

"You've Circled This Mountain Long Enough"



*Resources to Help Get Your Church
Moving in a New Direction*

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Introduction

"You have circled these mountains long enough; time to go north" (Deuteronomy 2:3)

The Israelites, under the leadership of Moses, had been delivered from Egyptian slavery for some time now. However, they were still wandering in the wilderness. They had not made it yet to the Promised Land. In fact, they had been circling the mountains in the southern hills of Edom for a long time. So God tells them through Moses, "You have circled these mountains long enough; time to go north." That place was not their destination. That's not where God wanted them. It was time they got moving toward where God wanted them.

Like them, your church has a great and noble heritage. God, under good leaders, lay and clergy, has brought your church a long ways. God has done many wonderful things in these mountains in and through the lives of your people. But you are hearing the word of God once again, "You've circled these mountains long enough. It's time to get moving in a new direction."

One of the constant temptations any church faces is to get satisfied with the status quo. We can grow too accustomed to circling mountains, too comfortable with the way things are or have always been, with the usually sights and familiar trails. It's difficult and scary to think about striking out on some new trail.

To say it another way, it's sure tempting to keep the wagon in the ruts. But you know what a rut is, don't you? It's a grave with the ends knocked out!

No doubt you are reading this because you realize that your church is deep in some worn ruts that have been circling mountains for some time. You hear God calling you to where God wants you, to a Promised Land of new adventures and ministry. But you may not know how to get started, to encourage everyone to see where they are, what they have been doing, and then begin moving together into new territory. You know that when you try to get a wagon out of ruts, there's a lot of shaking, bumping, and bouncing. That old wagon does not get out of the ruts without some noisy and discomfort. There will be those who like the ruts just fine. What are those seven last words of the church: "But we never done it that way before"?

You Are the Key

From my own experience I think you are the key. Your passion, your vision, your determination, your commitment, your leadership make all the difference. Imagine what would have become of the people without Moses constantly encouraging them, being patient with them, prodding, inspiring, motivating them to get moving from the old to the new that awaited them. Your leadership makes that same kind of difference. It begins in and with you.

Have you been in your present pastorate long enough to know where the ruts are? This is vital. Too many pastors make a mistake - they come in and even before they really know the church they start trying to make radical changes, that is, to take hold of the reins and force the wagon out of the ruts. Resist that temptation. Take at least a couple of years to get to know your people, to travel in those ruts, to get to know your community. Listen to them. Establish a relationship of

trust. In the process you will begin to hear with them God's call to move in a new direction and begin to get hints and signs of just where and when you need to do this. So, be patient.

Prayer

Prayer is a vital part of this, as you will see. Spend much time in prayer for your church and with your church. Prayer is listening to, not just talking with, God. It's keeping an alert sensitivity to God's presence and call as you work together with your people. Prayer focuses you on God, and when that happens, don't be surprised when you begin to hear God speak, to sense God's presence, to even see road signs God has put up for your church that say, "This way to the Promised Land."

But remember that you are the key. (See the next article, "Lead the Way," that explores your role more fully). When people see this passion in you, when they see the vision you have been given, it will create excitement. People really do want leadership. They may not think or even admit it, but they do. They need you as a leader not so much to tell them or try to force something on them as to help them begin to access where they have been, where they are, and where they need to be going. They need a vision. A common vision, a mutual destination will energize and focus them. It will be a constant rallying, unifying force for them. It will give them identity and purpose. It will build excitement as they make progress and give them challenges to overcome when they meet obstacles. It will help make them more the people of God, a people God can use to bring God's love, peace, grace, and justice into the world.

What you will find in this booklet is a method, a way of planning (see page 41) and some tools and resources I have developed and found helpful in getting a church to stop circling mountains and move in a new direction. You will need to become thoroughly familiar with it, adapting it to your own style, vision, and church. But you will find that it provides some simple yet effective ways for getting out of the ruts. Hold on. It will get bumpy. You will face obstacles and challenges. But what an adventure awaits you and your church!