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# GROWTH POINTS

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With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

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## A Leadership Myth

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A person may neglect leading because he believes the myth that he is not a born leader. The first question that many pastors ask at leadership conferences is “Do you believe leaders can be developed?”

It is accurate to say that some people are born with a propensity toward leadership as a result of some natural giftedness and personality. But anyone who chooses to learn can increase leadership capacity. Indeed, everyone can ramp up their leadership ability.

Educators, James Kouzes and Barry Posner, in their book, *The Truth About Leadership*, report “After examining the immense variety of stories from so many different people and places, it has also become crystal clear that *leadership is not a birthright* (emphasis added).”

This underscores the *de-mythization* of leaders being born. The sooner pastors recognize that they can develop leadership capacity and competency, the more willing they will be to develop the necessary skills to lead a church to fitness.

Another common reason a pastor neglects leading is a tendency to avoid responsibility for results. Often the pastor’s reasoning is couched in spiritual terms. He believes that God brings the harvest, God is the one who saves, and Jesus will build his church not us.

This is all true, but it is also true that God works in partnership with human leaders. For example, in the parable of the sower, what begins the process of reaping a harvest? It is the action of the farmer! “Listen! *A farmer went out* to plant some seeds. As *he scattered* them across his field” (Matthew 13:3-4 NLT, Emphasis added). It was the farmer (leader) who *went out* and *scattered*. All of the seed did not sprout, but there was seed that germinated and grew. And, while God produced the fruit, you can be 100% certain that if the farmer had done nothing, nothing would have resulted.

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Paul makes this same point to the church in Corinth. “After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God’s servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow” (1 Corinthians 3:5-6 NLT). God did indeed make it grow, but someone (a leader) needed to plant or water, and sometimes both; but it was God that provided the growth.

A pastor cannot, must not, avoid responsibility in the work that God desires to do in the life of the church he has been given to lead. When God was responding to the cries of his people in captivity he called Moses (a leader) to partner with him. God said to Moses, “Then the Lord told him, ‘I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land’” (Exodus 3:7-8NLT). God saw the need and took action.

His action was not unilateral. It was not exercised in a *divine vacuum*. He said to Moses, “Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my

people Israel out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10 NLT). God was going to do it, but he was going to do it through Moses. What God desires to do through your church he desires to do through you. The call he has on your church to bring it to greater fitness is for you to lead. The call he has on your church to make it more Great Commission effective is for you to lead.

There will be resistant as you move the church toward an increased level of fitness. There will be resistance as the necessary fitness plans are put into place. The exertion of your pastoral leadership in dealing with the resistance will be the difference between increasing fitness as opposed to remaining static.

The need for leadership is a constant. Pastors need to lead. The variable is the context in which they lead. “We tell our audiences that as much as the context of leadership has changed, the content of leadership has not changed that much at all.”

This being the case a leader needs to decide the type of church they have, determine the church’s level of fitness, and devise a plan to move to the next level. Are you taking responsibility to lead your church?

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God does not change, but people do. The ways people are hearing the gospel and connecting with churches today are not the same as they were even twenty years ago.

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### Author

Gary L. McIntosh (Ph.D., D.Min.) is professor of Leadership at Talbot School of Theology. He is the author of twenty-five books and numerous articles. He just completed thirty-two years at Talbot School of Theology as professor Christian ministry and leadership.

### Interesting insights from the book:

"While churches are becoming more missional in their thinking, they are becoming less evangelistic in their practice."

"If a church desire to be truly missional, evangelism must be restored to a primary place in its ministry."

"The gospel message requires a verdict. One either rejects Jesus or believes in him; there is no middle ground."

"To preach the kingdom of God adequately is to issue a call to conversion."

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