

Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches That Send by J.D. Greear, Zondervan (Grand Rapids, MI) 2015. (35 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols.)

1. Being a “Giveaway Church.”

Our culture at large doesn't celebrate those who grow their fruit on someone else's tree. We may praise kingdom impact, but we reward church growth. We may talk a lot about kingdom priorities, but more often than not our success is measured by how many people we keep, not by how many people we send. In the church world, the pastor or church with the most checkers wins.

So what's gone wrong? How did we come to a place where we wax eloquent about the Great Commission, storing up heavenly treasures, and servant leadership—but in reality send out so few? Why is it that we love the idea but resist the reality of becoming a “Giveaway Church”? [page 11]

2. Every Christian in Full-time Ministry.

By lifting up those in vocational ministry (pastors, evangelists, and missionaries) as a special class of people who are “called” into ministry, we've unintentionally restricted and downsized our sending pipelines.

Every Christian is called into full-time ministry. Once we step over the line and begin to follow Jesus, everything we do is supposed to be done in his name, representing him, with the goal of advancing his kingdom.

But clergy-centered churches tend to downplay this. By seeking to identify and send out a few well-trained and fully funded missionaries, they inadvertently raise the entry bar to ministry so high that few can climb over it.

In contrast, “Giveaway Churches” lower the bar. They seek to identify and send out Jesus-following engineers, accountants, entrepreneurs, teachers, and truck drivers who are willing to ply their trade wherever they are needed to help the cause of the gospel. They understand that the frontlines of evangelism and ministry are most often found in the marketplace, not within the walls of our churches. [page 12]

3. Releasing Control.

Planting always involves risk. We release control of something we need in the hopes that it will come back to us in multiplied measure. But once we let go of it, we forfeit any ability to use it for ourselves. Seeds you plant you can no longer consume. Yet without the act of planting, there will never be a harvest. [page 15]

4. Success of “Our” Ministries.

Let’s be honest: Too often, we church leaders measure the success of our ministries by one criteria and one criteria alone: *How large is it?* How large is the attendance? How big is the budget? And so we spend all our money on things that will increase our attendance, our budgets, and our capacity. [page 16]

5. Planting for God’s Kingdom.

I believe that every church, every ministry, and every follower of Jesus Christ ought to be devoted to planting—not giving away—what they have for God’s kingdom. [page 17]

6. “My” Kingdom Come.

God confronted me with my idolatrous and self-centered approach to ministry. He showed me that quite often when I had prayed, “*Thy* kingdom come,” what I had really meant was “*My* kingdom come.” [page 17]

7. Giveaway What God Has Given Us.

Whose kingdom are we actually building: ours, or God’s?

Do we really believe that Jesus grows his kingdom most as we “give away” what he’s given to us? [page 17]

8. Ordinary People Do the Job.

The greatest gospel movements in history have been facilitated by ordinary people like *you*, not church leaders like me. And the Great Commission will be completed only when we church leaders get serious about sending you out to do what God has called you to do, and you get serious about doing it. [page 18]

9. Paul Saw God’s Grace for All.

Paul thought of himself as a debtor to those who had not heard about Jesus. His future was not free. But why did he owe *them*? Because he knew he was no more deserving of the gospel than they were. He was not more righteous, nor had God seen more potential in him (see 1 Timothy 1:15). Paul saw God’s grace toward him exactly for what it was—completely unmerited favor. Paul knew that placed him under severe obligation to the grace of God. Paul’s future, bright as it may have been, having a great education and all the right connections, no longer belonged to him. Every spare resource—every ounce of energy, every moment of his time—belonged to his “creditor”: the grace of God. [pages 18-19]

10. Letting Go and Sending Our Best.

We pastors are not free to build ministries that mainly make life more comfortable for us. Each of us is under obligation to do whatever we can to get the gospel to those all around the world who have never heard. And that means *releasing* –planting—the seeds we have been given. It means letting go and sending out our very best to bring a harvest in God’s kingdom, even—especially—when it doesn’t benefit our church directly. [page 19]

11. Jesus the First of Seeds to Die.

When Jesus laid down his life on that hill in Jerusalem, he had nothing left. Soldiers gambled for his last remaining possessions on earth. Everything he owned had been either given away or taken from him. But out of that death came our life. In giving everything away, he gained us. In Jesus’ resurrection from death, God brought unimaginable life to the world—to you and to me. Jesus was the first of many seeds planted into the ground to die. [page 20]

12. Giving Away Our Faith.

We live by losing. We gain by giving away. What *we* achieve by building our personal platform will never be as great as what *God* achieves through what we give away in faith. [page 21]

13. Short Commissioning Sentence.

Jesus is described as “sent” more than forty-four times in the gospel of John, and “you are sent” is his one-sentence commission for every disciple:

“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (John 20:21). [page 33]

14. The Church is Christ’s Means of the Salvation Message.

The church is now Jesus’ vehicle for the completion of his mission. Jesus finished the purchase of our salvation, paying the full price for our sin on the cross and shattering the powers of death in the resurrection, but the mission of salvation is not yet complete. As Martin Luther said, it wouldn’t matter if Jesus died a thousand times if no one heard about it. [page 33]

15. Worldwide Missions Is Every Believer’s Responsibility.

Christopher Wright says, “God’s mission is what fills the gap between the scattering of the nations in Genesis 12 and the healing of the nations in Revelation 22.” God’s worldwide mission, he says, defines every believer’s primary responsibility until Jesus returns. [page 34]

16. Turning the World Upside Down.

We still think that the world will be won by a few hyper-anointed super-Christians who gather large crowds in big buildings. But Jesus said that a Spirit-filled church would be infinitely more effective than that, even if that one hyper-anointed individual was Jesus himself. (see John 14:12).

The book of Acts is a witness to the truth that having twelve men operating in the power of the Spirit and teaching others to do so as well is greater than having Jesus himself stay to lead the mission personally.

Jesus is not against building large crowds. He preached to crowds of upwards of 15,000, and both he and his disciples rejoiced in the size of those crowds. But when he ascended to heaven, he left only 120 disciples. Onto those 120 he placed his Holy Spirit, however, and they turned the world upside down within two generations. [page 35]

17. It Takes Time and Work.

Adoniram Judson, America's first and perhaps most famous missionary, labored in Burma for seven years without a single convert, and then another six years before he had enough believers to form a church. Yet, by his last year of ministry he could identify 7,000 believers in Burma—a place where hitherto no one had even heard the name of Jesus! A study done less than ten years after his death revealed 210,000 confessing believers in Burma. That's the multiplying power of God's Spirit at work, taking the seeds that Judson planted with his life and watered with his tears and turning them into a movement that impacted a nation. [page 36]

18. Moving Outward as a Church.

The church is a movement before it is an institution. And the number one characteristic of a movement is ... movement. If something is not moving, it can't be called a movement. And people who are not moving are not part of the movement, even if they are members of the institution.

Are you moving in mission? Are you moving *outward* into the world into the world with the gospel? Is your church moving that way? Or is it only drawing people inward, adding them to the rolls, providing religious services to "complete" their lives? [page 38]

19. Loving Christ's Kingdom More than Our Own.

A "sending" ministry always starts with a heart exam. Sending out people and giving away your resources, you see, will most often *compete with* your church's "bottom line," not benefit it. Sending means giving away some of your best leaders and letting go of needed resources. It means giving away opportunities in the kingdom, and

watching others get credit for successes that you could easily have obtained for yourself.

The only way you'll be willing to do that is if you love Jesus' kingdom more than your own. If your heart prayer in ministry is really "my kingdom come," you will never be an effective sender. You won't really even want to try. [page 45]

20. Enhancing Christ's Kingdom, Not Ourselves.

Ask yourself, "Are there mission fields in our backyard that could contribute to the global spread of the gospel that we have overlooked because they don't enhance the bottom line of the church? Are we evaluating ministry opportunities only by how they benefit us, or are we looking at the benefit they can bring to Jesus' kingdom even if there is nothing in them for ours?"

If you are a church leader, make it personal. What ministry opportunities are you personally involved with that are not enhancing you, your church, or your platform? [page 46]

21. The Mission Is *Where* and *How*.

"God, show me *where* and *how* you want me to go." The question, you see, is not *if* we're called to pour out our lives out for the mission, only *where* and *how*. [page 47]

22. Under Obligation to Others.

With the gospel comes responsibility. As I said in the introduction, receiving the gospel immediately makes us "debtors" to those who have yet to hear about it. No longer can we live as people "free" to do whatever we want; our resources, our talents, and our futures are all "under obligation" to the ... [*people*] of the world. [page 48]

23. Loving the Lost More than Anything Else.

What your organization *does* best grows out of what it *loves* most. To send effectively, we must love the glory of God and the lost more than we love anything else. [page 58]

24. Yearning for the Salvation of Others.

The French poet Antoine de Saint-Exupéry explained,

If you want to convince men to build ships, don't pass out shipbuilding manuals. Don't organize them into labor groups and hand out wood. Teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea. [page 58]

25. The Glory of Our Saving God Spread Throughout the Earth.

We have concluded this: that one has died for all ...; and those who live [should] no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor

5:14-15 ESV). Motivation for mission grows out of deep, personal experience with the gospel. When we are amazed at the grace God showed in saving us, going to great lengths to save others seems an insignificant thing. We yearn to see the glory of our saving God spread throughout the earth and others find in Christ what we have found. [page 59]

26. The Cross Provides Motive, Measure, and Mission.

The cross of Christ provided Paul with the *motive* for sacrifice (love of Christ), a *measure* for his sacrifice (Christ's death on the cross), and a *mission* in his sacrifice (seeing people reconciled to God; see 2 Cor. 5:14-21). Paul wanted to see others reconciled to God as he had been reconciled. [page 59]

27. A Gospel-rooted Heart Change.

Do you want to become someone joyfully willing to go to great lengths to reach others? Do you want to lead your people to become enthusiastic servants of the mission? Study the gospel—not like a seminarian studies doctrine to prepare for an exam, but the way you would study a sunset that has left you speechless, or the way a soldier longs for his fiancée studies her picture. Amazement at the grace of Jesus and excitement for his return will produce a passion to go to the ends of the earth that can never be extinguished.

Do you want to develop a sending culture at your church? Teach your people to delight in the glorious riches of what Christ has done on their behalf. Marvel in it every week. Ask God to open eyes of their hearts to see how high, how wide, how deep, and how long the love of God is for them. Ask God to let them *feel* that love. Let it simmer in them until it sets their hearts on fire. And then, I promise you, they will figure out a way to reach their world. They will soar in mission—without any need for you to smack them into action.

Let me say it as plainly as I can: *Apart from genuine, gospel-rooted heart change, sending will never take root in our churches.* With it, we won't be able to stop it. Without heart change, we may succeed in working up a little excitement for a season, but those balloons will sag to the ground when they encounter the slightest bit of difficulty. The sacrifices will just not seem worth it.

The gospel alone produces the passion that sustains the mission. Programs and institutions can be useful servants of passion, but never its sustenance. The gospel is its sustenance.

So abide in the gospel, and teach your people to abide in it as well. Sending fruit will grow naturally from deep gospel roots.

As Jesus said, “If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit” (John 15:5). [pages 66-67]

28. Vocation Equals Calling.

Our English word “vocation” comes from the Latin word *voca*, meaning “to call.” The Reformers saw our vocation, whether “secular” or “sacred” as callings by God to assist in his care for the earth. [page 73]

29. Do Well for the Glory of God and His Mission.

Whatever you're good at, do it well for the glory of God, and do it somewhere strategic for the mission of God. [page 75]

30. Be Tentmakers.

Twenty percent of the world's population lives in Muslim countries, yet only 4% of world trade comes from these countries...We are living at a point in world history of unprecedented opportunities for the expansion of the Christian faith. No country is closed to business. In no country is it illegal to love people. There are huge doors of opportunity wide open before us, if we are willing to equip ourselves adequately and walk through them. Countries considered “closed” to missionaries welcome Christians who come as [businesspeople]. – Patrick Lai [page 77]

31. Use Gifts for Great Commission.

We need to help “ordinary believers” in our churches recover the understanding that they are called to the mission and shaped by God for a specific role in that mission. I'll say it again: The question is no long *if* we are called to leverage our lives for the Great Commission, only where and how. Each disciple of Jesus must do an assessment of his or her life and ask how it can most profitably be used for the Great Commission. Again:

Whatever you, do it *well* for the glory of God, and do it *somewhere strategic* for the mission of God. [page 78]

32. The Great Commission Is a Mandate for All.

The Great Commission is not a calling for some; it is a mandate for all. Therefore, to become a disciple of Jesus means evaluating your passions and talents in terms of how they can best be used in God's kingdom. The call we are waiting for has already been issued: “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). So, again, when it comes to calling, we don't need a voice; we have a verse. It is now our responsibility, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, to evaluate how we are best suited to fulfill the call. The Spirit might reveal that to us through a special act of guidance, but more often than not he will give us and our church leaders the wisdom to make that decision. [page 80]

33. Grow Disciples.

Our mission, according to Jesus, is not to gather audiences, but to grow *disciples*. [page 83]

34. Every Believer is a Missionary.

Newbigin argued that the key to gospel advance in any society lies in the hands of the laity, for the church, in its very essence, is “missional.” Every believer, he said, is an ordained, Spirit-anointed missionary. [page 86]

35. Loving One Another.

Recently, several small groups in our church got involved with a struggling local school. Over an entire summer they renovated teachers’ lounges, stocked the library, and collected supplies. Their project culminated in a morning breakfast for the teachers the day before school started. At the breakfast, one of the teachers stood up and said, “I’ve always known you Christians said you should love one another, but I’ve never really known what you meant by that until now.’

Several members of that school’s faculty have begun attending our church, and over the past few years I have baptized dozens of teachers. One said, “I wanted to know what made you all tick. And I didn’t understand the half of what I was missing.” [page 88]