not right. Your congregation should have at least one mandated reporter whose job is to report child abuse to the police.

Don't be afraid to talk openly about needing to prevent child sexual abuse in your congregation.

Some people think talking about preventing child sexual abuse insinuates children are not safe in their congregation. In actuality, the more you talk about it, the safer children are. A church that stays silent about sexual abuse issues is more likely to cover up any incident that happens.

When you are providing training for adults who work with children, you will be discussing scenarios that may be uncomfortable for some people. That's okay—it's better to be uncomfortable now at the *idea* of sexual abuse than to be reacting to it after the fact.

Remember, *any* child is at risk of sexual abuse from *any* adult, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation.

Because of high-profile sexual abuse situations in the past few years, some people are under the mistaken impression adults in the LGBTQ+ community are more likely than straight adults to abuse children. In reality, sexual abuse has nothing to do with sexual orientation and everything to do with power. It is certainly possible for a heterosexual adult to abuse a child of the same gender simply because the opportunity has presented itself.

While the majority of perpetrators of child sexual abuse are reported to be male, females are reported to be the of-

fenders in 9 percent of sexual abuse cases, according to data from RAINN.

Even though girls are more likely to be sexually abused than boys, both genders are still very much at risk—and need to be protected equally.

It doesn't matter how "good" of a neighborhood your church is in—children need every measure of protection you can give them.

Adults who abuse children come from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds, races, and educational experiences. Abusers are often loved and respected by their communities and can target children in many different situations.

Create policies that detail all your steps to protect children and adults in writing.

While it's essential that your congregation discusses best practices for preventing sexual abuse, those practices need to be in writing to be truly effective. What's more, those policies should be available to everyone in your congregation, not just those who work with children. You need to be upfront about everything you are doing to prevent sexual abuse and have the documents to prove it should something go wrong.

Make a point of talking to your church's insurance company about the details of your sexual abuse coverage. Despite copious training and measures to protect children, situations can still happen, and you need a backup plan.

Your congregation's members will feel better about your planning if you can show them your organization's steps to protect their children.

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BOOST YOUR IMPACT: ESSENTIAL LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

AS WE LOOK ahead to the rest of the calendar year, it's important to consider how to make a bigger impact. Below are five helpful resources to help you unlock your full potential in 2024. These resources are designed to help you succeed. Get ready to take your efforts to the next level!

Transform Ministry Impact with an Integrated Funding Strategy

<https://resources.horizons.net/ifs>

An integrated funding strategy combines various funding streams and approaches to create a sustainable and diversified financial foundation. Instead of relying solely on traditional methods, such as donations, an integrated funding strategy aims to leverage multiple sources of income and innovative approaches to your mission and impact.

Discover Your Generosity Playbook

<https://resources.horizons.net/generosity-playbook>

Are you ready to tap into the transformative power of generosity? Look no further than The Generosity Playbook—a practical, actionable guide that will help you unlock the full potential of giving. With this playbook in hand, you'll gain valuable insights and strategies to make your giving initiatives more impactful and meaningful. Discover how generosity can create positive change and inspire others to join your cause.

Ensure Success with Pre-Campaign Planning

https://resources.horizons.net/pre-campaign_planning

Before you take on your next project, do the work necessary to ensure it is successful. Take the guesswork out of meeting ministry goals, minimizing risks, and maximizing potential outcomes. With an intentional approach, you can utilize a disciplined and structured approach to planning to maximize your return on impact.

Measure Effectiveness and Elevate Your Impact

<https://www.horizons.net/analytics>

Experience the joy of knowing you're making a difference. Evaluating the effectiveness of your ministry is crucial for identifying what's working well and what needs improvement. Setting clear goals and tracking progress allows you to make informed decisions, resulting in improved outcomes and greater returns on the resources you invest, both in terms of people and finances.

Monetize Your Assets [Video Series]

<https://resources.horizons.net/monetize-your-assets-webinars>

Discover how to turn your assets into a sustainable income stream. This video series is specifically designed for church and faith-based nonprofit leaders who want to

evaluate if they can generate more funds for their organizations by leveraging their organizational assets.

fundraisers, trained ministry strategists, and certified coaches are here to help you every step of the way.

Horizons Is Here to Support You

We are here to support you and share best practices aligning with your unique goals. Our team of experienced

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Parting Shot

With Scott Musselman

TECHNOLOGY MINISTRY

ARE YOU OLD? Do you remember a time when churches advertised in the yellow pages? Those were good days! Want to promote your congregation? Do a yearly update to your Yellow Pages ad. Boom! Done until next year.

Amazingly, our church still receives a Yellow Pages for local businesses. I take a moment to gaze upon it fondly and reminisce in wonder. Then it goes straight into recycling.

We used to think about church promotion as something of an extra because it was a build it and they will come expectation. Maybe you know the saying (look it up on Google) you recite along with finger movements. “Here’s the church. Here’s the steeple. Open the doors and see all the people.”

What a different day it is. We literally have to listen to Jesus today and “GO” make disciples. We have two primary vehicles for a foundation of church promotion at this time. Your website is first where you let people know information about you. Then, you let people experience a glimpse of who you are via video.

I am nearing retirement. It is a curious passage point to being almost a normal human and church shopping. I would not consider attending a church without being convinced by those two pieces.

Now, they don’t have to be television-quality, and they don’t have to compete with Joel Osteen’s church. (Quick. What really is the name of that church?) But they do have to look like you care.

The website needs to be up-to-date. It can’t be promoting the chili supper six months ago. It needs to show people presumably having a joyous encounter. If you must, you can put one small photo of your building on something other than the homepage. Contemporary people don’t care what your building looks like (as long as it is well-maintained).

My assumption is that people are yearning for two – and only two – opportunities from church. They want to experience the presence of God, and they desire profound relationships. How does your website show that?

Maybe you, as the pastor, don’t have those skills – you shouldn’t be in charge of the website anyway. So go looking in the congregation. You know, the younger the person likely the better. Still no luck? There are plenty of great ministries who will steward your website. If you can’t find one, contact me. My church has a contract with an inexpensive, wonderful group of people who allow our leaders to focus on other things.

Okay, are you old enough to remember the pandemic? I’m betting the answer is yes. It changed many things. One grand impact is the role of online video. No matter how small your church is, you simply must have an online presence. It is great for your members who are on vacation or can’t physically attend. But it is absolutely essential for prospective visitors.

I am a professional Christian. People pay me to be a faithful follower of Jesus. But even I don’t trust what you people may do when I enter your church building and you close the doors behind me.

In these post-pandemic times, most people are going to want to see some video evidence of what your ministry – particularly your worship – looks like. That is likely more difficult than the website. Online presentation with a church budget is fraught with potential hazards.

The computer may freeze up. The internet may go down. Updates to software may make your current equipment obsolete. And then you need quality people who will devote themselves to making this AV ministry work. They have to sacrifice a bit of their own worship in order to best usher others into the presence of God.

I don't think you ever "arrive" with your online/AV ministry. It is continually in need of attention. So put some dollars and your best people in this arena. You as a pastor are not responsible for the details. But you as pastor are responsible for making sure the details are attended to.

So, make sure you watch your online ministry every week. How is the quality of the audio and video? Do the audio and video match? Or do you have people's mouths moving at different times than the sound indicates? Is there a break in the video? Are we making good choices in camera usage? Are we publishing the words to the songs so that online people can really worship?

You are only mildly competing with Joel Osteen—he looks and talks good—but sadly, you are very much competing with the church across the street. God has blessed you with a unique ministry. Make sure your technology ministry provides a smooth path for those whom God desires to be part of your faith community.

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to vision fulfilled*



Everyone has a vision, but it seems that few know how to achieve their dreams. Bill Easum and Scott Musselman walk you through the process to make your church vision a reality.

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