

Principles for planning by Durk Meijer, March 31, 2016

What are some good principles for doing planning?

Planning has become key in a world that is making us accountable for what we do and how we do it. In the last decade of the twentieth century some organizations added one relevant twist, which should have been there all along... aiming at achieving God's desired result and not just products. Not that anything of this is new, since God always has been wanting us to be wise stewards of what He entrusts in our hands. I was blessed with a mentor who taught me this principle. She taught me to identify first the desired goal and then, step by step we looked at a wise plan to get there. She stressed the stewardship perspective by reminding us that our work should be a result of God working in and through us... not, us working for God. Consequently, we should be able to start each day with a clean slate. Then it becomes much easier to adjust our plans as needed.

I asked a prominent missions leader one time if he was willing to start each day with a clean slate and to be open to any changes God wanted to make at any time. He said that it would be impossible to plan that way, especially with an organization of thousands of people that is spread out all over the world. I sensed that he perceived this as having to start each day from scratch. I differed with him in that God knows about that organization and He wouldn't make the leaders start from scratch unless God had a reason and He needed the freedom to do so. If He gives us a vision, then we become stewards of that vision and not owners. As stewards we can trust God to keep unfolding a plan that is the best of the best, even if it feels to us that we sometimes have to make drastic changes. If we are owners of a vision, then we start working for God and we'll devise the ways that we think best to accomplish the vision. We worry about competition and act territorial, we want to fly our banner high, and we want to have an impact from our perspective – sometimes we even want a name for ourselves. We need to recognize that we are stewards of God's visions and likewise our work. We need God to be working in us and through us in ways that we are servants and partners, reflecting God's integrity. That will make us free from the worries of competition. It will keep God's banner high, and people will see Him glorified.

Let's look at some principles in a planning process:

- First we need to find out **what the vision is that God entrusted us with as His stewards? What do we understand His end result to be? What part does He want us to play in the overall plan?**
- As discussed earlier, it is important for us to **get to directly know the people we are serving.** We can study about them, but we have to be careful about the sources used, since most sources include a lot of personal perspectives from the researchers and those perspectives are colored by their own worldview. Statistics also have many limitations due to a diversity of control factors. The best way, if possible, is to get to visit with the people personally, which leads to the next point.
- We need to **build relationships with the people.** As a principle, we need to recognize the importance to develop relationships with them, modeling God's relationship with us. We want to help them be restored in their relationship with God. If in any way possible, this needs to be face to face in real life and it should lead to relationships that are based on God's real love reflected in and through us, not based on their openness to the Gospel... people are not objects for conversion but rather special living creations so loved by God that Jesus died for them.

- The people should **select relevant Bible passages that can serve them within their worldview to connect with God.** As we get to know the people, we also get to know about their families, their communities, their religions, their culture, and their worldview. Then we can serve them in selecting relevant Bible passages.
- Once people have an initial interest in God, it is important to **give people a basic picture of God from the Bible that people can make theirs as a foundation to build on.** This needs to be made primarily up of passages they can internalize, so that they have real Scripture as a foundation that they can personally defend. The stories that make up this basic picture should be considered in light of the worldview and interests of the people. If there are already churches among the people, then the use of Scripture will stimulate a healthy growth in local fellowships of believers.
- It is essential that people need to **internalize the passages from Scripture, to discover the truths from it, and apply these truths to their own lives.** Unless people own the truths themselves, their worldview is not reshaped by God. Instead they will only be affected... by what looks good, what feels good, and what is easiest. Sometimes their worldview is affected by coerced teaching or they may respond to what gives the best immediate benefits. Then they will continually keep changing depending on these same factors, blown about by every kind of doctrine. Memorizing complete passages and then telling these stories to others is a most effective way of helping people engage with Scripture and internalize the truths they discover. In that way they are applying those truths and thus God is reshaping their worldview.
- **We need to serve primarily as catalysts or mentors, so that people can realize that God is working directly with them.** It is easy to be tempted to put lots of infrastructure in place. We bring for example often programs, buildings, equipment, and established doctrines. We also can prematurely give people much Scripture which complicates them getting a chance to understand the basic picture. This is especially true with Scriptural issues that they cannot yet relate to from their current position. We also should be very careful to bring in any religious culture, liturgy, creeds, and doctrinal statements. These easily can become their foundation instead of the truths of God's Word and God's relationship with them.
- It is important to **build on what people already know with story cycles that help people engage with the overarching panorama of Scripture.** Often a basic panorama can be achieved by using even less than 10 stories that focus on the major themes of the overarching story of scripture. At other times a slow chronological panorama of all the major themes in Scripture can be a great individual or community experience to help people mature significantly. Typically each situation demands its own unique approach, yet we can often find common ground between related peoples.
- It is sometimes important to first **connect some story cycles to issues relevant to the community.** In those situations it is best to address issues as needed to develop interest, especially if there are religious, denominational, community, cultural, or other challenges that are hurting, dividing, or confusing the community.
- We need to **help people form local fellowships of believers, which are like living organisms.** This means that God is uniquely shaping each fellowship by each individual that is part of it. It is not primarily an organization with creeds, doctrines, liturgies, programs, or buildings. It is God living in and through those that have been born again.

- We also need to **integrate in every aspect of ministry that the truths learned from God's Word are to be lived out**. Also, the stories from the Bible should be told to others, starting with the children. This defines the foundation of a real abiding in God and it facilitates discipleship, evangelism, and every other aspect of ministry needed for a healthy maturing church.
- Finally, **everyone should continue growing, God's Word and the relationship with Him remaining central**. If this is done, then people will grow to be wise stewards of any programs, tools, materials, media, and plans alike.