

Discussion Questions for *Winning on Purpose* By John Edmund Kaiser

PART ONE—DO WE REALLY WANT TO WIN?

1. **Why does your congregation exist?** Kaiser suggests there are only three possible answers: (page 25)

1. Your church exists for its members.
2. Your church exists for others—your community, the lost, etc.
3. Your church exists for both.

2. Lyle Schaller states “there are over 300,000 Protestant congregations, all of them presumably going through the motions of ‘having church’ in one form or another.” Kaiser then asks, “How many of them are winning the hearts and minds of people in their communities for Jesus Christ? How many of them are even keeping score? How many of them are just enjoying their little volley as an end in itself?” (page 25) **As you reflect on these three questions, where would you say your church is today? Are you closer to “having church” Sunday after Sunday or are you closer to “winning the hearts and minds of people in your community?”**

3. On page 17 Kaiser shares the following powerful illustration.

“In *The Untouchables*, a movie about Elliott Ness and Al Capone, a crusty old cop named Jimmy Malone asks Ness the same question three times. When Malone (played by Sean Connery, whose rich baritone voice and muffled consonants drip with character) is recruited, he looks Ness in the eye and asks, ‘What are you prepared to do?’ testing to see if Ness can be trusted to go the distance against Capone. When the case against Capone hits a dead end and Malone wants to know if Ness is willing to go beyond conventional police work to get him, he asks Ness, ‘And what are you prepared to do, now?’ And when Malone lies dying from machine gun wounds on the floor of his flat, he pulls Ness close, and gurgles, ‘What...are you... prepared...to do?’”

As the pastor and leader of your church, “What are you prepared to do” to see your church grow?

4. “If you believe that mission happens naturally in congregations through business as usual, the only kind of pastoral leadership you need is operational leadership: someone to preach the Word, conduct services, oversee programs, and keep the campers happy. If, however, you believe that mission happens only through the courage to continually realign an organization’s culture with the values of Christ, then you need something more in a pastor. You need transformational leadership.” (page 28) **Are you functioning as an “Operational Leader” or a “Transformational Leader?” If the former, what change will have to take place today for you to become a Transformational Leader tomorrow.**

5. On page 33 Kaiser writes:

We can either say that the church is an organized organism like a body (each part with a function distinct and related to the others), or an organic organization like a family or an army (a matrix of living beings). Either way the church is not a spiritual invertebrate. Nevertheless, from time to time there are movements seeking to point us back to “New Testament Christianity” in a way that casts suspicion on formal organization. When this impulse is carried too far, it creates a particular set of obstacles for the congregation trying to achieve its mission... Without a structure for accountability, the most dysfunctional people often shape the life of a congregation. Healthy congregations are magnets for healthy people and are medicine for needy people. Needy congregations are magnets for needy people and medicine for no one.

How would you describe your church’s structure on a scale of one to ten with one being a “spiritual invertebrate” and ten being a “buff body?”

PART TWO—DO WE UNDERSTAND THE GAME?

6. In chapters four, five, and six Kaiser lays out three key principles: responsibility, authority, and accountability. **How are these three principles reflected in your church?**

7. Kaiser exhorts the church to make sure it is not choosing to fulfill the Great Commandment’s call to “love your neighbor as yourselves” while neglecting the Great Commission. He states on page 56:

Compassion for the vulnerable is presented as an evidence of righteousness in Matthew 25. However, there is not one criterion for judgment presented here but rather *three* criteria in parallel images: wisdom, illustrated by the [Parable of the] ten virgins (vv. 1-13); productivity, illustrated by the [Parable of the] talents (vv. 14-30); and compassion, illustrated by the [Parable of the] sheep and goats (vv.31-46). The criteria of compassion, wisdom, and productivity, fall within the “everything I have commanded you” portion of Jesus’ commission to the disciples. It may not legitimately be recast as an alternative to his explicit imperative to make disciples.

How well does your congregation keep these two great principles (making disciples and ministering to the least among us) in proper order?

8. Chapter Five opens with the following illustration:

In the days of the Soviet Union what was the difference between taking a road trip in Russia and a road trip in Nebraska? For either one you would have needed an automobile, fuel, and a driver. But in Russia you would need one thing more that you would not need in Nebraska: permission. Travel in a totalitarian state is based on approval. Travel in a free country is based on authorization—as long as you operate the vehicle within a few simple traffic laws, you are free to drive wherever you need to go.

Leading a ministry in many local churches is like taking a road trip in the Soviet Union: you may not be surrounded by Communists, but it’s hard to get the resources, it’s hard to get permission, and it’s hard not to feel that you’re stuck in a previous century. And yet the

proper use of a few clear boundaries can create the freedom and authority that ministry leaders need to accomplish the mission of the church.

What is it like to navigate day-to-day in your church environment. Is it more like traveling in the former Soviet Union or more like traveling in Nebraska?

9. Kaiser suggests that in an accountable environment there are two critical questions that a pastor should be willing to answer: (page 76)

Accountable pastors lead their team into the fray knowing that every so often they will win, lose, or draw. In the normal course of events, this day of reckoning comes in the form of an annual review of performance and compensation. On occasion, it arrives less predictably in the form of a leadership crisis. In either event, the only two legitimate questions of accountability are: 1) Is the mission [of the church] being accomplished as we agreed? And 2) Are any agreed upon boundaries being violated in the process?

Would it help you if you knew you would be expected to answer these two questions each year? Why or why not?

PART THREE—DO WE KNOW WHAT POSITION TO PLAY?

10. Kaiser uses the analogy of a soccer team throughout the book. In chapters 7-11, he addresses the diverse roles that are necessary for a church team to fulfill its mission, and provides the following caution (page 81):

There is an important place for diversity on the team as well as for unity. But one place you *cannot* have diversity is on the question of mission. If you create a tossed salad of leaders with different agendas, your congregation will suffer one of two fates. Either there will be hard and painful division, or there will be soft and putrid compromise.

Amos was not making a riddle when he asked, “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” (Amos 3:3, TNIV) he was emphasizing a principle.

The earlier chapters challenged you to be sure you had a clear mission. Now the question becomes, “Is your church unified around that mission?”

11. Review the table on page 88 which outlines the differences between the Control and Trust Paradigms. Kaiser states, “Without conscious effort to the contrary, over time congregations tend to fall into the *Control Paradigm*. **As you prayerfully reflect on your leadership style, which paradigm does it best reflect: Control or Trust?**

12. Kaiser uses the pilgrimage of “Gene Getz, a leading light of the Church Renewal movement dating from the 1970s” as evidence for having “A” team leader. On page 97 he says:

[Getz] originally advocated a plurality of elders acting in unanimity as the true biblical form of church leadership. If there was a full-time pastor he was ‘only one among several qualified men designated as spiritual leaders in the congregation.’ Through his decades of experience as a church planter, large church pastor, seminary professor, and author, it is instructive to see how dramatically his emphasis has changed. In the second edition of *Sharpening the focus of the Church*, Getz revised the section on church leadership to make room for a primary leader. In his recent volume, *Elders and Leaders*, Getz devotes an entire chapter to making an exegetical case for the following assertion: ‘The New

Testament definitely teaches and illustrates that when there is a plurality of leadership, someone needs to function as the primary leader of the team.’ It is not the purpose of this volume to debate the competing claims of various church polities to a biblical foundation. Instead, *Winning on Purpose* simply suggest there that the fluid and missional leadership structures in the New Testament era included a place for each group to have a primary leader.

Does your church structure provide for a primary leader, and do you function as the leader of your staff and church?

13. Kaiser defines what he calls “Modes of Leading” and places them into three categories (pages 101-102).

- In the context of the board, the pastor leads primarily by inspiring.
- In the context of the staff, the pastor leads primarily by directing.
- In the context of the congregation, the pastor leads primarily by teaching.

Do you agree with his assessment, and if so how well do you adapt your leadership style to the varying aspects of your leadership role?

14. On pages 102-103, Kaiser says:

If pastors don’t employ their gifts to serve the mission don’t tithe their income to fund the mission, and don’t schedule their time to accomplish the mission they should not be surprised if calls to commitment from their pulpits go no further than the notebooks of their people.

Are you leading by example and modeling the behavior that you expect from your staff, lay leaders, and church members?

15. Kaiser makes the statement that “congregations will succeed or fail in the long term based on effective pastoral leadership more than any other human factor. (page 108)

How do you response to that statement?

16. On page 115 there is the following summary of the “Governance Board”.

- Governance is distinct from leadership and management.
- The board represents the Owner of the team, [God].
- The board defines goals, boundaries, and scoring.
- The board keeps score and calls penalties.
- Good governance supports and defends leadership and management.
- Three board officers keep the board on track: chairperson, pastor, and secretary.

As you reflect on his design for church governance, what do you see as its strengths and weaknesses?

PART FOUR—DO WE HAVE THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT?

16. Chapters 12-14 deal with the structure and documents that help the pursuit and realization of the church's mission. **As you review the chapters what are some areas where you were able to say:**

- **Amen, I agree with you 100%!**
- **I would like to talk to you and clarify what you're saying, and then I want to think about it some more!**
- **Man, did you miss the mark with that idea!**

17. Chapter 12 discusses the specifics of Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, and Guiding Principles from the perspective of establishing clear and simple boundaries.

- **What do you think Kaiser means by the term Boundary Principle?**
- **Do you see the importance of the various documents?**
- **What do you see as the positives and negatives of using his concepts in your church?**

18. Chapter thirteen discusses four scheduling tools: the annual calendar, the meeting agenda, the training and selection process, and the transition plan. **What do you see as advantages and disadvantages of each of these as it relates to accomplishing your (senior pastor's) mission goals?**

- **Annual calendar**
- **Meeting agenda**
- **Training and selection process**
- **Transition plan**

19. On pages 153 Kaiser states:

Individuals who serve on a board using the Accountable Leadership strategy must be chosen and trained with utmost care. Board members who enter the room with a casual, mystical, or managerial expectation of tinkering with anything in the congregation that grabs their attention—or the attention of their spouses—cannot govern well. Instead they must understand the mission, vision, values, and structure of the church, and they must understand how to provide the governance piece of that structure in alignment with the mission, vision, and values.

And Table 13.4 on page 154 gives an outline for a Pastor's Training Course. **If you were to consider establishing an accountability board with the intention of training them, as Kaiser suggests, who would be some potential board candidates in your church?**

20. Chapter Fourteen has an excellent discussion about church polity. **From his discussion, your experience, and most importantly scripture, what do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of the following:**

- **Congregational**
- **Presbyterian**
- **Episcopalian**
- **Emerging**

21. **What are some key concepts that you gleaned from the book that we have not touched?**