

# God, Grant me Success!

By Pastor Mike Ramsdell

## Growing a Church

*In 1995, I was asked to be the pastor of First United Methodist Church of Mansfield, Texas. Gene Robertson, my DS, gave me the call under the authority of Bishop Joe Wilson. He apologized, the appointment he wanted for me fell through. First Methodist Mansfield was what was left. It had fallen into turmoil the previous year, losing members and money. The six months before my wife and I arrived, the attendance was 383 if my memory serves me. It had dropped from a high of 500 two years before. When I was asked to be the DS of the North District in July 2016, the average worship attendance at Mansfield had risen to 2,550, one of the top 25 attended Methodist churches in the nation. It was one of only five mega churches in the United Methodist Church that had an average of 10% growth over the three previous 10 years. In my time there, we built 500 parking places, a new sanctuary, a 600-seat sanctuary expansion, the addition of a large foyer and narthex, a large educational and activity building, a two-phase mission center and created four separate worship spaces that are all used multiple times every week. Our staffing went from a handful to over 100. We went from one broken computer to one everywhere. Emails, websites, social media, contemporary worship, cell phones were all yet to be. When I left, I handed this great church off to David Alexander who had been with us for 13 years. One of his first challenges was to buy four acres across the street for future growth and to consolidate the vision into which he would lead. He is doing a great job, and he sure knows far more than I did 21 years before. Things are going better than ever in almost every metric.*

*When I stepped into my little office in Mansfield in 1995, I had served three other appointments. I had learned to preach, be a good pastor, raise a little money and keep as many people liking me as possible. I had not learned much else. What I knew in my first three appointments had been enough. It was not enough in this new place. It is not enough in hardly any church in the religious chaos and competition of 2016. I would have to learn to lead, vision, build and stretch every God-given fiber I had. I would have to learn, grow, adapt, innovate and resource myself for the next 21 years, or I would fail. I would live through many sleepless nights. I read hundreds of books, went to uncountable seminars, symposiums, institutes and workshops, talked to other pastors in every size church, but especially bigger than the one I was in, learned, relearned, succeeded, failed, didn't quit, though there were days I wanted to. And, God was with me. God was my ultimate resource. And, God was faithful.*

*In this writing, I want to share a few of the things I learned that might help you, beginning with a solid biblical foundation from the Bible book of Nehemiah. Learning how to be a Christian leader happens first in this book, the Bible. God did not give us leaders as examples if we did not need them: Nehemiah, David, Moses, Deborah, Joseph, Priscilla, Paul and, of course, Jesus. I wasn't a leader when I went to Mansfield. I had not had to be. But I would become one.*

*The following process, and it has steps, is designed to help us discover a "vision" for us and for the church or ministry we lead. It is a unique partnership with the story of Nehemiah (The Wall Builder) and the story of the church we lead and want to build. If you are serious about discovering a vision that can drive your future and help you lead your church or ministry to the next level — the alignment of our faith and spiritual life, the structure and people of our church, the budget and spaces a church has, the community the church or ministry is in and what we do next, including the critical execution and follow-through — I believe this spiritual planning process could be an answer for you. Few do it, and few do it well. I hope you will. God grant us success! Psalm 118:25*

## Growth Steps for the Leader

If you are looking at a significant vision, beginning a comprehensive plan for making disciples, preparing the journey to a building project, refocusing your church toward a serious growth phase around the metrics of worship attendance, professions of faith and budget growth, or your church is in need of a basic cultural change from being inward-focused to outward-focused, it always begins with the leader. So, I recommend you find some time to focus yourself — in prayer, connecting with God, rethinking your mission and ministry — and prepare to lead the leaders in your church and your church to the vision God has placed on your heart. Please understand the importance of a "holy focus" and refocus. Don't do this alone, do it with God. God has an investment in you and your church or ministry. Involve God, please. Find a place to pray, worship and read — serious time (a week or more). This can change your life and your church and impact the congregation and community you relate to for years to come. Here are a few thoughts that have been

helpful to me and will hopefully be to you based on one of the foundational books of the Bible for building and creating something new, *Nehemiah*.

## **Nehemiah: “Arise and Build”**

Nehemiah was living a very comfortable life, managing and maintaining his role as the cupbearer to the king of Persia. Here he had been born into captivity along with many of the Hebrew people. He was one of the successful ones rising to a very high position working directly for the king. Life was defined and good. Then he receives a message from Hanani, a Jewish brother who had recently traveled to Jerusalem and Judea. He gives a report of the desperate situation there, where Jerusalem is in distress, poverty, and the walls around the city had been broken down and the gates burned. This was the Promised Land, a place the Hebrews hoped to return to one day.

The journey to rebuild and build must begin with a “reality” check. Sometimes this is the hardest thing for us to see. Our instinct is to avoid anxiety and experience comfort so it is easy to live in denial of what is really happening, what really is. When we check out the metrics of our church, look at the giving, worship attendance, professions of faith, growth projections, etc. What do we really see? The leader must do this, it is our responsibility, our job and even our calling — why God has placed us where we are. I think sometimes we just hope next Sunday everything will be better — the offering, the attendance, even the spirit. That is not how it works; God calls someone to lead the church to that “better.”

Nehemiah takes a look at reality. It is worse than he imagined. When he does, he realizes he has to do something about the condition of his city, Jerusalem. After all, he is the leader. Are you the leader?

### **How does Nehemiah respond to the crisis as a Godly leader?**

1. Nehemiah was passionate and engaged. This was personal. He identified with everyone who was involved in this — his people, his nation, his city.
2. Nehemiah prayed, mourned, fasted, prayed for days. This was serious business.
3. Nehemiah accepts responsibility for Jerusalem, Judea and the rebuilding of the city. He makes no excuses, does not put it on someone else, sees the rebuilding as an honor, I get to, God has called me, let's go.
4. Nehemiah asks God for success. He was specific. It is okay to ask God for success in the metrics of being a Vital Congregation.

***What are you passionate about?***

***Do you foster a relationship with God that allows you to discover his will for your church, your ministry?***

***Are you willing to pray for hours, days, even fast for the success of your church, your ministry?***

***Are you willing to sacrifice and risk for the rebuilding or building of a wall, a church, a ministry or maybe yourself?***

Nehemiah, as he prays fervently, asks the king if he can go to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. He knows he is taking a risk. He knows this will call for great sacrifice. He knows he is giving up life as he knows it for an unknown life. He then travels to Judea, examines the city and walls, sees the critical need and identifies what needs to be done. The city is in devastation and ruin. He is mortified by what he sees. He is determined to succeed in this endeavor. He accepts the challenge. It is his to do.

### **What are the decisions that Nehemiah begins to make as he accepts this challenge?**

1. Nehemiah does not wait for a miracle, for God or someone else to do it. Some will tell you why something can't be done. A leader will tell you how they are going to do it. Nehemiah gives the king his request immediately and steps out. He knows God will be with him.
2. Nehemiah organizes the trip, gathers resources and people and then travels to Jerusalem. He uses the gifts God had already given by visioning, planning, organizing and doing.

3. Nehemiah inspects the wall and gates, gathers information he needs to make the dream happen. Here God puts fully in his heart and mind what to do to restore Jerusalem. Nehemiah proclaims, **“Let us rise and build!”**

***What is the goal, the vision, the hoped-for success God has or is giving you?***

***What might be the first step you need to take, where are the resources, what will it take to get off of square one?***

***As you inspect the circumstances, get a clear picture of reality, what needs to happen, what needs to change, what needs to be rebuilt what needs to be built.***

***Who do you need help from, permission from, support from?***

***Are you ready to move forward? Then write out the dream or goal as a prayer and begin to pray consistently. Invite others to join you in the prayer.***

As Nehemiah begins to build the wall, he is hit with serious opposition. Some opponents are residents of the city he is hoping to help; some are the leaders who already are running the show. It is also a very difficult job to do, more difficult than he had imagined. It will take many people, a great deal of money and months of work, all while facing threats, both of ridicule and even physical. He could lose everything, even his life. But time and time again, Nehemiah encourages the people, prays and reminds himself and others that God is with them in this plan, and God will grant them success. They pray, work, set up guards, work some more, pray some more and continue to organize, strategize and work to keep this amazing project going.

***How is Nehemiah able to keep this project going during the hardest time, the time after the vision is cast and before the vision is completed, the time when most people quit?***

1. Nehemiah goes back, again and again, reminding himself that God began this vision.
2. Nehemiah keeps himself together when times get tough through prayer and worship, in community and in private.
3. Nehemiah does not let naysayers, the opposition or the hard days influence him. He knows how to sort the voice of God from the noise and chaos around him.
4. Nehemiah continues to reorganize, adapt and change as circumstances require.

***What in your prayer life might need to change?***

***What opposition might you expect moving this vision forward?***

***What kind of team can you build who can support you, each other, and keep the vision moving forward even if things get difficult, which they probably will?***

***Is there anything in your life and heart that needs to change before you begin the hard work that always comes with vision casting, doing, leading change and building a vital church, leading up to the next level?***

Nehemiah finished the task. He did not give up or quit. He knew about the follow-through. It is always about the follow-through. The work of the church is about faith, and faith is about courage.

*The next group of ideas is more about the practical, what we do, the process, how we do it and to the eventual outcome of typically leaving a personal plateau and often the church plateau to the next level of growth. This is difficult; we typically maintain what is. Again, Nehemiah’s story is the biblical parallel.*

**Steps to Growth: Vital Congregations Making Disciples for the Transformation of the World, Growing the Church**

## **Discovering the Truth or Abandoning Denial**

Nehemiah listened and learned of the truth of the situation in Jerusalem, the disrepair of the wall, the desperate circumstances of the people and the decline of the city. It would have been easier to ignore this or avoid at all costs this reality. It would have been easier and why we so often decide to avoid examining in detail this reality.

## **Connecting to God, or Have We Tried Prayer?**

Trying to changing churches, trying to change ourselves without prayer usually fails.

He prayed; he had others pray with him; he opened his heart to something new; he opened his heart to God.

## **Leaving the Old for the New**

Nehemiah was willing to change. He had a good comfortable gig as cupbearer. We lean toward comfort and avoid sacrifice. Nehemiah was ready to give that up, to sacrifice, to literally go where God was calling him, to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem, to rebuild Jerusalem, to bring people back from captivity, to restore a nation to the promise God had made to it long ago. He would learn as he went. We seldom find success by what we have learned, but by what we are learning.

## **Gathering the Resources**

He gathered the resources, the people, the permission he needed to succeed before he began. He got permission from the king, he found those who would go with him, he found financial and support resources, he planned the timing and the season for the journey, he organized his crew, his camels, his cash, all before he began. He was ready, and even though this was a new adventure for him, he did the due diligence for this new vision.

He knew he would face some opposition, and he did. He prepared to protect the vision from those around who might attack it. He followed through. He did not give up; he executed.

To expand the life and mission of a church with the foundational goal of living life as a Vital Congregation (growing the church metrics) is one of the most difficult things that can be done. Many churches are in either stable decline, stagnate and comfortable or in need of a turnaround. Others are simply on the edge of hospice. There are a few lucky congregations that are growing but need to be concerned about the ways to keep growth growing, knowing that in today's culture, ongoing growth calls for ongoing effort, or success becomes managing success instead of leading growth. In a world of unbelievable and growing competition — constant cultural and generational change, sometimes an anti-denomination bias and the free-for-all of a post-Christian or postmodern world — the church is harder and harder to make work. But it is still ours to do.

Consider the vision, goals, strategy and accountability of a plan — process, schematic, budget, staffing, strategy etc. of a growth movement to expand as a Vital Congregation. This is much like doing a building program. (Nehemiah was going to build a wall and then a city.) We often build ministries, churches and communities. But we are still building something tangible and real.

***You need to get spiritually grounded, connect with Christ and resource your soul.***

***You need clarity of the vision. The what and why of the building. The vision must be clear and measurable.***

***You need to gather influencers, leaders, supporters, financial resources.***

***You need to calendar the schedule, fundraising, capital campaign, groundbreaking, meetings, sermon series, small groups, town hall meetings, building stages, length of process, move in, of the vision.***

What exactly is your vision? What is a disciple? What are you trying to accomplish? Who are you trying to reach? How big are you wanting to get, in what worship service, what class, what activity, what mission and ministry? The Vital

Congregations metrics are about “worship attendance,” “professions of faith,” “giving” and to a lesser degree about mission giving and small groups, though these often integrate together.

In the implementation of a vision — mission, goals, the strategy and accountability to grow a church — the leader needs to identify and bring together the influencers and other leaders who can help make it happen or who might stop it from happening if they are not on board. People don’t like change unless it is their idea, or at least they are on the inside of the development of the idea (being a growing Vital Congregation). This due diligence can take months, a year or even longer depending on the size of the vision or the stagnation and basic culture of the church. Often the entire culture of the church has to change. This takes time.

Thom S. Rainer in *Who Moved My Pulpit – Leading Change in the Church* suggests we process change in a church like this:

- Stop and Pray: The crucial, foundational issue is often neglected.
- Confront and Communicate a Sense of Urgency: Face and share the brutal facts.
- Build an Eager Coalition: Unite those who are already ready to move forward.
- Become a Voice of Vision and Hope: Members follow positive leaders.
- Deal with People Issues: Have the courage to handle blocks from staff and church people.
- Move from an Inward Focus to an Outward Focus: Steadily change the culture.
- Pick Low-Hanging Fruit: Celebrate the victories to sustain momentum.
- Implement and Consolidate Change

*Following I have some practical ideas that might be helpful. When it came time for Nehemiah to build the wall and implement the vision, there came the rock-carrying time, the mortar-mixing time, the actual concrete execution of building a real wall that would create a new future.*

**Some of the pieces:**

## **A Spiritual Core**

This is something I have become aware of more and more. The church that I served for 21 years that grew from 383 to 2550 had a spiritual core, a core I and others worked hard to instill in this amazing church family. Without that faith or spiritual core, it would not have continued to grow. A crisis here and there, and we had many, would have derailed it. They would not have given to the multiple capital funding campaigns required to build so many buildings, the budget that undergirded the life and mission, the million dollars or more given to worldwide mission. They would not have taken on the challenges, put up with the changes, embraced the mission, “the vision,” without that core. They might not have even put up with me for so long without that. Preach Jesus. Invite prayer. Talk about faith. Center in Christ. Hold a Bible up. After all, it’s not really you they are following! We know without a spiritual core we will fail. So will the church!

## **Preaching**

People follow the vision the church leader is preaching about, that is being celebrated consistently and clearly. People want to:

- Connect to God — to Christ;
- Connect with you — the preacher;
- Connect to each other;
- Connect to the community — mission, outreach, forming and shaping the community.

It is difficult to accomplish a vision, goal, strategy unless the preaching corroborates it. This is often where becoming a Vital Congregation either begins or ends. People want to experience God in the message and the life of the church they share, the vision, goals, and strategies they help accomplish through their own prayers, giving and serving. Tell people in the community about your church, tell your church about your goal, vision and strategy until they are sick of hearing it, or you think they are. You want them to complain that they are tired of hearing about it rather than, “I didn’t hear,” and

then shoot the plan down. The stakeholders in your church who will resource the vision by giving, communicating to others and serving have to get behind your leadership and the vision/mission of the church.

## Reveal

Just a few years ago, a book came out called *Move*. It was based on a national survey done by the Willow Creek Association, looking at just what made a growing, disciple-making, successful church what it was. What was the constant, common denominator for growing churches? They came up with four simple yet nonnegotiable focuses for churches that wanted to grow and expand their life and mission:

- Get people moving;
- Embed the Bible in everything;
- Create ownership;
- Pastor the community and world.

Momentum needs to be created and kept alive. People want to connect to the Bible and its encouraging and challenging teaching. The church family needs to feel ownership of the church's vision, mission, growth and success. Churches that invested in the community and world in comprehensive and consistent ways were typically growing churches. There are many ways to integrate these four focuses, and they interact well with the five fruitful practices that are the set practices of the Central Texas Conference.

## Marketing

Social media, mailing, signs, emails, smoke signals. Whatever tool for communication that is available should be used. If there is an area that is critical to almost anything in the church that we want to be successful, it is communication. A church that wants to reach the unreached, wants the reached to partner with them in reaching the unreached, then it must be about communication, communication, communication.

Create a clear pathway to discipleship for your church, and surely get buy-in from everyone. Preach about it, talk about it, celebrate it, stick to it. This may take some time to actually change the culture of the church to a discipleship-making culture. The first step is to define what a disciple is. What are the biblical definitions? What does a disciple look like today? What is the church trying to do in people's lives, how is the church trying to form and shape people who walk into the door as an adult unchurched, or when they come in as they are baptized as an infant? Many churches have no plan because they have no definition of a disciple. What kind of sermon series, emphasis is integrated into each year? What kind of classes for visitors? What kind of invitation to come to the church, welcome, respond to a visit, opportunities to attend a class for new members? How do people journey to involvement in leadership, mission, outreach, serving in children's or youth ministries, music, etc.? This should be a comprehensive plan that staff, leadership, and the church as a whole understands and works with. It should be the heart of the culture. We make disciples in this church. This is what we do and expect of you. Our disciples know Christ. Our disciples find their way to service and mission. Our disciples integrate their faith into marriage, family, neighborhood, workplace and community. Our disciples help make other disciples.

## Interaction with the Community

The old system of church growth was the attraction model. In a postmodern, post-Christian culture, post-denominational culture, this very seldom works. I think most of us know that, yet many churches still think or hope or just wait for people to drive by, see a sign and come on in just as previous generations did. If we wait for the local and new "Methodists" to join, we will fail. Outreach and mission in the community are not only something Jesus teaches the church to do, but they are also very effective ways to grow a church by interaction with people and families in the community, making a connection where people are. But just mission alone is not adequate. The outreach needs to be interactive, a partnership, a way to make a connection with people, inviting members and non-members to work together, partner in the community. This is a designed purpose, not the typical food banks of many churches — and food banks are good, they just don't grow churches. School, city, community partnerships do. This is planned, intentional, consistent and long-term to change the church's understanding of itself and for the community to change its

understanding of the church. Your church should know and be defined by its mission and so should the community the church is in. Have your church partner with other churches, the city and schools and clean up the city parks.

## **Church Campus**

A church should look living fresh, and speak the language of the people the church is trying to reach. Many churches only speak the language of the members or, even worse, the language of people the church used to reach or, even worse, the people that are long dead. Since we see a church every day we often are unaware of how it might feel or look to a new person, a young person, or an unchurched person. People should see themselves in a church they visit not the people that used to attend the church. Look carefully at landscaping, pictures, entryways, hallways, sanctuaries and spaces. It may not sound like a big deal, but the color of paint, the color of the carpet, decorations, pictures, etc., all speak a language, and some welcome new, unchurched, younger families, and some say this place is not for you. People may not remember the sermon, but they will remember how the church made them feel.

## **Children**

This was slow learning for me. I knew long ago how important nurseries were — what they looked like, how big they were, how clean they were and who was providing care for the children. But today there is nothing as important as children's programming, children's spaces and the care of children for a church that is wanting to expand and grow and especially trying to reach younger families. There was a time that the first staff person to be hired after pastor and music leader was a youth director. I think that that has changed. The first major hire needs to be a children's director or leader. Young families will not, I repeat, will not attend church without the care, teaching and blessing of children that is top notch, not only in the care but also the discipleship-making process for their children. Every service we want families to attend must be backed up by children's ministries that are equally as good as the worship experience. The young families in your town might be talking about how good the preacher is, but most are probably talking about how good or bad the children's ministries are.

## **Multiple Worship Experiences**

Back in the 50s, traditional worship was only at one time and one style, 11:00 am, big choir, organ, maybe piano and a pulpit presence presenting a message as an art object, a well-crafted oratorio address that sometimes pointed at God. In that world, everything was traditional because those churches were creating the tradition. Today people are often nontraditional, meaning they did not grow up in church or they grew up in a non-traditional church. This is not a problem; this is an opportunity. There are many more ways and times that people can be reached for Christ. People will attend many different styles of worship, worship spaces and times for worship. This is often a tremendous untapped resource for Methodist churches that often have a lot of space but not many people. Be creative here. Understand your community and who you are trying to reach. What are the resources, spaces, times that you have available? What, when, where, how and even why. It is a necessity to be excellent in this, in space, children's ministry that connects, hospitality, welcoming, worship, etc. If we really want to challenge ourselves, we can go off campus for these services. Here there are unlimited ideas and opportunities. Learn, be creative, take a risk. Also, it is a major mistake not to have online worship even if it's only on an iPhone and social media. A major commitment here can sometimes create a major success. It can't be done halfway.

## **Staffing**

This can be paid staff, part-time staff or even volunteers that act as staff. Alignment is key. Does our staffing, leadership, volunteers actually line up to our vision, mission and goals as a church? If growth is what we are looking for, if expanding the base of our life and mission is the outcome we desire, does our staff structure, lay volunteer structure, volunteer recruitment all align with the outcome we want? Often this is not the case. Sometimes it is because a pastor inherited what is. Sometimes it is because staffing was put in place to solve problems or to keep a few members happy. Sometimes it is because staffing is designed around what was and not what we want to be. Sometimes staff and leadership just happened without any clear direction or connection with the vision and the strategy that needs to be in place to make that vision a reality. For many churches, this is where it must begin. And, it is a hard place to begin. Money can be an issue. Most staff and leaders are invested in what is already in existence and dislike change. The congregation can be invested in the way things operate and the people they connect with. Almost always a church that wants to grow to the next level requires change here. This may be the hardest area to change, but if not done it will

typically stifle any growth to the next level because our staffing and leadership are designed around the level we are at now.

## **Groups**

Have you ever heard that many people, especially the unchurched, want community? Well, they do, and it is here that they grow and the church grows. The attraction model of many years ago is not the community and relationships model of today — that is if we want to be successful in the mission and vision God places in every church. One of the things to think about is creativity. Certainly, a traditional Sunday School class is a small group. But so is a group that does mission together or runs together, rides motorcycles, meets at a home to fellowship and study, plays softball or basketball or volleyball. Videos, teachers, study guides, shared mission — think outside of the box here.

Almost any way people come together under the banner of church is a successful building tool for a church, and they can meet, almost answer, for any length of time. But few churches grow today without adding groups of every category, size and focus.

## **Worship**

I already mentioned the importance of adding worship experiences, as well as a little about preaching. I have long thought that worship was the engine of a successful church, whether it is a small church with one service or a larger one like the one I served so long that had eight services, not counting youth worship and children's worship experiences. Sometimes churches can hold the status quo for a while and still have mediocre worship. People come because they have always come, they are Methodist, they have relationships there, they just do so out of habit. They have adapted to mediocre worship because they are friends with the pastor, they like the food at the monthly after-service meal, or they sit with friends who always sit on the third row from the back on the left-hand side. But they might not invite their friends because they know the service is boring or just bad. New people in the community don't hear how great the worship is, they probably don't hear anything about it at all. No one talks about the sermon. They just hope people don't ask. Guests come in the door and decide halfway through "we are not coming back here," even if you as the pastor greeted them profusely. I am not just suggesting you upgrade the choir, add a new bass guitarist to the band or change your liturgy. Worship has a purpose. Is that purpose being met? George Barna said some years ago (and I am paraphrasing), if people experience God in worship, they will come back, and once they experience God in worship, they will never again settle for less. Does your worship experience or experiences connect people to God, to each other, to you as the pastor/leader, to the community they come from and will go back into to represent your church? Is there energy, spirit, excitement, hope?

***Do people experience God in your worship services?***

***Do they feel God's presence?***

***Do they feel a call to get to know and follow the Christ we want them to become disciples of?***

## **Evangelism**

I think most Methodist churches get mission and outreach, but many do not get or even do evangelism. We talk about professions of faith but do not prioritize, preach or teach about what it means to profess faith in Christ. We don't lead people into an experience with Christ or offer conversion. We might believe in but don't celebrate and tell the story that Christ can change people's hearts, lives and, yes, even save their souls. Yet, this is the basic reason for church growth. I think it is always good to take a look at the book of Acts, review the great commission and plan the place evangelism has in our pathway to discipleship, the metrics of a Vital Congregation and certainly the vision for our church or ministry.



## Summary

- Do a comprehensive and honest reality check of yourself, your soul, and your church. Invite others to participate.
- Go somewhere and dream, read, resource, pray, envision, set goals, yes, go to the mountain. It worked for Moses.
- Involve others in the process — leaders, influencers, friends, staff, committees. The truth is they are the ones who will make the vision happen. The first followers are the most important in the church organization — recruit and inspire them.
- Develop a comprehensive vision, mission, set of goals, strategy that include who what, when, why, where, how much, how and take it through whatever process you have until all the church is in momentum with you.
- Be prepared for the expected roadblocks that will come.
- Don't give up. Sometimes the dream takes years to come to pass, but it has to begin somewhere, somewhere in the heart of the leader.
- Keep praying and inviting others to pray with you.

## In conclusion

Almost 20 years ago, I had a sleepless night. Our church has just laid the slab for a new sanctuary that would change the life of our church. It also was going to put us in a lot of debt and require a lot from me. It felt like a high-risk moment to me, and I entered an uncertain season. Yes, I was anxious, even a little bit afraid. Had I led to fast? Could we pay for this? Would people come to fill it up when finished? Was my church family on board with this? Had I led them astray? This could, we could, I could fail. So, I drove to the church at about 1:00 am in the morning. I sat on the edge of the just-poured and barely-dry slab, and I prayed. I prayed as I had always prayed. But for the first time I prayed these words, "God, give me success; God, give us success." Yes, I still wanted God's will, but the simple answer that God put in my heart was, "About time you asked." It was a few years later before I realized those words were a Bible verse, Psalm 118:25.

***MAY GOD GIVE US SUCCESS!***