

INTRODUCTION

*Though I am free and belong to no one,
I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible...
I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.
I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.
Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize?*

Run in such a way as to get the prize.

*Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training.
They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.
Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.
No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others,
I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

The Apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 9:19–27 (TNIV)

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?”

When I read 1 Corinthians 9:19–27, I think of Jimmy Malone. The Apostle Paul was the kind of leader that Malone would have trusted and followed, come hell or high water. Paul had the combination that the Irish veteran was looking for: dedication to the mission, the character not to compromise his integrity on the job, and the audacity to use any means necessary—within his integrity—to win against the enemy.

This book is for readers who want their congregations to succeed in mission and therefore want their pastors to succeed in leadership. That can include board members looking for a way to lend support without rubber-stamping, pastors looking for a way to lead boldly without lording it over people, denominational executives looking for way to recruit effective pastors, consultants

looking for a way to help ministries move to the next level, and dedicated church members looking for a way to understand how their congregation can thrive. For all of these readers and more, the chapters that follow offer such a way: a strategy for mission that can make a measurable difference in results. It's not for everybody...only for those who play to win on purpose.

After ten years as an active volunteer and twenty-three years in full-time ministry, I know from experience that not all ministers play to win. Some run aimlessly. Some beat the air with their fists. These men and women either don't know or don't care that, having preached to others, they themselves may be disqualified for the prize. Every time I see a pastor who avoids taking risks in order to keep a job, a board member who undercuts the pastor's authority in order to keep control, or a church member who whines about new Christians in order to keep them from "taking over our church,"—I want to shout, *It doesn't have to be this way!*

Rather than curse against the dark, however, I choose to light a candle. *Winning on Purpose* is a way to organize congregations for success in mission. All this talk of success in the church is bound to stir up a few questions for thoughtful readers. Since there is no space to answer them all, I want to acknowledge up front four assumptions that underlie this book:

God wins on purpose and wants his Church to do the same.

As early as the curse in Genesis 3:15, God has been out to crush the head of the Serpent. In Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*, you can even hear it *crunch*. Winning is not always nice, but winning by the right side is always good. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus describes his Church on the offense, battering down the gates of hell.

Fruitfulness is the same theme of prevailing dressed in a different biblical metaphor. Images such as the sower in Matthew 13 and the vine branches in John 15 depict the deepest, most intimate, and most God-glorifying disciples as those who "bear much fruit." Thinking of success in the church is neither an encroachment of corporate business culture nor an inherently modern fixation of Boomers. Even the sports metaphor in *Winning on Purpose* dates back as far as 1950—1950 *years ago* that is. See Paul fight. See Paul run. Run, Paul, run. The emphasis of this image in 1 Corinthians 9:19–27 is not on the discipline of training but on the purpose for the discipline, which is to win the race.

Wait—doesn't God love losers? Of course! In moral terms, all of us sons of Adam and daughters of Eve are losers. But God doesn't love us *because* we're losers. And his love doesn't *leave us* as losers. God is the Ultimate Winner, and he makes a place for us on the winning side. The name of his team is not *Losers Anonymous*, it is *Those Who Overcome*. God has a redemptive purpose in the world and is serious about prevailing. This positive view of triumph, though not triumphalism, is a key assumption of this book.

We win by using God's gifts for God's purposes.

Congregations don't win by sporting the largest auditorium any more than sports teams win by congregating in the largest stadium. Congregations and teams win by reaching the goal. It may well be that winning teams tend to have better stadiums and that winning congregations tend to have better auditoriums, but don't confuse the consequence with the cause.

Success is achieving an intended outcome. Success in God's Church is achieving the outcome God intends. Another word for this outcome is *mission*. Just as essential as reaching the goal is reaching the goal without cheating. In other words, as we press toward the mark using all possible means, true winners in ministry are committed to operating within the bounds of God's revealed Word, the Bible. That commitment does not limit us to the strategies and tactics of the prophets and the apostles, but it does limit us to their value system.

Speaking of strategies and tactics, we recognize with James 1:17 that all good gifts come down from the Father, who provides us with natural and spiritual gifts and then empowers us when we use our gifts for his purposes. Christ will build his Church. However, one thing that God does not provide is foolishness. That's a human contribution. When we reach a critical mass of foolishness by neglecting God's mission and squandering God's gifts, we should not be surprised when Christ builds his Church through some other congregation instead of through ours.

Groups cannot normally be expected to lead or be held accountable.

Paul Borden, Executive Minister of the American Baptist Churches of the West, offers a theory on this point in his book, *Hit the Bullseye*: "It is impossible to hold groups of people accountable, unless you are willing to dismiss the entire group when expectations are not met. I believe one of the main reasons that ecclesiastical bodies like committees and commissions is

that these groups are ways for people to have influence without being held accountable, because we are usually unwilling to tell a group that it can no longer exist.”¹

Bodies of believers such as congregations, small groups, ministry teams, and the like are the building blocks for expanding the community of Christ on earth. Many failures in ministry result from individualism, rugged or otherwise, crowding out the corporate nature of the Christian mission. Together we are infinitely more than the sum of our parts because together we are the body of Christ. However, despite our status as a body—no scratch that—*because* of our status as a body, we must value the unique contribution of each individual part, including leaders. A hand is not the eye. A sheep is not the shepherd. And a board member is not the pastor. Leading is merely a specialty of service, not a badge of honor. Every obedient servant of God is worthy of honor, but not every servant is called and gifted for effective pastoral leadership.

The reliance on accountable, individual leadership may well be the most controversial assumption underlying, *Winning on Purpose*. It runs counter to the preference for team and community favored by some respected writers addressing current postmodern/emergent/missional issues. For this reason it also runs the risk of *ad hominem* criticism as a limited “Modern” or “Boomer” perspective. Easum and Travis’s *Beyond the Box*, for example, devotes its first chapter to the opposite position: “Beyond One-Person Leadership: Shifting to Teams.” The authors are influential thinkers and, ironically, effective leaders and developers of leaders. However, I must respectfully disagree with their initial argument because I believe it dismantles a straw man. The book is filled with examples of effective and innovative congregations. However, none of them, including those cited in the first chapter, lacks an effective lead pastor. I could not ask for a better compilation of evidence for my conviction on the need for a leader. Those who differ on this point are in good company and may nevertheless gain some helpful insights from parts of my book while rejecting its central premise. However, for an organizational model based on teams in place of leaders, one must look elsewhere, such as Tom Bandy’s *Christian Chaos*. The present volume seeks without apology to set up congregations for success in mission by setting up their pastors for success in leadership.

This book is adaptable to a wide range of contexts.

The Church of Jesus Christ finds expressions in a vast array of denominations around the world. Each one has a history and a polity, either formal or assumed. Most denominations

recognize at least a few of the others. Some claim to be the one true denomination. Other identifiable groups of congregations deny that they are denominations. Finally, there are churches that find denominations divisive, so they are *nondenominational*, ironically dividing themselves from everyone.

This book is written with a wide variety of Christian movements in mind. The strategy of “Accountable Leadership,” as I have called it in my training and consulting, is applicable and adaptable to virtually any organization that is serious about accomplishing a mission. This scope goes beyond any one Christian polity, whether traditional or emerging. As theory, it can be adapted beyond Christianity or beyond religious entities of any kind. However, by design this volume is written specifically as a tool for Christian congregations who are committed to fulfilling the mandate of Christ to make disciples of all nations.

It is my intention to offer a strategy that can be customized for traditional, contemporary, or emergent ministries without prejudice. It is not my intention to address the process of change, except in passing, or to advocate for one polity or movement over another. I have made an effort to touch on the problems and uniquenesses of the four broad streams of episcopal, presbyterian, and congregational polity, and emerging “unpolity.” The brevity of this book does not allow for the complexities of these broad streams to be addressed, much less the nuances of the individual movements that constitute each stream. My remarks in this regard are meant to be suggestive starting points only.

The organizational strategy I have developed is called “Accountable Leadership.” Though the strategy has been influenced by interaction with the systems of many others including John Carver, Stephen Block, Cyril Houle, and Tom Bandy, readers would be mistaken to view *Winning on Purpose* as a presentation of or argument for any of these models.² Accountable Leadership differs in systemic ways from each of them. The strategy has been used across denominations in the United States, New Zealand, and Australia but has been implemented most through the American Baptist Churches of the West, based in California. In this book, it is presented one layer at a time as the answers to four broad questions for congregations and their pastors:

- 1) Do we really want to win?

A foundation of intentionality, difficulties, and strategy

2) Do we understand the game?

Three dynamic elements of the task to understand

3) Do we know what position to play?

Four components of the model to align

4) Do we have the right equipment?

A collection of tools for implementation

For congregations that want to prevail, I would say Jimmy Malone asks the big question, and the Apostle Paul supplies the right answer. *What are you prepared to do?* “Run in such a way as to get the prize.”

¹ Paul Borden, *Hit the Bullseye: How Denominations Can Aim the Congregation at the Mission Field*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 127. (*Like* is a verb in this sentence.)

² See each author’s work in the Annotated Bibliography.