



## EQUIPPING LEADERS FOR MISSIONAL OUTREACH

### Lessons from the business community... “...good is the enemy of great...”

*“Wishing” is the longing of  
a wistful heart yearning for  
what is not.*

*“Hoping” is the gracious  
hand of a loving God  
reaching back from the  
future.*

*We live in “hope” not in  
wistfulness!*

You’ve heard me talk about him before. The author of the above quote is Jim Collins. He writes this as the opening line in his book, *Good to Great, Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don’t*. In fact, it’s the title of his first chapter. Following these words, he goes on to say, essentially, the reason we don’t have great schools, or great government, or great companies, or even very many people who live great lives is because we settle for second best...just being good rather than great.

I wish Collins did not stop where he did. He could

have gone on to say that’s why we don’t have great churches as well. But I believe that was assumed in the whole concept. We do have good churches around. And that’s not bad, that’s good. But its not great, either.

Its easy to settle for second best when we believe we’re on our way and have already done the best we can. Its easier to accept the good life than it is to continue the work and strive for the great life.

Now, it would be easy to say that “I’m doing the best I can!” and leave it go at that. And there are lots of justifications that would

allow one to make that kind of observation and be perfectly correct. There’s only one little difficulty with that. Your plan may be to be good. But Jeremiah reminds us of something else. Smack dab in the middle of what would be one of the worst times in Israel’s life, Jeremiah pipes up and says, *“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”* Here’s the thing about understanding God’s “future and a hope.” Its not about “besting” anyone else. Its about being what God wants you to be.

### Level 5 leadership is not what its cracked up to be

One of the first lessons that Collins and his research team learned was that great leaders... *are more like Lincoln and Socrates than Patton or Caesar*. Hmmm, now there’s a startling insight! Turns out that high-profile leaders with big personalities who make headlines and become celebrities don’t provide much in the way of sustainable progress toward greatness for any company (think Lee Iacocca). Somehow, speaking personally, this is

strangely reassuring...and troubling at the same time.

The research showed that self-effacing, quiet, reserved, even shy leaders who led companies to being great were a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will. Suddenly, nearly all of us are back in the ball game. Seems to me Jeremiah speaks once again...*“I knew you before I formed you in your mother’s womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my spokesman to the*

*world”* (Jer. 1). Uh-oh! So, you are where you are thanks to God; and you’re where you are in order to make a difference in the world! At least that’s what God thinks! What Collins identified as a key component of great leaders is an ability to turn ego needs away from themselves in the larger goal of building a great company. So, translation: Its not about besting anyone else. Its about following God’s call. Its about knowing that you make a difference in the world.

## Right people on the bus...in the right seats...

This next item might seem a bit confusing at first. Collins points out that he expected to discover that a new vision and strategy for the great companies was the first step in moving them forward. He discovered something different.

What he heard was that it was about getting the right people on the bus and in the right seats and then they figured out where to drive it. Ohhh, I hate it when that happens; when something seems to negate a basic principle that I know is important — vision! However, think about this a bit with me. What Collins is really talking about here is identifying people's gifts and then allowing those gifts to

shape the direction and focus of the company. I know, its not as simple as that on the surface.

On the other hand, this is beginning to sound an awful lot like Gift-based Ministry from Natural Church Development (NCD). When we pay attention to this, we remember that *"God has given gifts to each of you from [God's] great variety of spiritual gifts. Manage them well so that God's generosity can flow through you"* (1 Pet. 4).

What would ministry look like if we worked out of the gifts that God has given us as a ministry? Stop to think(!), how would that be different than what it is you are trying to do now by putting "warm

bodies" in to previously identified spots just because that's the way we've always done it?

Quite honestly, this is a real challenge for us as Lutherans. We depend on the Church Council to do certain kinds of business each month and most councils are arranged around a given committee structure that seems indispensable. But suppose the structure wasn't the ministry but the people were. Suppose the people bring spiritual gifts and passion that grow out of their life experience. Suppose ministry in your place grew out of those gifts and passion. How would that make the witness of the congregation *in the world* be different?!?



*"...know your context, take stock of the world (reality), act to engage it..."*

## Take clear stock of reality...know your context...

One of my earliest memories in growing up is of the A&P grocery store in town. The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company was the largest retailing organization in the world in the early 1950's. Kroger, on the other hand, was barely noticeable. Then, in the 1960's, A&P began to falter while Kroger began to plan for the future. For a while they were about equal. Then, over the next 25 years, Kroger generated cumulative returns 10 times the stock market and 80 times better than A&P. Uh-oh, here it comes again....

According to Collins, here's what's interesting. Both companies were old companies in the 1950's and 60's. They were both traditional in their approach to the grocery business. They both could see the world was changing around them. Unfortunately, they both encountered that

reality differently.

A&P and Kroger both built expensive "test" stores to try out new concepts for the grocery business. A&P's store was called The Golden Key. At the same time, Kroger was also dealing with the beginnings of the superstore concept. Now, surprisingly, both store chains came to the same conclusion: as the times were changing, the way people were now going to expect to shop would be influenced by their ability to do more in one location rather than run from one type store to another. So, people wanted drugs, banking, eye glasses, videos, etc. at the same place they purchased food.

Surprisingly, A&P took this information and ignored it. Kroger acted on it and it became the leading grocery store chain in the US by 1999.

Now, let's see, remember the tribe of Issachar in 2 Chronicles? David is gathering around him an army to replace the mentally ill Saul. Each of the 12 tribes of Israel sends him warriors in the thousands and tens of thousands....except Issachar. They send 200 *leaders*! Everyone else sent 336,900 warriors! This is more than twice the number of soldiers we have in Iraq at the moment. What's the point? The 200 that came from the tribe of Issachar were *"all men who understood the temper of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take"* (2 Chron. 12). Oh, yes; know your context, take stock of the world (reality), act to engage it.

OK, no more ostrich syndrome please! What's your context?! How will that shape your ministry in the world?

## What are you? A Hedgehog or a Fox?

Do you remember this little parable by Isaiah Berlin? He based it on the Greek truism, "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog (think porcupine!) knows one big thing." The short summary of the story is that the fox is a cunning creature able to devise a large number of complex strategies for sneak attacks on the hedgehog. Day after day, the fox devises a variety of plans to ambush the hedgehog. The hedgehog knows only one thing well. The fox plans carefully, executes his attack, and bounds toward the hedgehog. The hedgehog, who is slow and dowdy by nature says, "Here we go again!" and promptly rolls up into a perfect little ball, spikes pointing outward in all directions. The fox, seeing the defense, stops short, retreats, and begins planning a different kind of attack for the next encounter. The moral of the story? Foxes pursue many ends at the same time and see the world in all its complexity.

### "P" words....

One image that Collins uses in his book to describe how change happens in a company is to visualize a huge flywheel. He says it should be about 30 feet in diameter, 2 feet thick, and weighing 5,000 pounds. Now, how do you get that sucker moving? There is such mass present in this thing that it takes all the energy and effort you can muster to make it inch forward. After two or three hours(!) of pushing, you might get it to make one full rotation. With persistent ef-

Foxes think they have to engage that complexity on all levels and spend lots of time trying to do that. The difficulty is that they never integrate their thinking into one over all concept or unifying vision. (You knew we'd get to this sooner or later, didn't you!)

The hedgehog, on the other hand, recognizes the complexity of the world and is able to simplify it into a single organizing idea or concept that unifies and guides everything. For the hedgehog, anything that does not somehow relate to that simple idea or unifying concept holds no relevance.

Now, think about vision and the power of vision. You have read, here, before that a ministry ought to have a vision/purpose statement that is no longer than 12 words after the word "is." And, it ought to be phrased in such a way that an 8 year old can repeat it when asked. Here's an example from one ministry I

fort, however, it begins to move a bit faster. The thing about flywheels is that they come to a point where their own mass becomes an aid in helping to move them. But getting them going is a bear.

The thing about good-to-great transformations (Oh, the "T" word, sorry!) is that no matter how dramatic the end result, nothing ever happens in one significant event. Getting to great is the result of persistent, intentional, small, focused, individual actions that cumulatively

have known: "The purpose of Good News Lutheran Church is to be 'A People of Good News with Good News for you.'" Or, the purpose of [insert the name of any church here] is "Sharing Christ, Changing Lives."

Here's an interesting thought. Do you have a personal biblical vision text for yourself? It took me a while to realize the value of this, but when I did, "...do justice,...love kindness,...walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6) became mine.

Collins' example of this at work is Walgreens. He says, "In a world overrun by management faddists, brilliant visionaries, ranting futurists, fearmongers, motivational gurus, and all the rest, its refreshing to see a company succeed...by taking one simple concept..." (p. 93). Eckerd's didn't get it. What happened to them? CVS now owns them. What is your unified vision in your ministry?

build up to an outstanding result. Patience is a virtue. So is Persistence. Both are required as a part of who we are as leaders working in our own way to bring the awareness of God's reign into our world. Remember the parable of the Persistent Widow (Lk 18). Remember the Patience of Job and the Patience to which we are called as we long for the dawning of the light of world. There is a lot of similarity between these two concepts. Live them in your ministry in the world.



*Patience and  
persistence are  
different sides  
of the same  
coin.*



EQUIPPING LEADERS  
FOR MISSIONAL  
OUTREACH

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### Texas Center for Mission

Purpose statement:

*"...do justice...love kindness...walk humbly with your God."*

Micah 6.8

Solicitation is sought for additional articles to be included in this publication. Submissions to this newsletter will be considered when they follow the above purpose statement as well as the Great Commission and Great Commandment.

Please submit requests for inclusion in this publication to

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Mission Director for the Northern Texas/Northern Louisiana Synod  
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## Finally, a word about technology...

In our world today, there is a fascination with the latest and the greatest gadgets electronic and otherwise. Someone close to me is beginning to learn how to use one of the new multi-endowed cell phones that includes a PDA with calendar, word processor, excel spreadsheet, and lots of other bells and whistles. Now, this is not a harangue against anything like this. I enjoy technology as much as the next person might. I even use it.

The thing that Collins discovered was that sometimes the technology can overcome the message. He contrasted Nucor Steel with Bethlehem Steel. Nucor was a steel company with an office suite that was as large as a moderate-sized dental office. Bethlehem, on the other hand,

built a state of the art 21 story office complex with an expensive design that gave ALL the executives a corner office. Of course, we know what happened...Bethlehem who?

The more technology we have, the more tempted we are to rely on it as the thing that will make the difference. Collins suggests that, while we all have "to do" lists that we keep in a variety of ways, we also need to have "stop doing" lists as well.

Another way to think about this is to be aware that Jesus also had to contend with people who wanted to get wrapped up in the wrong things, or at best, the distracting things. Jesus said to Martha, *"...there is really only one thing worth being concerned about..."* We know what

that one thing is. It is Jesus. Collins' observation is that technology has some gifts it can bring to us and to our world, but it isn't the answer. Eckerd's Drugs jumped on technology and tried to use it in a big way. They didn't grasp the appropriate use for them, however. Walgreens studied it a long time and then introduced a plan to "nationalize" prescriptions. You can walk in any Walgreens in the country and get your prescription refilled.

Well, enough! I hope this has been a helpful digression into insights from the world of "great." We are called by God, blessed with gifts, discover our passions, and led into the mission field in the world... what are you waiting for?!