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Confessions of a Reformission Rev.
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CHAPTER ONE



**God saved me while I was
living with my lesbian mom
and my dad was in
prison for murder.**

I am a founding pastor.

Jesus, Our Offering Was \$137 and I Want to Use It to Buy Bullets

0-45 People

The upstairs room at the fundamentalist church was so hot that everyone was sweating like Mike Tyson in a spelling bee.¹ During one service, a pregnant lady simply passed out and fell off her chair. This would not have been so traumatic if I were trying to plant one of those shake-and-bake, holy-roller churches where I smacked people on the nugget in Jesus' name so they could lie on the floor and twitch like a freshly caught trout on a dock and call it the work of the Holy Ghost.

It was the first half of 1996 and I was twenty-five years of age chronologically, six years of age spiritually, and trying to gather enough people to launch Mars Hill Church in the city of Seattle. About ten to twenty people a week were showing up for our Sunday service, which had outgrown the living room of my rental home and was now being held in one of those epically awful youth rooms, complete with golden shag carpet on the floor and Christian rock posters on the wall for the poor kids forced to ride the short bus of Christian culture. Our weekly service would start sometime around 6:00 p.m., whenever the college students and indie rockers would show up, because it was apparently very difficult to get up by the crack of dinner. Fortunately, the room was free, which was nearly more than we could afford.

I had spent the previous two years as the college ministry intern plankton at the bottom of the food chain at a multiracial mega-

church and had used the youth room to run a college group in Seattle. College ministry soon started to feel like hanging out with an ex-girlfriend, so I hit the eject button because life-stage ministry was a vocational dead end.

What my college students needed was to mentor high school students and hang out with singles who had phased from college into the work world and married couples who had learned what kind of person to be and to marry to make a family work. What they did not need was to hang out with the same immature yahoos they spent all of their time playing “pull my finger” with anyway and going to a free event that was like day care for twenty-one-year-old hormonally enraged porn addicts and video-game aficionados trying to stretch junior high into the retirement years.

So I decided to start a church, for three reasons. First, I hated going to church and wanted one I liked, so I thought I would just start my own. Second, God had spoken to me in one of those weird charismatic moments and told me to start a church. Third, I am scared of God and try to do what he says.

My wife, Grace, and I did not yet have any children, were both working jobs to make ends meet, and spent all our free time changing diapers on our baby church in its infancy phase.² Our church was a dysfunctional small group of Christian college kids and chain-smoking indie rockers who all shared the clueless look of a wide-eyed basset hound that just heard a high-pitched whistle.

COACHING CORNER

Infancy is the season of dreaming and envisioning the future, gathering people, raising money, and making plans. The ministry at this stage exists only in the mind of the leader, who seeks to effectively communicate the vision and compel people to help make it a reality. In the infancy phase, the church and the leader are one and the same because the leader is essentially the only person holding the church together and doing most of the work.

In retrospect, our church services were, quite frankly, painful. My preaching was like a combination of boring systematic theology and uninspiring motivational talk from a cranky junior high gym teacher. Our rotating cast of worship leader tryouts ranged from screaming punk rockers—to this day, I have no idea why they were so dramatically depressed—to the kind of happy-clappy Christian praise musicians that you would expect to find playing on a karaoke machine at a Christian homeschool co-op reunion for kids whose moms made their clothes. Our sound system included speakers from a home stereo that were muddy and faint, except when pumping out feedback, of course, since we could not afford real speakers. We used a moody overhead projector for worship that another church had thrown out because it only worked when it felt like it. If I were Hindu, I would guess that the projector was a junior high kid or a union laborer in a former life.

In my imagination, however, I saw an entirely different church, one that did not have a beat-up old couch or a foosball table in the sanctuary. I envisioned a large church that hosted concerts for non-Christian bands and fans on a phat sound system, embraced the arts, trained young men to be godly husbands and fathers, planted other churches, and led people to work with Jesus Christ as missionaries to our city.

Sadly, that church only existed in my mind, and the hard part was figuring out how to get my vision into the minds of other people so that together we could build the church God had put in my imagination. I started to wrestle with some very basic questions that, although I had read widely, I had apparently not connected in a practical way for ministry. These questions continue to drive our ministry so that it remains missional, and I believe they are vitally important for every Christian and Christian leader to continually ask because they keep the person and mission of Jesus as the most important factor in the church and Christian life.³

The Missional Ministry Matrix

Priority 1: Christology—Who is Jesus, what has he accomplished, and what has he sent us to do?

Since our little church was meeting in the evening, I spent a lot of time visiting other churches in our area on Sunday mornings to see how things were going, why they were succeeding or failing, and what kinds of people were going to various churches. I can honestly say that visiting many churches was worse than being a vegetarian chef employed at a steak house.

1. Christology

Who is Jesus, what has he accomplished, and what has he sent us to do?



2. Ecclesiology

How does the Bible tell us to structure our church leadership so that our church can most effectively be God's missionary to our culture?



4. Ministry

How does Jesus want me to help serve his mission in our culture through my church?



3. Missiology

How can we most effectively expand God's kingdom where we are sent?

What kept nagging me about each church I visited was that no matter what the tradition or theological persuasion was, they generally had a crooked Christology. What I mean is this: in visiting numerous churches scattered across the city and throughout the surrounding suburbs, rarely did I hear a clear declaration of the person of Jesus Christ. He was never presented as the eternal God who incarnated as a man in culture to live without sin, die as a substitute for sinners, and resurrect in triumphant victory over Satan, sin, and death; who is now exalted as King of Kings and Lord of Lords; and who is coming again to judge the living and the dead, sending the repentant to his heavenly kingdom and sentencing the unrepentant to his fiery hell.

In the more mainline liberal churches, I heard about the halodiper Christ. He was presented as little more than a marginalized Galilean peasant who took a beating as an example for the little guys of the world who get pushed around by bullies and cry a lot. In the more mainstream evangelical churches, Jesus was presented as a sort of buddy Christ, who was a motivational life coach who could help you lose weight and make more money with his pithy acronyms and cheerleader enthusiasm.

In both cases, Jesus was shown only in the selective partial portrait that best suited the agenda of the church, which ranged from gay rights to environmentalism, financial prosperity, and emotional euphoria, depending on the church. What I did not witness was an understanding of exactly who Jesus was and is and what he had accomplished through his incarnation, death, resurrection, and exaltation.

It was not so much that the various churches were wrong *per se* but that they were incomplete in their selective presentations of Jesus. In the more modern churches, the triumph of the resurrected Jesus was stressed to emphasize victory, so that being a Christian basically meant you were on the winning team with Jesus and, therefore, you were a real winner. What they overlooked was the incarnation of Jesus. Simply, they ignored the fact that Jesus humbly entered into culture to identify with and effectively reach

lost people steeped in various kinds of sin. This oversight allowed people to triumphantly parade their victory over sin and sinners but failed to call them to humbly incarnate as missionaries in culture to effectively reach lost people. Christians with this mindset can easily come to see themselves as winners and lost people as losers and consequently are often despised by lost people, who find them smug.

Conversely, many other churches more akin to the so-called postmodern churches focused almost exclusively on vegetable-munching hippie Christ's humble incarnation in culture to hang out with sinful lost people, particularly the poor and marginalized. In this mindset, being a Christian means being a nice person who loves people no matter what their lives are like by trying to identify with their cultural experiences and perspectives in a nonjudgmental and empathetic manner. What is lacking, however, is the understanding that when we next see Jesus, he will not appear as a humble, marginalized Galilean peasant. Rather, we will see the exalted, tattooed King of Kings coming with fire blazing in his eyes and a sword launching from his mouth, with which to make war upon the unrepentant. Until the day of Jesus' second coming, we are not merely to relate to people but also to command them to repent of sin and bend their knee to the King before they are grapes crushed under his foot in the winepress of his fury.

We need both portraits, the humble, incarnated Christ and the triumphant, exalted Christ, to truly understand Jesus Christ. As we get to know the humble, incarnated Christ, we learn how to be missional and lovingly relate to people in their culture. As we get to know the glorified, exalted Christ, we learn to be confident and bold because we proclaim his victory over Satan, sin, death, and hell.

It took a lot of hours reading my Bible, especially the incarnational gospel of John and the exaltational Revelation of John, to sort this out in my mind theologically. In the end, I realized that we labor *with* the exalted Christ, which gives us authority to proclaim the gospel of freedom. And we labor *like* the incarnated Christ, which gives us humility and grace to creatively demonstrate and

proclaim the love of Christ to fellow sinners in our culture. And though I needed to be like Jesus and lead our people in kind, I also needed to remember that there is one way in which a Christian should not be like Jesus. Jesus never sinned and, therefore, never repented, but because we sin, we must continually repent if we are to be faithful missionaries. This simple point is important because, while the many emerging pastors I speak with have rightly focused on following the example of Jesus, if they fail to recognize this vital difference between us and Jesus, they will diminish the acknowledgment of sin and the urgency of repentance.

The more I read the Bible, the more deeply the Holy Spirit convicted me that I had grievously erred by trying to figure out how to do church successfully by reading a lot of books, visiting a lot of churches, and copying whatever was working. Instead, I needed to first wrestle with Jesus like Jacob wrestled with Jesus and then discover what Jesus' mission was for Seattle and repent of everything I thought and did that was not congruent with his mission for our city. Only then could I faithfully lead our church to follow our Senior Pastor, Jesus, on his mission in our culture, with the humility of his incarnation and the strength of his exaltation.

Priority 2: Ecclesiology—How does the Bible tell us to structure our church leadership so that our church can most effectively be God's missionary to our culture?

Before God rebuked me, my primary mission was to get a lot of people to show up on Sundays to listen to me preach. But once I realized that the mission of the church was not simply to see how many people would come to listen to my pithy insights, I saw that I had to spread the workload so that we could scatter for mission and not just gather for Mark.

Even though our church was no bigger than some Mormon families, it was wearing me out. Like most pastors of small churches, I was doing a lot of deacon work. I would unlock the building, photocopy my sermon notes, help set up our cutting-edge Fisher Price sound system, set up chairs, welcome visitors, hand out the ser-

mon notes, run the service, and clean up the room when everyone left. During the week, I would answer the phone, answer email, go through the mail, and do whatever else needed to be done, including driving around frantically before the service to pick people up.

Thankfully, a handful of faithful servants picked up the slack, so the church was more than just one highly motivated young guy without any real skills in management. I learned that in a small church, ministry is generally something the pastor does for his people and that the people chip in if and when they feel like it. I feared that if this mindset remained in my church, it would either fail to grow or grow and bury me in work for lazy and ungrateful church people.

As our church continued to meet, it became clear that three basic types of people were showing up. Observers were happy to do and give nothing but just came to watch the show each week, not unlike the people who hit the brakes when driving past a nasty car wreck to gaze and grin. Consumers likewise gave and did nothing but were always wanting more and making demands for more goods and services from me. Participants were the handful of people who had bought into the idea of the church being a missionary to our city. They came to church seeking a way to serve a greater mission and were enormously encouraging.

I soon tried to spend most of my time with the participants in our mission rather than with the observers or consumers of our church. I continually repeated our mission each Sunday from the pulpit—to honor God through the gospel as a church transforming the city—so that the people who stayed in the church understood that they were not welcome to bring any other agenda. The problem was that many of the people who came to the church had been sucking the life out of various program-driven, seeker-sensitive churches for years and ended up being basically worthless for mission. Week after week, they would walk in to see that we did not have the program they wanted and then walk back out, never thinking that perhaps they should serve Christ and build a ministry.

The college kids and singles who had sucked resources from youth groups and parachurch ministries for their entire life without serving or giving were generally just more dead weight to drag around. The young arty types were more willing to serve, providing it was something cool and up-front like playing worship music or speaking to the group in eccentric bohemian fashion, which would be tough to organize because if they all were on the stage, we'd have no one else left to sit in the room and watch them be cool.

In retrospect, I made some very strategic errors that nearly killed the progress of our church. First, I had a very informal leadership structure, as is common in small churches, which permitted heretics, nutjobs, and pushy types to wield a lot of power. Worse still, it was hard to know how to remove such people without killing the church since it was so small that we were one social network and to remove one person was to risk losing every person.

Second, the church was based on relationships that were all connected to me, and we did not have formal small groups to connect people to each other. This kept me from working on growing the church, and I got stuck being friends with the handful of people we already had. This became particularly obvious when my truck and I seemed to be moving every college student in the church each school year.

Third, I had not clearly articulated in written form what we would and would not fight over theologically, which led to some tremendous problems and got us branded as a cult by some outsiders. I also did not explain in written form that we were theologically conservative and culturally liberal, which caused great confusion because half of the church was angry that the other half was smoking, while the other half was angry that I taught from the Bible.

Fourth, I greatly underestimated Solomon's statement that "money is the answer for everything" (Eccl. 10:19). Somehow I got the idea that money was a dirty thing and that to talk about it, receive it, or spend it was also dirty. To this day, I am not sure where this silly idea came from, but I was willing to have both my wife and I work full-time to pay the bills for our little church, to

the point that she began having stress-related health problems. I raised outside support to cover part of a salary so that I could work for the church for free and left a box in the back corner of the room on Sundays, telling people that if God led them to give, they could. Apparently, the Ghost only led people to give once every presidential election, and I hit rock bottom one Sunday when our offering was \$137. I stood alone in the room, counting the money and cussing at the offering box for being filled with one-dollar bills and the ominous smell of imminent death. Obviously, I had to quickly figure out how to organize our church with real elders, real deacons, and real Christians so that we could get to our mission of reaching lost people.

At the time, it was becoming increasingly popular for young pastors to have churches that were not called “churches” but rather silly things like “new monastic communities” and leaders that were not called “pastor” but rather silly things like “abbess” or “spiritual director.” As our mission began to develop, the New Testament teaching on church leadership and church discipline seemed increasingly wise and urgent to implement, before we ended up like the church at Corinth, divided and off mission because of folly and sin. Over the years, I have become increasingly troubled by the frequency with which young pastors simply dismiss the New Testament teaching on church leadership and discipline, so that if four guys are drinking beer in a pub, they can call it a church. One well-known expert promoting this new undefined, undisciplined, and unbiblical ecclesiology was once asked how we can possibly define what a church is if his advice of not having elders, deacons, members, discipline, or doctrine was heeded. His response was simply, “If it smells like a church, it is a church.” My response was that sometimes a whore wears the same perfume as a wife, and it’s no different with the bride of Christ.

God deeply burdened me to thoroughly study and submit to the biblical teaching on church leadership. People’s eternal lives were at stake, and I would one day stand before Jesus to give an account for each person that he had entrusted to me to pastor, leaving no

room for ecclesiological experimentation or for vainly creating new definitions of church because I wanted to be cool (Heb. 13:17).⁴ Pastors who want to do mission need to first meet the New Testament requirements of an elder-pastor and then train other men to be qualified pastors and men and women to be qualified deacons. Without biblical leadership, mission cannot happen because no one has the authority to define the mission, direct the mission, or defend the mission. This explains why church ecclesiology was so important to Paul, who followed Jesus' example of appointing men to the highest positions of spiritual leadership. When biblical church leadership is in place, people can be more effectively trained for ministry that is meaningful because it is missional.

Priority 3: Missiology—How can we most effectively expand God's kingdom where we are sent?

While visiting the various church services in proximity to our church, it struck me as curious that although all the congregations claimed to be Christian, they were clearly all on very different missions. One church was particularly confusing. They promoted homosexuality but made me take off my ball cap upon entering the church. It seemed odd that a male greeter who had likely had sex with a man before church chastised me for wearing a hat in church because I was disrespecting God.

The woman pastor of this church, wearing a very nice, flowing, cutting-edge-of-1536 robe, talked about rainbows for twenty minutes while sixty or so very old people who were former classmates of Noah and eyewitnesses to the covenant rainbow sat scattered among one thousand seats or so and napped in Jesus' name. Between her sermonette, the written literature I picked up that told me how to bequeath my estate to the church when I die, and looking around the room at the equivalent of a Viagra before-photo of lifeless geriatrics, I truly could not discern why that church existed. The closest I came to finding someone with a mission was the children's pastor, namely the meek husband of the senior pastor in pumps, who said his goal was to make his wife happy, which made me very sad.

Down the street, another woman pastor and her gay male associate pastor with a lovely rainbow on his elegantly sassy robe both spoke passionately about the need to get rid of our nuclear weapons. Their message did not connect with me because I did not have any nuclear weapons. So I left early.

At a church in the suburbs, I was impressed with their very cool building but a bit bummed that the church web address was the same as the pastor's name, because it seemed a bit pretentious, like rapper P Diddy a.k.a. Sean John, who wears his own clothing line with his name emblazoned on the front of his shirt. Conversely, I was also a little jealous because it did sound a bit cool to have a church named after me, complete with my photo on the side of buses so that everyone would know that I was pastor izzle fo' shizzle. From the printed material and the sermon, it was readily apparent that this church was into the bling Christ, who will make you rich and cure all your diseases, except for the epidemics of consumerism and eighties charismullet hair, of course. They even taught that Jesus was a rich man and that only people who lack faith get sick, presumably like the junior varsity Job and Paul. For them, Jesus was a piñata, Christianity was a whacking stick, and their mission was to teach people how to get goodies to fall out of heaven.

One fundamentalist church I visited was doing a series on Revelation, and the pastor's face was so red that I thought he was going to blow a gasket. He yelled about the end of the world at the battle of Armageddon, which was going to happen in ten or fifteen minutes, from what I could surmise. Unlike the pastor of the liberal church, this dude was a full-blown, big-gutted, heterosexual, gun-shooting, truck-driving, meat-eating, fire-and-brimstone-preaching Bible thumper from the old school. He was my favorite, even though he used the King James Version and said homosexual like it was three words, "ho-mo-sexual."

His point was that Satan had taken over the media with the help of the Jews and that some secret group of government leaders with a really scary name like Illuminati were meeting behind closed doors to usher in a one-world government. Presumably, it would be led

by none other than the Antichrist, who would make us all get bar codes on our heads so we could be scanned like jars of mayonnaise at the grocery store and run through a wood chipper if we did not pray to Satan and eat our children. Fortunately, the pastor told us about the rapture and how, if we don't watch television and do vote Republican, we can fly to heaven just before Jesus opens a can of whoop in the end. This man was on a mission, but it wasn't very missional. His mission seemed to be simply to get off the planet as soon as possible, which didn't sound very incarnational to me.

I visited a lot of other churches, but you get the point. No matter what the tradition or theological perspective, the one common thread that wove all of the churches together was that they were each on their own mission instead of on Jesus' mission to transform people and cultures by the power of the Holy Spirit through the work of the gospel. And each church conveniently grabbed the snapshot of Jesus that best suited their mission and used it to legitimize and bless their mission in his name. Theologically, this was profoundly troubling, because I was certain that Jesus was on his own mission and that any church not on that mission had what Paul called another gospel and another Jesus, concocted by a cunning Serpent.

During this time, I was deeply convicted that until this point I too had been on my own mission with my church, trying to reach hip postmodern people and have hip music and basically just do the cool church thing. I had grown facial hair, started cussing again (I had stopped for about fifteen minutes after I got saved), and briefly considered taking up smoking but had asthma, which kept me from achieving my full cool potential. But I was certain that while Jesus did not mind if hip postmoderns got saved or if our band was rockin' like Dokken, he did have bigger things in mind when he got out of his tomb on Easter Sunday than me growing facial hair, cussing, and rocking out. This led me to consider the next question: What exactly had Jesus assigned to our church as our part in his mission in our city? To learn the answer, I obviously needed more time in prayer and Scripture to listen to what God would say.

Priority 4: Ministry—How does Jesus want me to help serve his mission in our culture through my church?

I know this may sound nuts, but when you are the only pastor on staff at a small church, you don't have a boss, a job description, or a general clue what you are supposed to be doing. In some ways, I felt like the kid in that movie *Home Alone*.

Trying to figure out what I was supposed to be doing, I met with a few other pastors to inquire about their typical day. I learned that small church pastors go out to lunch a lot, answer the phone, counsel people, tidy up the church building, labor to put together a mediocre sermon, and sit in their offices looking sacred so that if people drop by, they feel like they are getting their money's worth from their pastor.

Since my office was in our home, we were borrowing the youth room at the fundamentalist church on Sundays, and I did not like to counsel people, I decided that I would just do what I believed Jesus wanted of me after spending hours studying the epistles and praying for direction. I did not want to be an employee of the church, keeping shop by working for church people, much like a hotel concierge sitting by a desk, waiting for the phone to ring so that customers can be well served no matter what their outrageous demands are. Believing I worked for Jesus and not the church, I decided to spend my time with Jesus, prayerfully investigating the city like a missionary, trying to figure out what Jesus' mission was for our city. Over the years, I have accepted that I'm really not much of a pastor but rather am a missiologist studying the city who leads a church filled with missionaries who reach the city and with pastors who care for the converts.

I tried to figure out why the different neighborhoods in our city functioned as tribes that shared values and experiences. I hung out on college campuses, observing students and asking them about their spirituality, and killed time in various bars, coffee shops, and restaurants, observing people to determine why they were drawn to these places instead of to local churches. I met with people who were shaping our culture, such as real estate brokers, chamber of

commerce members, business leaders, musicians, and basically anyone who would talk to me. I also spent time hanging out with the homeless kids who loitered near the university, trying to figure out what their family systems had been like. This was a season of listening, since I was not actively trying to save anyone just yet but rather trying first to understand them so that I could build a church best suited to reach people like them and to change the culture that contributed to their problems.

But to make that happen, I had to focus all of my time and energy on growing Mars Hill as a missional church for Seattle. Therefore, I had to stop doing all other ministry work that was not accomplishing this objective. As you can imagine, this presented me with difficult decisions. At the time, I was cohosting a national radio show called *Street Talk*, founded by a dear friend named Lief Moi. We spent Saturday nights from 9:00 p.m. to midnight answering spiritual questions from the usual bag of mixed nuts listening to the radio while driving home drunk.

The show itself was a bit of a miracle. We had no sponsors, no real budget, and no paid staff. On a whim, Lief raised enough money through one of those chicken-dinner fundraisers to get our local show beamed up to a broadcast satellite. But no market in the country agreed to pick us up. One night we unexpectedly started getting calls from the great nation of Texas because the board operator at a radio station forgot to turn off the satellite feed. The listeners liked the show enough to call the station and plead for our show to remain on air, and that is how we got into our first national market. The miracles continued until we were on some thirty stations across the country.

I really enjoyed the show because it was successful in bringing the gospel to a wide audience and taught me a lot about the thoughts and questions of lost people. I needed to quit the show at this point, however, to focus on our struggling little church. Lief later shut the radio show down altogether, though it was successful, to also focus on our church. I also killed the small college ministry that I had

started, and most of those students scattered like chaff in the wind, though a handful jumped on board to help start the church.

Speaking to other pastors, I learned that many pastors, particularly pastors of small churches, are busy but bored like I was. They spend their time taking care of their people and running services but don't have much of a mission to keep their pilot light lit. So they tend to volunteer time in other ministries, such as overseas missions trips, parachurch organizations, and the like, to do something more than just answer the phone and meet with the same handful of people that already know Christ and drive the pastors nuts. I was convicted that rather than spending my time supporting auxiliary ministries outside of our church, I should labor to build a church that would satisfy my ministry desires by being on mission with Jesus to transform my city by the power of the gospel. To do this, I would need to stay doggedly focused on our mission. Over the years, this has become increasingly difficult because the other pastors in our area, whom I do sincerely love, are prone to jump on various bandwagons, from political causes to social agendas, and want me to do the same. I refuse to join them not because they are wrong but because their projects are off my God-given mission and, therefore, are a waste of my time and energy, not unlike a hockey player spending hours perfecting his curveball.

So in an effort to clarify our mission, I wrote down on paper the first of what would eventually be many strategic plans. I shot for the moon rather foolishly and decided that our church that was not big enough to fill a bus would plant multiple churches, run a concert venue, start a Bible institute, write books, host conferences, and change the city for Jesus. I started handing out these goals printed on boring white paper without any graphics, colors, or cool fonts, naively assuming that it would all happen eventually because it was what Jesus wanted.

To get leaders in place for world domination, I also spent time trying to articulate the vision in my head to good men who would be qualified to rise up as fellow elders-pastors. So, as Jesus did, I

spent time in prayer asking the Father which of his sons should be trained for leadership. The church started as an idea I shared with Lief Moi and Mike Gunn. Lief is a descendant of Genghis Khan and his dad was a murderer, and Mike is a former football player. They proved to be invaluable, except for the occasional moments when they would stand toe-to-toe in a leadership meeting, threatening to beat the Holy Spirit out of each other. Both men were older than I and had years of ministry experience, and they were good fathers, loving husbands, and tough. Too often this last point is overlooked, but when Paul said that a pastor must fight like a soldier, train like an athlete, and work hard like a farmer, he had in mind the manliest of men leading the church (2 Tim. 2:1–7). Sadly, the weakest men are often drawn to ministry simply because it is an indoor job that does not require heavy lifting.

To prepare the best men that I had to become pastors-elders, we started meeting with Eric Brown, who is currently on staff at Imago Dei Church in Portland (part of our Acts 29 Network), Campus Crusade for Christ staff member Chris Knutzen, and a man named Kirk Schlemlein. All of us were converted later in life, which was helpful because we were focused on reaching lost people and could relate to lost people. In time, this group became the official elder council and ruled the church through some incredibly tough seasons. The key was that each man was a player who could do ministry and a coach who could train other leaders. Since we were flat broke with no staff, I needed a team of player-coaches who could get things done and lead the church through the sheer force of their godly influence.

Our church was so small that I knew everyone by name and visitors stuck out like strangers at a family reunion. For reasons that are still unclear to me, people started visiting our little neo-Amish, punk-rock enclave, maybe just because it was new and there was a buzz about a new kind of church. The good news was that I was the pastor of a growing church. The bad news was that I was a bad pastor of a bad church and had a lot of mistakes to undo.

Reformation Reflections

1. Does your church or ministry have a clear biblical understanding of Jesus? If not, what else do your people need to learn?
2. Is your church or ministry led by qualified and respected leaders? What can you do to support the leaders in your church?
3. Articulate in one sentence the mission Jesus has called your church or ministry to. Would the people in your church or ministry give the same answer, or are there contradictory missions and confusion in your church or ministry? What can be done to bring people who are not on mission in line with the mission?
4. What ministry are you currently doing to help serve Jesus' mission in your culture through your church? What are you learning as you serve?