

# connect

**HOW TO DOUBLE  
YOUR NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS**

nelson searcy

**WITH JENNIFER DYKES HENSON**



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**To the dedicated volunteers who serve  
at The Journey Church.**

I am grateful that you show up each week with such enthusiasm to grow in your faith and to serve our Lord. In my nightmares, I see what it would be like if you didn't!

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# acknowledgments

## From Nelson Searcy

In the introduction of this book, you'll read about my journey with what I call the ministry system. I have had to learn (and relearn) the lessons embedded in these pages more times than I'd like to admit. I am merely a two-talent guy who has had the privilege of being surrounded by ten-talent people! My eternal gratitude goes to Jesus Christ for calling me to salvation and later to ministry—I'm honored to be one of his equippers for his church.

While dozens, if not hundreds, of pastors have influenced my thinking on ministry and volunteerism, two stand above the rest: Steve Stroope and Rick Warren. If you don't know their names or haven't read their books, please go to Amazon .com right now and order everything they have written. Steve and Rick, thank you for your personal and ongoing investment in me.

In addition, I would like to especially thank the following pastors and church leaders for influencing my views and shaping my thoughts on ministry: Steve Sjogren, Wayne Cordeiro, Bill Hybels, Bryant Wright, Jimmie Davidson, Tim Stevens, Tony Morgan, Ray Wickham, Milton A. Hollifield Jr., Erik Rees, Lance Witt, Adam Bishop, and Larry Osborne. If the theology and applications in this book are correct, you can thank the pastors above. If there are mistakes, those are solely mine.

I must also express huge thanks to my colleagues at The Journey Church, both past and present staff members. Since 2001, I have had the privilege of being the dumbest person on an extremely smart team. Kerrick Thomas and Jason Hatley, in particular, have greatly shaped the thoughts in this book. To all of our current staff, I love doing church with you! To those God will call to our staff in the future, I look forward to being on the team with you. We have openings right now—get in touch!

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I must also express my thanks to the now eleven hundred-plus pastors who have completed one of my Senior Pastors Coaching Networks. Many of the ideas shared in these pages were first beta-tested on you. Your feedback, insights, and improvements have made this a much stronger system. Thank you for living out the “learn and return” principle.

Jennifer Dykes Henson has been a partner on my last eight books. I am so grateful that she initially stepped up in 2004 as a volunteer at The Journey and offered to use her communication skills “to help out as needed.” She is now such a valuable part of the team that to say she “helps out” is an understatement. This book simply would not be in existence without Jennifer. Her passion to communicate my basic material in such a profound way is equal only to her commitment to God and the local church. Thank you, Jennifer! As members at The Journey, Jennifer and her husband Brian serve as models of all that I discuss in this book.

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Finally, I must thank the love of my life, Kelley, and my son, Alexander. Kelley and I first met on a blind date in 1992. Her not seeing me in advance gave me a fighting chance, and I’m still grateful for that opportunity. I say this in every anniversary card I’ve ever given her since our August 6, 1994, wedding (see, I do remember): Kelley—I love you now more than ever! Alexander, who will turn six years old just prior to the release of this book, has benefited so much from the dozens of volunteers who serve each week in Journey Kidz. Each Sunday afternoon, when he has something new to share after his time in Journey Kidz, Kelley and I are again thankful for the investment those volunteers are making in his young life! Alexander: I love you and you are indeed my main man (and yes, I am done writing for the evening, so now we can



wrestle). Thank you both for your commitment to this book and your continual support.

### **From Jennifer Dykes Henson**

Thanks, first and foremost, to God for allowing me to have some small part in calling his people to live more purposefully for him. Thanks to Nelson: the magnitude of the work I am privileged to do alongside you continually humbles me. Thank you for answering the monumental call God has put on your life and for inviting me into that ministry with you. And thanks to my husband, Brian: every day with you is better than the last.

## preface

*Tuesday, 7:45 a.m.* Pastor Tim steps into the diner and immediately notices that something is out of the ordinary. Dirty tables sit untouched. A crowd of people waiting to be seated is forming at the front. Tim scans the restaurant and sees David perched on the edge of their usual booth, surveying the breakfast remains of the people who had been there a few minutes before.

Tim and David, a young pastor with whom Tim has formed something of a mentor relationship, have been meeting for breakfast the second Tuesday of every month for at least three years now—always at the same time, always at the same place. Generally the atmosphere is inviting and the service is smooth, but today the classically well-run diner is different. Tim pushes through the chaos at the front to get to David.

“Hey, man,” Tim says. David stands up to greet him. “What’s going on?”

“Hey, Tim. I’m really not sure what the deal is . . .”

As if on cue, a waiter who often serves the two steps up and starts clearing the dirty table. “Good morning, guys. Sorry about this. Things are crazy today. We’re short two servers and one hostess. I feel like a one-man show running this place.”

“No worries, friend,” David says to the waiter. Then, to Tim, he jokes quietly, “I know the feeling. Running my church lately feels like running a one-man show. I just hope none of my services turn out like this.”

Tim chuckles along with David, but the comment concerns him. Once they settle into the booth and order coffee, he asks, “Do you really feel that way, David? About being a one-man show?”

“Well, I have to admit, sometimes I have this nightmare that I show up at church on a Sunday morning and I’m the only one there—no worship team, no ushers, no greeters, no kids workers . . . just me. I mean, our church isn’t huge or anything, but things aren’t going to happen like they should without volunteers showing up. And I’ll tell you, I could use a lot more of them . . .”

---

David’s not the only one who has that nightmare about being the only person to show up on a Sunday morning. I’ve had it a few times myself. How about you? One thing we learn early on in our work as church leaders is that the church is a volunteer-run organization. Without people who are willing to serve, we can’t do what we’ve been called to do. In fact, when we try to take care of everything on our own, we mess

up God's plan by stunting both our people's growth and our church's redemptive potential.

Dream with me for a minute. What would your church look like if you could double the number of people who volunteer? What if a full 50 percent of your people were connected through serving for at least an hour every week? Imagine the ministries that would finally be fleshed out. Imagine the great experience your attenders would have at each weekend service. Imagine the influence you could begin to exert on your community. Abandon the nightmare and embrace this dream. It can be a reality.

God wants the people he has put in your church to be actively engaged in serving. He has no interest in a one-person show. In fact, connecting your people through service is a critical part of your responsibility to disciple them—a necessary element in helping them become a better reflection of Jesus. In the pages ahead, you'll discover how to build a system that will give you an ongoing abundance of volunteers, consistently attract new people, and make sure you don't burn anyone out. You'll also uncover some surprising, contrarian truths about how to encourage a culture of service in your church. For example, I'll describe:

- Why a pre-serving spiritual gifts assessment can be a bad idea.
- Why it's important to let people serve before they are believers.
- How you can ruin your volunteers by overtraining them.
- Why you have to make eager servers take a break.
- Why you never *need* a volunteer for anything.

When there aren't enough hands to do what needs to be done, things break down. Quiet chaos begins to rumble below the surface. God's vision for your church gets buried beneath the urgency of figuring out how to keep all the parts moving. People languish as consumers rather than contributors, missing God's best for their lives. Ministries aren't able to fulfill the missions they were created for. And you, as the leader, run the risk of falling into a dangerous scarcity mentality.

God has a greater plan for your church. Thankfully, he doesn't operate in lack but in abundance. As you learn how to cooperate with God in leading people into a deeper walk with him by connecting them through biblical servanthood, you will begin to see healthy growth in your members and attenders, in all of your ministries, and in your church as a whole. Are you ready to get started?

# introduction

I'm a slow learner. The lessons I'm going to share with you in the pages ahead—and the system they led to—have taken me over twenty years to learn. My thinking about ministry started taking shape back in 1993 when I became the pastor of a thirteen-person church on the northern edge of Charlotte, North Carolina. A few weeks into my role as pastor, one of my congregants let me in on a little secret: the night the church voted me in, they were actually voting to keep the doors open. Their options had been to either take on the kid with no experience or shut down the whole operation for good. They chose me. To this day, I'm not sure they made the right decision.

Over the next several months, by God's grace, the church began to grow. The increase was great for the kingdom—we grew mainly by reaching lost people—but bad for me. Why? I was a one-man show. At first, I thought I had to do everything myself. Then I realized that other people would

be helpful, but I was too timid to ask. After a few months of the do-it-myself attitude, I realized I wasn't going to be able to keep my head above water unless something changed. So I proceeded to do what many a young pastor has done: I swallowed my pride and begged for volunteers.

Yes, I stood in front of my little congregation every Sunday morning and begged. I begged people to serve in our nursery. (As you can imagine, this wasn't comforting to our first-time families who had just dropped their kids off in the nursery.) I begged people to come in and serve during the week, to help with administrative and maintenance tasks. I begged people to lend a hand in any and every way possible. I even set up a committee to help me beg. In short, I became a professional beggar because, hey, that's what you have to do to get people to volunteer, right?

Begging actually worked well over the short term. By the time I left the church two years later to pursue graduate work, our attendance had grown from 13 to 130, and we had enough volunteers to squeak by. But as you and I both know, begging isn't a sustainable model for the long run. If you live by the beg, you'll eventually die by the beg.

While I was in graduate school, I didn't pastor a church of my own, but I helped out a great pastor who had just started a new church. The experience marked my first foray into church planting. My time with this pastor taught me more about ministry than I knew there was to learn. He understood that *ministry* simply means *to serve*—and when it came to connecting servers, he didn't have a begging bone in his body. Rather, he knew how to cast vision. Instead of pleading with people to serve, he made them want to serve. Volunteers lined

up in spades to be a part of our fast-growing church. My role became something like that of a traffic cop, directing people who were eager to serve into various areas of service. I repented for my old begging ways and said “never again!”

After graduate school I had the privilege of serving on staff at one of the largest churches in America. The senior pastor convinced me to leave a PhD program to work on his staff by saying, “You’ll get more out of being a part of what’s going on here than out of any PhD program in the world.” He was right. I got to see the inner workings of a large, healthy church. I had the unique opportunity to study the fruit of a volunteer system I didn’t build. I witnessed bright-eyed men and women arriving early to set up tents, chairs, and children’s ministry equipment before sunrise and holding mini pep rallies over breakfast to energize the hundreds of weekly volunteers. I remember thinking, “If I ever get a chance to lead a church, this is how I’ll approach ministry.”

In 2001 God gave me that chance. My wife, Kelley, and I moved from Southern California to the Upper West Side of Manhattan to start The Journey Church in New York City—the church I lead to this day. As I describe in great detail in my book *Launch: Starting a New Church from Scratch* (Regal, 2006), I started The Journey with no money, no members, and no meeting location. (To learn more about *Launch*, visit [www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/connect](http://www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/connect).) To grow this new church under the headship of Jesus Christ, I had to internalize, synthesize, and systemize all my ministry experience to date. As I think back through what I have learned about ministry along the way, there are three big lessons I can’t get away from.



1. *I can't lead a healthy church by myself.* This humbling truth is actually a blessing in disguise. Not only am I incapable of leading a healthy church by myself (as are you); God doesn't intend for me to. First of all, I desperately need the Spirit of God and the mission of Christ to be my constant guides. Second, I need the people God has put around me to step into the ministry roles he intends for them.

Logistically speaking (and church health notwithstanding), it is possible to handle everything yourself when you lead a church of a hundred people or less. Of course, that's not God's plan—and you likely won't be able to do it well—but it is possible to keep things afloat. Maybe that's why half of the churches in America have an average attendance of one hundred or less. (For more on why churches get stuck at one hundred, two hundred, and five hundred, see my *Growth Barriers* resources at [www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/connect](http://www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/connect).) If you try to do it all yourself—at any level—you can count on these three things:

- You will be setting yourself up for major burnout.
- You won't experience the kingdom impact God wants for your church.
- You will be robbing the people in your church of the opportunity to find purpose and passion through serving.

Thanks to all I had learned before 2001, I made an intentional decision from day one at The Journey: I decided to humble myself and admit that I couldn't fulfill God's purposes for his new church by trying to do everything on my own. To this day, that's one of the best decisions I have ever made.

2. *If I fail to connect people in significant ministry, I am robbing them of the opportunity to grow.* In other words, the people in my church will never become the fully developing disciples I long for them to become if I don't connect them in specific, appropriate ministry positions.

This reality made me uncomfortable. You see, I love being a pastor. I love doing the work of a pastor. I find fulfillment in helping people and—I'll admit it—I enjoy being needed. At the same time, I live to see people grow in Christ. My constant pleading prayer is that our church will be a disciple-making church. I wake up in the morning and go to bed at night thinking about discipleship and the systems that can help grow a healthy disciple. (For more on my systems approach to discipleship, see my free ebook *Healthy Church, Healthy Systems* at [www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/connect](http://www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/connect).)

So, for a long time, I lived with the tension of wanting to do all I could for my own fulfillment, on the one hand, and wanting to connect the people in my church to do what they could for the sake of discipleship, on the other. While I still struggle with this tension on occasion, I ultimately found freedom through studying Ephesians 4—the passage in which Paul clearly describes the role of a pastor:

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. (Eph. 4:11–13)

Humor me and underline “Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.” (It’s okay. You can write in the book.)

I won’t go into a long exegetical and theological discussion of these verses here, but I do encourage you to spend some time with this passage. Personally, as I prayed and sought God’s instruction from Paul’s writing, I became focused like a laser on one word: “equip.” I realized that my chief role as a pastor is to equip the people of my church for ministry. I don’t always get to do; I get to equip someone else to do. When I equip and my people do, we both win. I find fulfillment and confirmation from God regarding my calling, and my people find fulfillment and confirmation from God regarding their place of service. Wow!

One minor thought before we look at the third lesson: over the years I have discovered that I am both a disciple and a pastor. As a pastor I am to equip others to be disciples by calling them to Christ, connecting them in service, and challenging them biblically. And as a disciple myself, I am meant to connect with *some* ministries of the church in a deeply personal way (keyword: “some,” not all). I do my part and equip others to do theirs. In other words, I equip people for all of the ministries of the church, but I personally commit to doing only a few things.

*3. More people are reached for Christ when more people are connected in places of service.* In a way this reality is a natural outgrowth of the previous point—but evangelism must be intentional as well as natural. (For more on intentional evangelism, see my book *Ignite: Sparking Immediate Growth*

*in Your Church* [Baker, 2009], and visit [www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/connect](http://www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/connect).)

When people are connected within your church, finding fulfillment and growing in their Christian faith, they will live out their faith more fully outside the walls of the church—which means they will invite more of their non-Christian friends to your services and events. So, connecting your people in service not only deepens the discipleship ministry in your church; it also expands your evangelism outreach.

I have definitely noticed this correlation at The Journey. The more people we get plugged into volunteering, the more people we reach for Christ. Greater numbers of people serving equals greater numbers of people baptized. Only God could have set it up that way.

As I mentioned, I am a slow learner. The three lessons above have taken me twenty years to learn, but I hope to help you discover the truth of these lessons for yourself over the pages of this book. Even beyond my desire to inspire you and educate you, my goal is to equip you—equip you with a specific nuts-and-bolts system that keeps you from doing it all yourself, doubles your volunteer base, and positions you to reach more people for Christ. To that end, here are a few suggestions for how to get the most out of *Connect*:

- Read with a pen in hand. Allow God’s Holy Spirit to speak to you as you read, and capture the thoughts he brings to mind on paper. Even if you are reading this book electronically, I encourage you to take notes.
- Read *Connect* with your entire team. Encourage each person to think specifically about how he can work to

implement the details of the ministry system effectively in his area.

- Take a season to study *Connect* with all of your key volunteers—both laity and staff. I can't overstate the importance of having everyone unified behind a common vision for ministry and volunteerism in your church.
- Share *Connect* with a fellow pastor—learn and return. Learn from the pages ahead and then return your knowledge back to the kingdom by recommending *Connect* to someone else you know who wants a church full of eager volunteers.

I would love for this book to open up a dialogue between you and me. Please connect with me along the way for free stuff, more details, and next steps at [www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/connect](http://www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/connect).

PART 1

# adopting a ministry mindset



# 1

## the significance of service

### WHAT MINISTRY LOOKS LIKE

The greatest use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.

—William James

The greatest among you must be a servant.

—Jesus (Matthew 23:11)

My wife and I go on a date once a month. Between my hectic schedule and all of Kelley's responsibilities, it can be hard to pin down a night, but twosome time is a priority so we do whatever needs to be done to get a date night on the calendar. Sometimes we keep our dates low-key (think pizza and a movie, maybe even on the couch at home), but sometimes



we take things up a notch and go to a new play or a trendy restaurant. Whatever we have planned, I am a stickler about ensuring that the details are fleshed out and that everything is in place.

For one of our recent date nights, I made a reservation at a restaurant in town that was, apparently, the hot new place. A few of our friends had been there and they raved about it. Thanks to all the hype, I had to make reservations three weeks in advance just to get a table. When the night came, Kelley and I got dressed up, dropped our son off at a friend's house, and headed downtown. I was impressed as soon as we pulled up to the restaurant. The building was gorgeous. The ambiance inside was warm and inviting. The aromas swirling around were unbelievable. As the hostess led us past a jazz quartet to our table, I just knew that this would be a great night—a perfect night. That is, until our waiter approached the table.

As soon as Henry (I knew his name thanks only to his name tag) walked up, the mood began to crumble. With no greeting and no eye contact, he pulled out his notepad and grunted, “Do you know what you want?” A little taken aback, I said, “Um, no, we actually just sat down. I think we need . . .” Before I could finish my sentence, Henry shoved his notepad back into his pocket and walked away.

Now, I can dismiss such behavior at a dive or a diner like the place Tim and David frequent, but this place was neither of those things. Not by a long shot. This restaurant was meant to be an experience—the kind of place where you spend time with the menu, ask questions of the waiter, and make sure you choose the perfect dish. It's the kind of place where you linger over your appetizer before the meal comes

and linger over your meal before dessert. You get the picture. Saying Henry's attitude did not match the atmosphere is an understatement. He was our server for the evening, but I knew immediately he had zero interest in serving us. He was there out of obligation and the need for a paycheck. His heart wasn't in it.

Our experience with Henry—which only went downhill from there, I'm sorry to say—got me thinking about the whole idea of serving. In Matthew 23:11 Jesus makes a pretty ironic statement: “The greatest among you must be a servant.” We're all familiar with that statement—maybe you've even taught a message based on it—but when we drill down, what does “being a servant” really mean? What is the actual connection with “the greatest” among us? Specifically, for our purposes as church leaders, what does Jesus's statement mean in our churches?

The church is unique in that it is largely a volunteer-run organization. People who are willing to serve are crucial to what we do. But a lot of frustration and unanswered questions are inherent in that fact. Questions like: How do we get people to serve? How do we make people *want* to serve, so we don't have a bunch of Henrys showing up out of obligation? How do we best utilize the people who are interested in serving? How do we make sure they want to keep serving? In short, how do we mobilize people for significant ministry?

If you're like me, at some point you have probably looked around at other churches and wondered why they seem to have more volunteers than you do. You've wondered why their people are so dedicated to serving the church, when you feel like you are doing everything on your own, afraid to ask for

help. Maybe you've always thought that eager volunteers were directly linked to the charisma of the pastor, or the result of some clever terminology he uses when asking people to serve. Maybe you've wondered if they bribe their people with free ice cream. You can admit it; we've all been there.

The truth is that the leaders at those churches with a plethora of eager volunteers aren't doing anything rare or difficult. They aren't doing anything that you can't do just as well. An abundance of volunteers, or a lack thereof, comes down to one simple thing—namely, the quality of the ministry system operating in the church. As one of the eight systems at work in every healthy church, the ministry system is the system that asks the question just mentioned: *How do we mobilize people for significant ministry?* In case you aren't familiar with my operational theory when it comes to church organization, let me give you a quick rundown of the thinking behind the eight systems of a church.

## Defining the System

Those of you who are parents know the awe that comes with holding your newborn baby in your arms. Even though babies are born every day, each one is a miracle. Think back to the last time you looked at ten tiny fingers and toes, or watched a little chest move up and down, drawing breath. By cliché, that baby is a “bundle of joy,” but she is also a bundle of something else. She is a bundle of perfectly formed, intricate systems that are already working together to keep her alive.

Thanks to her tiny circulatory system, her heart is pumping blood through her veins. Thanks to her respiratory system,

her lungs are taking in air. Her digestive system is breaking down her mother's milk from the very first drop and her muscular system is letting her wrap her little hand around her father's finger. Even in a brand-new baby, each of these systems and others are fully developed, fully functioning, and ready to grow with her as she starts her journey toward adulthood.

God is into systems. He organized the universe with systems. He established the measurement of time through a system. And, from the beginning, he formed our bodies as a cohesive unit of systems. Adam and Eve—unblemished specimens of God's craftsmanship—were compilations of the systems that caused them to function. They were perfect adult examples of that newborn baby. Without systems humming under the surface, they would not have been able to walk or even breathe. They wouldn't have been able to experience the pleasures of the garden. Eve wouldn't have been able to pluck the apple from the tree and Adam wouldn't have been able to take the bite that set God's redemptive plan into motion. Without their systems, they would have remained as unmolded lumps of clay, unable to fulfill the purposes of God. From the beginning, God has put systems to work, providing the mechanics and the platform through which he shows his greatness.

One more thing about Adam and Eve. What is it that we know about them for sure? What was the blueprint God used in creating them? Himself. Genesis affirms that God created man in his own image. Don't miss this: God created beings who function through systems and said that they had been created in his own image. God is into systems.

Paul understood God’s affinity for systems. That’s why, in trying to help us wrap our minds around how the church should function, he compared the body of Christ to the human body. He aligned the design of the church with the functioning of our own different parts. In Romans, Paul writes, “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Rom. 12:4–5 NIV). Sounds remarkably like how God designed our physical bodies with systems, right? Go back and read the verse again, substituting the word “systems” every time you see the word “members.” It makes perfect sense. All the parts of the body—both the church body and the physical body—work together, allowing us to fulfill God’s purposes and plans on this earth. And both of those respective bodies function best through well-developed systems.

A system is any ongoing process that Saves You Stress, Time, Energy, and Money, and continues to produce results. Good systems function under the surface to keep things running smoothly so that you can concentrate on more important priorities. Thankfully, you don’t have to think about the fact that your neurological system is allowing you to read and process this information. That system is doing its job, or you wouldn’t be able to understand the words in front of you. But if you began to see a decline in your cognitive ability—if all of a sudden you could not remember or analyze information in the way you always have—you would have to deal with the stress of knowing something was wrong and put a lot of money, time, and energy into figuring out where the breakdown was occurring. We may not be aware of a good

system when it is running well, but there is no mistaking when something isn't working like it should.

The same is true in the church. We know that the church is a body, so it follows that the church also has systems working beneath the surface. I contend that the church is made up of eight systems: the worship planning system, the evangelism system, the assimilation system, the small groups system, the ministry system, the stewardship system, the leadership system, and the strategic system. Each of these systems is present in your church, whether it is healthy and active or not. And each system is giving you the results it has been designed to give you. If you want to change your results in any area, change the corresponding system in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. (To learn more about all eight of these systems, download the free “Healthy Systems, Healthy Church” report at [www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/connect](http://www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/connect).)

Recently I've become a runner. When I first started running, my cardiovascular system was not very strong. It was there, but it wasn't used to working efficiently. I could only run a few minutes at a time before I was spent. But over the course of a few months, with directed training, I strengthened my cardiovascular system (not to mention my respiratory system and muscular system), and now I can run long distances without stopping. While I'm proud of my progress, I have a friend who has been running for years and can still run marathons around me. His cardiovascular system is more highly developed than mine. So, while we all have a cardiovascular system—you, me, my friend the marathoner—they are in different stages of health based on what we do to exercise and maximize them. See where this is going?

In the same way, as church leaders, we all have a ministry system at work beneath the surface of our church. In some churches, this system is more highly developed than in others. The churches with well-developed ministry systems are the churches that always have plenty of volunteers who are willing and eager to find a place of service and dedicate themselves to it. These are the churches that are able to attract many more volunteers than they even have room for—which is a great problem to have—and who understand that wise recruitment of volunteers is actually a form of discipleship.

The ministry system is an ongoing system that motivates people to serve for the first time and mobilizes them for a lifetime of serving. Unlike some of the other more independent church systems, the ministry system is a far-reaching system. It affects every other system. Just as a cardiac failure would be devastating to the other systems in your body, a weak ministry system inhibits every area of your church. Why? Because the ministry system is where you discover the servants whose time and efforts will go a long way toward making your church effective. It's where you find the people who will head up your small groups system; it's where you find the people who will make your assimilation system run well; it's even where you identify people who may become future staff members at your church. Your church can't operate without volunteers, so the strength of the system by which you mobilize people for service is crucial. To that end, there are four clear steps to creating an effective ministry system:

1. Clarify your theology of ministry.
2. Create first-serve opportunities.

3. Cultivate a ministry ladder.
4. Celebrate and reproduce servants.

While the remainder of these pages will focus on the details of implementing these steps and moving people through processes, I don't want you to miss the ultimate truth behind this discussion: at its core, the ministry system is about helping people become servants. The word "ministry" simply means *to serve*. Woven into every principle and strategy in this book are Jesus's words, "The greatest among you must be a servant." The way we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to help our people become servants—which ultimately helps them become fully developing followers of Jesus—is to provide them with the knowledge, tools, and opportunities they need to give themselves to something greater than themselves.

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## In a Word

Back in 2002, when we started The Journey, we understood next to nothing about the importance of systems within the church. We launched on Easter Sunday with 110 people in a comedy club on New York City's Upper West Side. The next Sunday I learned an inherent truth of church leadership: not everyone who shows up on Easter Sunday comes back to church the next week. Over the next three months, through my dynamic leadership and charismatic preaching, I



decreased the church down to thirty-five people. That's when I began to realize certain things we needed to do in order to cooperate with God in the work to which he calls us.

That fall, things began to turn around. One of the early signs we'd rounded a corner happened just before Thanksgiving. A young Jewish woman who had been attending our services came to faith in Christ, and we baptized her. Soon after she became a Christian, she started facing a barrage of questions from her family. Being so new to the faith, she was having a hard time explaining Christianity to them. Her relatives weren't devout, so they were not threatening any drastic measures over her decision to become a Christian, but they were concerned. One morning after the service, this young lady came to me and asked, "If you had to summarize Christianity in one word, what word would you pick?"

I had to step back and think for a minute. I mean, there were options here. I could have gone with the safe answer and said, "Jesus." I could have said "salvation" or "heaven." I could have thrown her for a loop with "propitiation." I could have said "love." Any of those would have been good answers, but as I thought about it more, I realized that the best word to sum up Christianity is really the word "servant." Christianity is about being a servant. Jesus said to be a servant. Paul went a step beyond servanthood and called himself a slave to Jesus Christ.

I'm convinced that Jesus was keen on creating servants because serving is the ultimate expression of love. After all, a little earlier in Matthew, when someone asks Jesus to pinpoint the greatest command in Scripture, Jesus replies, "You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all

your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:37–39). Love is the greatest commandment, and service is the ultimate outward expression of love. It makes sense then that Jesus said the greatest among us would be servants. Mother Teresa spoke to this truth when she said, “Love cannot remain by itself—it has no meaning. Love has to be put into action, and that action is service.”<sup>1</sup> The greatest are those who allow God’s love to flow through them most freely in the form of service to the people around them. Which takes us back to date night and Henry . . .

Henry’s title was “server.” His job was to serve, but he had no interest in being a servant. His motivation was not love but something else altogether. Being a servant is an issue of the heart. Sure, Henry, Joe Churchgoer, you, and I can go through the motions of serving someone, but if love isn’t our impetus, our service is empty. If love *is* our motivation, however, we will be translating the gospel through action to the person we are serving. Part of mobilizing people for significant ministry is helping them understand the heart of service. Serving may be a humble position, but it takes a great soul to do it well. And when done well, it leads to light being poured through the kingdom, as the server becomes more like Jesus and those being served begin to see his love.