

# **Invitations to Thriving:** Congregation Ministry Frameworks



### **Embracing New Patterns: Thriving Beyond Traditional Ministry Cycles**

In the ever-evolving landscape of the modern world, churches find themselves facing new challenges and opportunities. While tradition has long provided a sense of stability and continuity, it is essential for churches to recognize that clinging solely to old models and patterns will hinder our ability to thrive. Churches simply cannot follow traditional ministry cycles with the hope of passing the faith along to future generations in meaningful and powerful ways. Instead, as leaders we have a dire need to focus on *faithful expectations* that open the possibility of handing the church to current and future generations with hope and impact.

Instead of focusing solely on the logistics and tasks of running a church, elders should also regularly and frequently engage in *high-level questions* to ensure the spiritual growth of people and the advancement of the church as a organization. By asking thought-provoking questions at every stated-meeting, elders can foster a more profound and impactful environment with the church community as it advances the church's mission.

Below are three possible frameworks a local churches can adopt as an aide to drive their conversations and actions. These frameworks are not perfect, and there is a need to develop more faithful frameworks. *However, the important thing is for every local church to have a concrete model that helps them refocus their conversations and actions beyond the well-know ministry cycles of the last century.*

Each framework includes an overview, followed by a series of key actions. In the future, a process of exploration needs to be developed so that churches can wrestle with which framework suits their identity best and helps them take regular and simple steps forward.

# Expanding Grace

## Based on Luke-Acts

### Overview

The biblical writings of Luke-Acts provide invaluable insights into the early church and its ministry, and can serve as a model for contemporary churches. From the beginning to the end, in Luke-Acts, God's care and love are expansive.

Keep big categories. List a few examples, and then include other examples in foot notes. Also, could be added as devotions.

### Key Themes:

- Inclusion of the Excluded
- Spirit Empowered
- Focus on the Cross
- Witnesses to the ends of the earth

### Types of Questions for Sessions to Ask:

#### Inclusion of the Excluded

- How can we better participate in God's expansive love?
- How does our religiosity or practices exclude people? What do we assume everyone knows about faith or how our church functions?
- Who are the unlikely prophets in our community? How can we better listen to them?

#### Spirit Empowered

- How do we hinder the Holy Spirit? How do we make ourselves more in-tune with God's Spirit?
- What is one bold step is God calling us to take today?

#### Focus on the Cross

- As a church, how have we acted like the pharisees, and not the Good Samaritan?
- As a church, and individuals, how have we been the prodigal son?
- What act of self-sacrifice is Christ wooing the church to take today?
- How can we better experience God's abundant life and forgiveness in Jesus?

#### Witness to the ends of the earth

- In what ways can we celebrate the saving power of Christ more and call people to live as part of God's reign?
- How do we focus on energy on the expansion of God's love from "Jerusalem, to Judah, to Samaria..."? Where do we fall short? What needs more effort? How do we start locally?
- How can we build healthier relationships with God's children across the world?

## Scriptural References

### Inclusion of the Excluded

- In Mary's Song, she proclaims God's care for the downtrodden, "God has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:53)
- The first to hear the news that Jesus was born were the lowly shepherds (Luke 2:8-20).
- Anna, a prophetess, preached about Jesus as boy and when he was presented in the temple (Luke 2:36-38).
- The genealogy in Luke's gospel does not stop at Abraham. Instead Luke traces Jesus all the way back to the Garden of Eden. This highlights God's love not only for the Jews, but for the whole world. (Luke 3:38)
- Empowered by the Spirit, Jesus, in Luke, proclaims good news to the poor, proclaims release to the captives, gives sight to the blind, and sets at liberty those who are oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). This mission of compassion, liberation, and healing becomes the paradigm for the church's ministry.
- Jesus heals non-Jews, including the centurions son (Luke 7:1-10).
- The parable of the Good Samaritan highlights that outcasts can act with greater faithfulness than the "righteous" (Luke 10:25-37)
- Jesus teaches in the parable of the Prodigal Son to welcome back those who have squandered the goodness and blessings of God (Luke 15:11-32)
- Jesus heals 10 lepers who traditionally have no social contact with the community (Luke 17:11-19)
- The inward-outward tension comes to a head in Acts 15, when the early church debates whether or not non-Jewish male followers of Jesus need to be circumcised or not. Paul vigorously argues that circumcision is not needed for non-Jews, and the church ultimately only prohibits actions that are used during cult worship: eating food offered to idols, eating blood, and sexual immorality. Paul's stance of God's inclusive salvation challenged Jewish fundamentals that went back more than 1000 years.

### Spirit Empowered

- **Empowerment for Ministry:** The Holy Spirit empowers individuals for various ministries, such as preaching, teaching, healing, and performing miracles. Examples include the disciples speaking in tongues on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and Peter's bold preaching that leads to thousands being baptized (Acts 2:14-41). Just as importantly, the Spirit of God empowers Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3:22).
- **Guidance and Direction:** The Spirit guides believers in their decision-making processes, as seen when the Holy Spirit directs Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch and opens his understanding of Scripture (Acts 8:26-40).
- **Inclusion of Gentiles:** The Holy Spirit plays a significant role in the inclusion of Gentiles into the early Christian community. Acts 10 documents the vision of Peter and the conversion of Cornelius and his household, showing how the Spirit breaks down barriers and welcomes Gentiles into the faith.
- **Confirmation of God's Presence:** The Holy Spirit serves as a confirmation of God's presence and approval. For instance, the Spirit descends upon Jesus at his baptism, affirming him as God's beloved Son (Luke 3:21-22).

## DRAFT

- **Comfort and Encouragement:** The Spirit provides comfort, encouragement, and guidance during times of hardship. Acts 9:31 mentions how the early church is built up and walks in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.
- **Prophetic Inspiration:** The Holy Spirit inspires prophetic words and visions. Luke 2:25-27 describes how the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would see the Messiah before his death.
- **Conviction of Sin and Repentance:** The Spirit convicts individuals of their sin and leads them to repentance. Acts 2:37-38 portrays Peter's powerful preaching, where the Holy Spirit moves the crowd to respond with repentance and baptism.
- **Unity and Fellowship:** The Spirit fosters unity and fellowship within the Christian community. Acts 2:42-47 describes how the early believers devoted themselves to teachings, breaking of bread, and prayer, establishing a sense of community empowered by the Spirit.
- **Perseverance and Endurance:** The Spirit strengthens believers to endure persecution and hardship. Acts 7:55-60 depicts Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, facing persecution with courage and forgiveness even in the midst of his martyrdom.

### Focus on the cross

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus reveals his determination to fulfill his mission by setting his face towards Jerusalem, where he ultimately faces crucifixion on the cross. Luke 9:51 states specifically, "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." This decision symbolizes Jesus' unwavering resolve to accomplish God's plan for salvation, despite knowing the suffering and imminent death that awaited him. Throughout Luke's account, Jesus repeatedly foreshadows his crucifixion, such as in Luke 9:22 where he says, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and on the third day be raised." This demonstrates that the cross holds profound significance as the ultimate act of sacrifice, through which Jesus willingly bears the weight of humanity's sin to reconcile them with God. The cross signifies God's immense love for all humanity and Jesus' unparalleled obedience and love for his Father as he willingly lays down his life to offer salvation to all who believe in him.

### Witnesses to the ends of the earth

In Luke-Acts, the church is depicted as embracing the mission to spread the Gospel to the whole world. Luke highlights the transformative power of the Holy Spirit as the driving force behind this mission. The mission of the church is foretold by Jesus in Luke 24:47, where he instructs his disciples to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations. The fulfillment of this mission begins with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2:1-4, empowering the disciples to boldly testify about Jesus. Throughout Acts, the church actively engages in missionary endeavors, displaying its commitment to reaching both Jews and Gentiles. Key examples include the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10, where Peter proclaims the Gospel to the Gentiles, and Paul's missionary journeys in Acts 13-28, as he travels to various regions to establish and strengthen churches. Luke-Acts underscores the church's mission to extend the message of salvation to the ends of the earth, demonstrating its universality and inclusivity.

# God's Reign of Renewal

## Based on Mark 1

### Overview

We are all familiar with the call to follow Jesus, but it is important to understand what this actually entails. If we desire to follow Jesus, it is crucial for us to imitate Jesus' ministry, life, love, grace, and justice.

Within the gospels, the most concise and detailed outline of Jesus' ministry actions is found in Mark 1. This Gospel reaches its climax with Jesus' crucifixion, highlighting the significance of Jesus' selfless and forgiving love. By embodying the actions depicted in Mark 1 and Jesus' love which is demonstrated on the cross, we can truly follow Jesus and move away from traditional ministry models built within and influenced by Christendom.

Jesus' actions which are found in Mark 1 can serve as a powerful framework for a church seeking to embrace a new future. Below, you will find the five ministry actions outlined in Mark 1, which together form a robust framework. Perhaps this framework is the direction God is leading your congregation as you move forward together.

### Key Themes:

- Proclaiming the Kingdom of God
- Healing
- Calling people above their station (to serve in ministry)
- Living a shared life
- Going to other towns

### Types of Questions for Sessions to Ask:

#### Proclaiming the Kingdom of God

- What was Jesus' message as he proclaimed the Kingdom of God? What is the best way to enact and speak this proclamation today?
- What specific groups, crowds, or individuals would hear this proclamation as Good News? What makes this proclamation Good News?
- What are the first few steps we should take?

#### Healing

- What types of healing do our people and larger community need most?
- How are we adding to the healing of the nations/peoples (Revelation 22:2)?

#### Calling people above their station (to serve in ministry)

- Who are we calling from the fringes of society to lead in God's Kingdom movement?
- How can we be made more aware of all of God's people?
- Who can help introduce us to others?

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### Living a shared life

- How are we sharing life together in formal and informal ways?
- How do we encourage, foster, and promote informal relationships?
- How do we better help our people be active in various sized groups so that they get to know the breadth and depth of the Body of Christ?

### Going to other towns

- Apart from our local context, where else in the region or world is Jesus inviting us to carry the message of the Kingdom of God? What people resources do we need? What field trips do we need to take?
- What personal boundaries do we set when God invites us out of our comfort zones? How are these boundaries healthy and unhealthy?

## Ministry Actions inspired by Mark 1

- **Proclaiming the Kingdom of God:** This is much more than talking about eternal salvation, and asking people to intellectually accept Jesus as savior. Biblically, salvation is holistic and emphasizes both the body and soul, time and eternity, thought and actions. As imaged in the prophets and restated in Revelation, Jesus was concerned, as “The Son of Man” to make all things new. Teaching of the Kingdom of God includes a broad set of saving terms, such as deliverance and redemption. God delivered Egypt from slavery and Boaz redeemed Ruth. Deliverance is rooted in the physical, just as redemption is tied to relationship. As Jesus turns to speak of eternal salvation, the physical and temporal are not lost. Jesus is the eternal savior as well as the temporal savior. The span of eternity, includes today.
- **Healing:** The central event, which repeats it’s self time and time again in Mark 1 is healing. Healing is the signpost of the Kingdom of God—making all things new. Jesus heals the man in the synagogue, Peter’s mother-in-law, and the crowds as they come to the door. Again, the spiritual and the physical are closely tied together. In Mark 2, as Jesus heals the man who is paralyzed by saying, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”
- **Calling people above their station:** Jesus called the disciples to follow him, and eventually to lead this Kingdom movement. In the ancient world, a rabbi only called the best and the brightest rabbinical students. None of Jesus’ disciples fit this description. Jesus called those who did not even make it to rabbinical school. Jesus called, outcasts, like Matthew. Jesus also called Simon the Zealot, Mary of Magdalene, and the lowly fishermen. The vast majority the followers of Jesus came from the fringes of society.
- **Living a Shared life:** Jesus did not have a public ministry alone. Instead, Jesus spent every day with his people. Jesus lived in community. We see this as Jesus stayed with Peter. Jesus’ private ministry was just as, if not more important than the public ministry.
- **Going to the other towns:** When the disciples “hunted Jesus down” to heal more people in Capernaum, Jesus’ response was that it was time to share the message of the Kingdom to other towns as well. Jesus literally had no walls. Jesus took the disciples to neighboring towns to preach the Kingdom of God, and to heal. Eventually, Jesus taught and sent his followers to do the same. But Jesus never sent them alone. Jesus sent them in pairs. Ministry is a group effort.

# Total Transformation

## Based on Matthew 25 and Matthew 28

### Overview

The New Testament is teeming with teachings and insights regarding the expectations of what a church is called to do in ministry. Among the numerous passages, two stand out as a powerful ministry model when used in conjunction with one another: Matthew 25:41-46 and Matthew 28:16-20. These passages emphasize God's desire to heal the world and teach others to participate in actions of divine transformation. Transformation of soul, mind, and world.

In Matthew 25:41-46, currently highlighted by the PC(USA), Jesus speaks a parable of the eternal king of heaven who separates the sheep from the goats. This parable ties the final judgement of humanity to our specific actions of care for those in need. Here, the righteous will inherit eternal life while the unrighteous will be condemned.

Jesus states that those who have fed the hungry, given water to the thirsty, welcomed strangers, clothed the naked, and visited the sick and imprisoned have unknowingly done these acts for God. This passage highlights God's concern with the physical pain and suffering of people, and teaches that when we care for the physical needs of others, we are ultimately serving and honoring God.

In this parable, our eternal salvation is not tied to intellectual beliefs that Jesus saves, but to our faith in action. Damnation is for those who ignore the pain of others. It is important to note, again, that Biblically speaking there is a close tie between the physical and spiritual worlds, the temporary and the eternal. Every spiritual thing is physical. Every physical item is spiritual. They cannot be separated. Shalom is a word that highlights the connection between these two realms. This tie between the spiritual and physical is at the heart of how and why we proclaim the resurrection of the body.

Likewise, in Matthew 28:16-20 Jesus commissions his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything he has commanded. From this passage, we observe a few important items. First, we recognize that the church is sent to all peoples (nations). Second, we see that Jesus is focused on bringing the nations/peoples into relationship with God. Finally, we are commissioned to teach people to obey all the commands Jesus taught.

By combining these two passages, we find a holistic approach to ministry that encompasses both the physical and spiritual aspects of human existence. The Bible recognizes that humans are not spiritual beings on physical journeys, nor are we physical beings on spiritual journeys. Instead we are profoundly and deeply physical and spiritual beings, intertwined as one, just as God is one. *Hear O Israel, the Lord, your God is One.*

When we participate in Matthew 25 and Matthew 28 ministries we embrace God's oneness, our physical and spiritual oneness as individuals, and our oneness with the God's people and creation.

This ministry model is profoundly powerful because it celebrates Oneness at every level.



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The tone of these passages and their message is incredibly encouraging. They remind us that our actions have a direct impact on others and that every act of kindness or discipleship matters in the grand scheme of things. We are called to recognize the inherent worth and dignity of every individual and to actively work towards healing the brokenness in our world. The same is true with our own well-being, and our relationship with God, individually and together.

Moreover, these passages reveal God's desire for us to participate in actions of divine transformation. By imitating Jesus' ministry, we are not only fulfilling His commandments, but we are also joining in His mission to make all things new. Through acts of love, service, and sharing the Gospel, we become channels through which God's healing and transformation can flow to those in need.

In conclusion, the combination of Matthew 25:41-46 and Matthew 28:16-20 offers a powerful ministry model that encompasses the physical and spiritual dimensions of human existence. As believers, we are called to engage in acts of social justice, compassion, and discipleship. This holistic approach to ministry reflects God's desire to heal the world and our role as agents of divine transformation. Perhaps this model fits the personality, passions, and gifts of your congregation.

### **Ministry Actions inspired by Matthew 25 and Matthew 28**

- **Fed** the hungry
- **Give** water to the thirsty
- **Welcome** strangers
- **Clothe** the naked
- **Visit** the sick and those who are in prison
- **Go**
- **Make** disciples
- **Baptize** in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Teach** others to obey all the commandments of Jesus

### **Regular questions for church leaders (samples):**

- How are we feeding the bodies and souls of people?
- Where and when do we see people who are thirsty? How are we quenching their thirst?
- Strangers are those who are foreign to us, and outside our community. How can we better welcome strangers in formal and through informal methods? Who is most difficult for us to welcome? How do we work on our own hearts and actions to welcome them better?
- Visiting the lonely is central to the work of the Kingdom of God. Who can help us visit the sick and those who are imprisoned? What fears do we need to overcome? What are ways to overcome these fears?
- Going is the partner of coming. We come to Jesus and his yoke when we are weary (Matthew 11), but we go, because others are weary and desire shalom.
- Being a disciple is more than being in the crowd who comes to get the benefits of Jesus. Disciples follow Jesus. Discipleship requires discipline. How are we growing the disciplines of faith together? How can we better help others grow in their disciplines of faith?

## DRAFT

- How can we have a stronger emphasis on baptism others in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? What does baptism mean? How can we do this in healthy ways? What holds us back?
- Teaching others to obey is not primarily done in a classroom setting. Teaching is done through experience in the world. How can we better teach people to feed the poor, visit the sick, etc.?