

**A process and
conversation guide
for sending pastors,
church planters, and
teams**

HOW TO TURN YOUR LAUNCH PLAN INTO A 3-5 YEAR STRATEGIC GROWTH PLAN



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The Bible is full of strategy, both human and divine. In Genesis 1, God's plan for creation is obvious. Each day, God created something specific, and each thing he created came in a logical progression. One day, God created the heavens, the earth, and day and night. Another, he created the atmosphere. And so on. He didn't create Adam until the earth could sustain humanity. Creation was strategic. . . Just as God had a strategy for hanging the stars and Edison had a strategy for developing the light bulb, you need a strategy for creating a church that will make a significant impact for God's kingdom.

-Nelson searcy

If you have taken time to develop a strategic launch plan, then you are a step ahead in developing a post-launch church growth plan. As you have planned, prayed, and prepared for launch you should strategically plan, pray, and prepare for continued growth *after* launch. Just as you identified measurable goals and benchmarks in the pre-launch phase, it is important to identify measurable growth goals and benchmarks in the post-launch phase. The process of strategic planning and implementation should not end at launch day.

The vision God gave you in the beginning will need to be sustained in the years after your launch. As you endeavor to launch large and cast a net as wide as possible on launch day, you should endeavor to sustain that effort and momentum over time. You must also accept the reality that this is *easier said than done*.

IT BEGINS WITH YOU

If you are the lead church planter or pastor, you will realize that you can only reproduce what you are. You will see this truth emphasized in substantial ways after launch.

Therefore, it is imperative that you maintain your own personal health, spiritual vitality, and vision for ministry. If you truly desire to be a strategic leader, you must give up the attempt to be all things to all men and understand that you will not be able to please 100% of the people 100% of the time. Because this is true, you must be wise about how to invest your time, energy, and emotional resources.

- To have a strategic church, it must be led by a strategic leader.

The law of thermodynamics states that "closed systems lose their energy over time." This law plays out in the context of church planting and leadership every day. Church planters and leaders who plant or lead in isolation (closed-off from others) will never grow above their own potential. Only with a spiritual support system, friends, coaches, and a team will we gain the nutrients needed to grow *above* our own potential.

- To lead a strategic church, I must stop using my church to prove myself.

Proverbs 17:20 says that "He who has a deceitful heart finds no good." Other translations replace the word "deceitful" with "crooked." This verse communicates the truth that church planting (or ministry in general) should not be used for self-centered reasons.

- We are no good to God when we compare the vision He has given us with the vision He has given someone else.

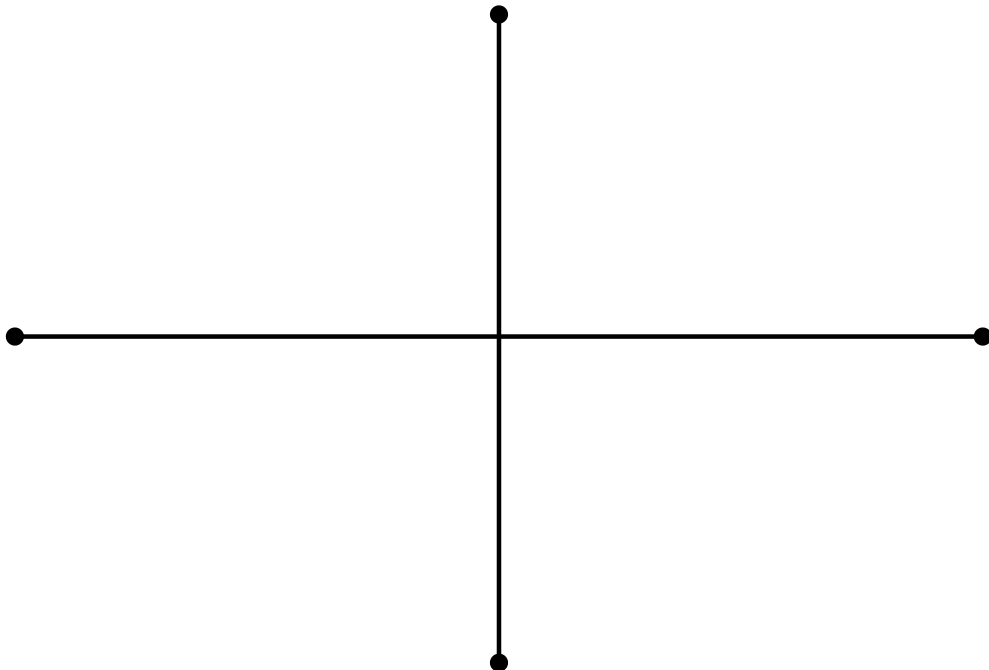
Getting involved in church planting in order to receive applause from our peers is a quick way to derail the pleasure of our heavenly father. Our pursuit of the vision should be driven by a sincere desire to please our heavenly father. There is no reason to use ministry to prove ourselves when Jesus has already paid the price and died for us. This is important to understand because if our motives in ministry drift to lesser things we will, in time, begin to follow a vision of our own creation.

This only leads to frustration, misaligned expectations, emotional weariness, and the death of meaning. As you stay healthy on a personal level and master your motive for ministry, you will be better equipped to keep your church healthy in the years after launch.

A SINGLE STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

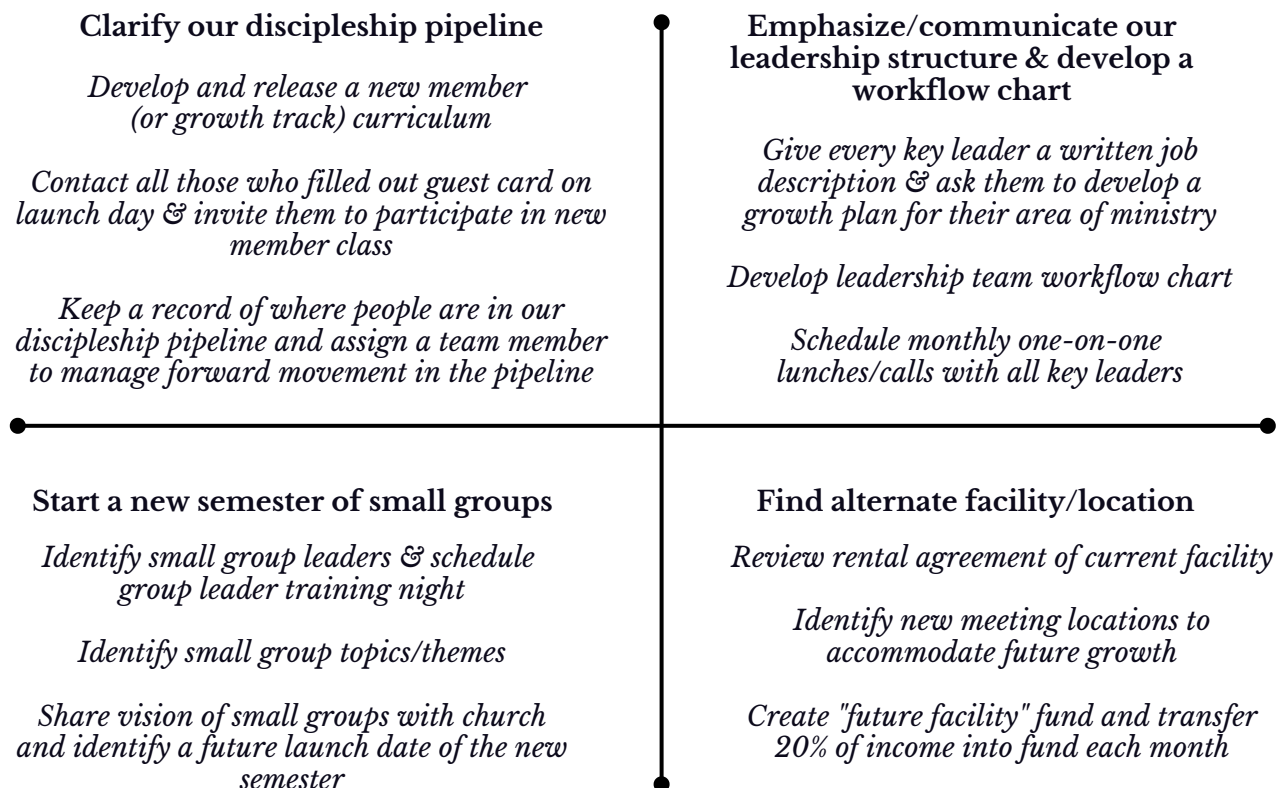
On a practical level, being strategic simply means taking the next step in the right direction. It begins with identifying your "critical path" forward. As an exercise, take a moment to view the chart below. This chart illustrates the critical path of your church *after* launch. The vertical and horizontal lines create four areas of focus. In each of the four blank spaces, write a future goal that *must* happen in order for your church to grow. These should not be "stretch goals" that would make you feel good if they were achieved. These should be goals that if *not* achieved would *inhibit* the growth of your church. These should be **critical objectives** that must be achieved in the future.

OUR CRITICAL PATH



After you have identified four critical areas of focus, take a moment and write 2-3 practical action steps under each focus area. These steps should be easy to measure and track over time. For the sake of illustration, we have completed this task in the chart below.

OUR CRITICAL PATH



What you see above serves as a simple version of a strategic growth plan. Each of these objectives is critical to sustaining forward momentum. Below each objective are practical steps that a leader can easily measure. Thinking in these terms will help a new pastor manage his/her priorities. If they were to spend large amounts of time, energy, and emotional focus working on non-critical tasks, then they would begin to quickly lose the momentum they worked so hard to gain at launch. Strategic planning begins when you establish your own path that is critical to the growth of your church. As a pastor, you must continually ask yourself questions such as:

- "What is the next step I must take in order to fulfill the vision God has given me?"
- "How much time each week am I working to complete the critical path?"
- "Am I distracted by a bunch of small things that have little long-term value?"

Thinking in these terms will help you and your team propel the vision God has given you years into the future. Small steps in the right direction are how churches grow.

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The next time you gather with your team, take time to think about what you need to accomplish *after* you launch. As you discuss the post-launch phase, take out a large sheet of paper and draw a "critical path" chart with vertical and horizontal lines. Then, as a team, identify four areas of focus and relevant action steps for each area. After doing so, review and/or revise the critical path chart at each monthly team meeting.