

A banner with a green and yellow background featuring a field of grass. The text is centered and reads: DR. LAMAR E. SMITH CENTER FOR EVANGELISM & CHURCH GROWTH.

DR. LAMAR E. SMITH CENTER FOR EVANGELISM & CHURCH GROWTH

God, Vision, and the Leader

If you are working to develop a significant vision for your church, preparing a comprehensive plan for making discipleship, stepping out to create a new faith community or worship service, prepping for a building project, initiating a new stewardship campaign or program, getting ready for new mission and outreach opportunities, refocusing your church toward a serious growth season around the metrics of worship attendance, professions of faith and budget growth, or your church is in need of a basic culture change from being inward-focused to outward-focused, I have learned no matter how it may seem, it's still about God.

The question we often fail to ask is a simple one, yet one rooted in the “why” of ministry and the church itself. What does God want? What is the will of God here? Where is the Holy Spirit leading us? If we commit seriously to following Jesus, where might it take us?

When I ask myself “Why am I a Methodist pastor,” the answer always comes back, “I believe this is what God wants me to be and to do.” God did not say it would be easy or that everything would always go the way I want it to go, God just said go.

The conviction of carrying out the will of God, fulfilling the purpose of God, and building the kingdom of God goes a long way to getting us to the place of courage and consistency. We need to succeed in the vision we embrace, especially if we believe the vision began in the heart of God.

It's all spiritual, of course, prayer, but also a decision concerning what type of music for a new faith community is needed, what kind of food will connect with this mission opportunity, or what should a discipleship pathway look like.

- What we believe and the conviction we have about that belief is a powerful thing.
- Connecting with God in developing a vision is an amazing thing.
- Partnering with Jesus in implementing a vision is a miraculous thing.

I found during the seasons I retreated to focus, pray, read, and envision were invaluable to me. If I didn't, the tasks and demands of the church would prevent any forward movement for me or the congregation. The church and I would stagnate quickly and find ourselves maintaining what was instead of moving toward what might be. The foundation I led came from these seasons of looking to God. It kept me balanced, moved me to invite others to envision with me and made God the real leader.

I think it might be helpful to define what mission and vision are. I find that churches can easily be confused on the difference. The following definitions are from Bill Hybels.

Mission: A simple statement of what you do. It is your core competence. Generally, your mission doesn't change over time.

Vision: A future-oriented, challenging, and exciting statement about where your team, ministry, business, or organization wants to go. It will change over time, typically every 3-5 years for a team or longer for a larger organization.

I would also add strategy and how do we intend to get there, what do we need, budget, leadership, staffing, facilities, training, implementation, etc. The mission, vision, and strategy need to have the hand of God in it. This is the job of the spiritual leader to ensure this happens.