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Book Review: Here Today, There Tomorrow: Unleashing Your Church's Potential by Gary L. McIntosh

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Gary L. McIntosh, *Here Today, There Tomorrow: Unleashing Your Church's Potential*. Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2010. 220 pp. \$14.99.

Reviewed by Dr. Robert Vajko, International Church Planting Consultant.

The goal of this book is clearly explained by its author: “to provide a simple but effective way to plan the future of your church and unleash its full potential” (16). Then again, the goal of the book is amplified further noting, “it is the development of a coherent, coordinated, and unifying comprehensive plan to which *Here Today, There Tomorrow* speaks” (17). The author has great credibility as a consultant, having worked with some five hundred churches linked with fifty-five denominations. This is reflected throughout the book.

The introductory chapter, “Get on Board,” sets the direction for the book. Here McIntosh writes of the challenges of churches just having a maintenance mindset, trying to do too much, and yet not knowing where to start (14–15). Chapters two through nine relate to “foundational issues” and lay the groundwork for later chapters. Chapters ten through fourteen give the reader the main issues to address in a workable plan that stimulates growth. Chapter fifteen provides an outline of a written plan for the accomplishment of the vision to move the church from where it is to where it should be.

Due to space constraints, I will highlight key issues in selected chapters. In chapter three, the reader is given nine steps that are to be worked through in order to move the church from maintenance to growth. I found what McIntosh calls the “Church’s Typical Life Cycle” to be extremely helpful in pointing out the importance of continual renewal by revision of the planning cycle every three to five years.

Chapter four elaborates five principles drawn from the life and ministry of Moses in relation to vision, investment, ownership of the vision, use of resources, and inspecting to what degree the goals are being accomplished.

I found chapter five, “Team Together,” to be one of the most helpful sections of the book. In particular, the explanation of using two teams was a key insight into planning that preserves and yet advances the work of the church. McIntosh suggests using a “present team” and a “future team.” The first deals with what is happening and the second with what should be happening as a new vision is elaborated.

Chapter seven addresses the fact that a church must both be ministering to those within the church and at the same time reaching out to those outside the

fellowship. Almost all pastors struggle with keeping this balance, and this book should be of help to them as they seek to live biblically in this tension.

Chapter eight notes the importance of change in a church in order to help the church move from where it is now to where it should be. Churches that say that they would rather die than change, usually do. Chapter ten explains how to deal with the church's mission. Real help is given here in explaining that one must shift from presenting programs to purposeful ministries (141). Another help in this chapter is showing how a church's vision gets diluted as it moves through various levels of leadership (145). Chapter twelve deals with values, and chapter thirteen shows how to achieve the church's goals once they are developed. Then chapter fourteen is one of the most helpful in terms of understanding the gap between goals and actual results. The author speaks of manpower, money, management, and ministry in prayer.

Chapter fifteen of the book is entitled "Build Your Dream House" and has the goal of fitting together the comprehensive plan for growth in three headings: "doing, designing, and dreaming." Also included are three appendices composed of worksheets, a sample plan for a church, and ten "pathological signs and pitfalls to avoid" (215–220) in developing an effective plan.

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This reviewer found this book to be extremely helpful in developing a plan to move churches from maintenance to effective growth. I would recommend that every pastor or church planter think through the material in this book and seek to implement processes outlined here to move ahead.

In working through this book, my own experience as a consultant for church planting and church growth made me ask the following questions:

First, to what degree can one use Old Testament examples to help with such planning? Not that such passages are unhelpful, but many pastors would think that it is easier to do planning in the light of the Old Testament theocracy rather than the New Testament church, where more emphasis is given to example and theology of the church.

Second, is the question of planning overdone? Not that developing a plan is unimportant, as the author states right at the beginning, "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail" (13). However, management by objectives can be a tricky exercise, especially when we realize that we may make solid objectives that do not reflect the will of God.

Third, can a pastor or church planter do most of this planning effectively without a consultant or mentor? Experience and studies conducted on this seem to show that having a consultant will make an enormous difference in the growth of a

Vajko: Book Review: Here Today, There Tomorrow: Unleashing Your Church's church. So, this question does not negate what is taught in the book but rather points out that this book's goals would be more effective if worked through with some experienced mentor.

Fourth, as one works through the various objectives in this planning, where does one start, or what aspect of the planning needs the greatest priority? My own experience and the experience of pastors and church planters is that working on too many objectives at the same time is quite difficult. The priority needs to be discovered.

Fifth, in light of the New Testament emphasis on church multiplication, why does the author not address, as one of the objectives in growing a healthy church, the planting of a daughter church? In some cases, a church moves ahead as it faces the challenge of change in planting another church.