

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Breaking Through

How do you create a breakthrough church? Where do you start?

To begin, it is important to note that breakthrough churches are found in every context, region, or state. They are found among smaller, larger, and middle-sized churches. The seeds of breakthrough are found in every kind of church.

It is also important to note that the leaders of breakthrough churches are a diverse group, with no common personality or style.

“Begin by building a spiritual foundation through Bible study and prayer.”

—Gary L. McIntosh

So, with those two thoughts in mind, where does one start to create a breakthrough church?

First, realize that breakthrough is a spiritual issue. Begin by building a spiritual foundation through prayer and Bible study. Start building spiritual leaders, and stress the importance of servant leadership.

Second, look for and listen to the healthy people in the church. Spend little time with the VDPs—very draining people—but engage with the VTPs—very trainable people.

Third, discover and communicate a shared vision of the future. While listening to the VTPs, extract a picture of hope for the future of the church and begin communicating it.

Fourth, keep casting and recasting the vision, but begin organizing the church around it. As much as humanly possible, reorganize the church around a simpler structure that allows those who are doing the ministry to make the decisions.

Fifth, live the vision yourself. Leaders must embody the vision in their own lives and expect others to follow. You must repeat the vision over and over in every meeting,

conversation, or message, while also practicing it in your walk.

Sixth, look for others who resonate with your vision and bring them together in a small group. Nurture and train these people, eventually moving them into key leadership positions in the church.

Seventh, create a sense of urgency by showing people reality. Help the leaders see the dangerous situation the church is in and how it will likely play out in the future.

Eighth, introduce all changes as part of the vision, and be prepared for conflict. Focus your energy on a few changes that will give the most return for the effort. Never second-guess yourself, but focus on the positive and trust God to work everything out.

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Look for those who resonate with your vision.

Breakthrough takes seven to twelve years.

So, what are the common characteristics of churches that breakthrough to new levels of life and ministry?

First, they have leaders who are willing to stay for the long-haul. This first of all points to the pastor, but also includes other key leaders in the church. Breaking out of old patterns into new ones takes time, and leaders must commit to staying long enough to see breakthrough happen. Long enough normally translates into seven years in a city church and twelve years in a rural one. Research over the last fifty years consistently points to the fact that growing churches have pastors who stay a minimum of six to seven years.

Second, they have leaders who are willing to pay the price. A church will only gain to the degree that the pastor, and other leaders, are willing to suffer the pain. Breaking through to new levels of ministry requires that change take place. Change leads to conflict, which always creates pain in the hearts of leaders. Leaders know criticism is a way of life, as is being rejected and ridiculed.

Third, they have people who understand that it is not about them. People in breakthrough churches realize that, while they are in the story of their church, it is God's story. They know they are part of something bigger than themselves, and willingly trust God for the future.

Fourth, they have people who are willing to forgo instant gratification. The people do not insist on having all of their needs met all of time.

Fifth, they have people who are generous and giving. The church gives away instead of hoarding its resources. Ministry is more about people outside the church than those already inside the church. Success is measured by how much the church serves others, rather than by how much it takes from others.

Sixth, the leaders have the ability to restart. Failure is never viewed as fatal or final. They

pick up the pieces and start over. They are resilient and flexible.

Seventh, they accept the fact that Murphy's Symmetry Principle is true: Things go wrong all at once, but things go right gradually. It takes time to create breakthrough. In most situations the fastest that breakthrough occurs is two and a half years, but in many cases it takes ten to twelve years of work.

Eighth, they exhibit a mission mentality. Creating a breakthrough church is like starting a church on the mission field. Church leaders start from scratch learning the culture and how to break down barriers that keep people away from Christ and His Church.

Ninth, they agree on the essentials—inspiration of Scripture, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, the trinity of God, the incarnation of Jesus, salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone, etc.—while working together in grace.

Tenth, they see the Great Commission as their marching orders, and plan and act to make disciples in their communities. Changes are introduced that enable the church to be effective in making disciples of secular people. Success is evaluated on how many new disciples are made.



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