

BEARING FRUIT

COMPANION STUDY GUIDE

BY
TOM BERLIN AND
LOVETT H. WEEMS, JR.

Since *Bearing Fruit: Ministry with Real Results* was published in the spring of 2011, we have been pleased to learn of the many ways that individual church leaders and congregational teams are using the book as a springboard for discussion and planning. We have prepared this study guide to facilitate reflection, discussion, and application of the book's key points. While it can be used as a self-study guide by individual readers, it is intended primarily as a resource for group study.

The study guide is organized chapter by chapter. If a group plans to study the book over the course of several gatherings, it can focus on just one or two chapters each time it meets. However, the chapter-by-chapter approach may be too much for groups discussing the book in its entirety in a single session or retreat. In these settings, the discussion leader will want to review the study guide and select the questions most relevant to the group's focus. For example, if the group's objective is to consider how the concepts of *Bearing Fruit* apply in its own church, the leader should select questions from across the different chapters to help with that task.

This study guide is intended only as a launching pad. We know that the richest learning will occur as each leader and each group brings their own questions and perspectives to *Bearing Fruit*. We encourage you to use this guide creatively and in the manner most appropriate to your situation and needs.

We hope this guide will be a helpful resource for those seeking to bear fruit in their ministries.

Tom Berlin and Lovett Weems

Questions for the Introduction

Choose one of the following statements listed in the introduction of *Bearing Fruit* and discuss why this perspective might work against, rather than support, fruitful ministry:

- “I am not called to be effective; I am called to be faithful.”

- “I am called to a ‘ministry of presence.’”

- “You have to understand where we are in our life cycle as a congregation.”

Beyond “who we are,” “what we do,” and “how we do it,” the authors suggest churches should also focus upon “what we accomplish.” Addition of this fourth feature enables churches to consider not only processes, but also the outcomes of their ministry. Why is this important?

Compare and contrast the meanings of the words successful, faithful, and fruitful. Explain why you agree or disagree with the authors that “fruitful” is the best descriptor of effective church leadership.

A Biblical Mandate for Fruitfulness

What are some of the aspects of biblical mandate for fruitfulness?

(See Matthew 7:17-20, Luke 8:15, John 15:2-5)

What is your understanding of fruitful leadership within the church? In what ways do passages like Genesis 17: 6-7, Psalm 1:1-3 or Proverbs 8: 17-19 expand your understanding of fruitful leadership within the church?

How might the dimension of fruitfulness found in the writings of the prophets (Isaiah 58:6-7, Jeremiah 5:27-28, or Isaiah 5:5-7) be demonstrated within the life of your congregation?

John 15:1-2 teaches about pruning. *Bearing Fruit* cites management pioneer Peter Drucker's reference to "creative abandonment" as the process by which people and organizations determine what they should stop doing. How does "creative abandonment" apply to church ministry and what might be an area for pruning consideration within the life of your congregation?

An Invitation to Labor for God's Harvest

The authors distinguish among three terms: mission, vision and values. Define each term as you understand it and explain why it is best to consider them separately rather than trying to meld them into one concept.

The authors suggest each church has unique values. What are the values of your church?

What benefits could be gained from explicitly stating these values as a congregation?

“A common confusion is equating fruitfulness with expanding programs and activities. The question is not, ‘Are we doing more? But are we accomplishing more?’” (14) What is the difference between activity and outcome measures? Why is this an important distinction for church leaders?

Explain what you have discovered about the concept of fruitfulness as a measure of church vitality, and how you might apply this concept to your ministry.

The Two Most Powerful Words for Fruitful Leadership: SO THAT

The authors have found that a clear “*so that*” helps keep leaders and congregations focused on the end, and not just the means. Considering the Vacation Bible School example described on pages 22-24, what changes result from using “*so that*” statements in church ministry?

Complete the following Bible verses depicting “*so that*” phraseology.

Exodus 25:8 “Have them make a sanctuary, *so that* _____.”
_____.”

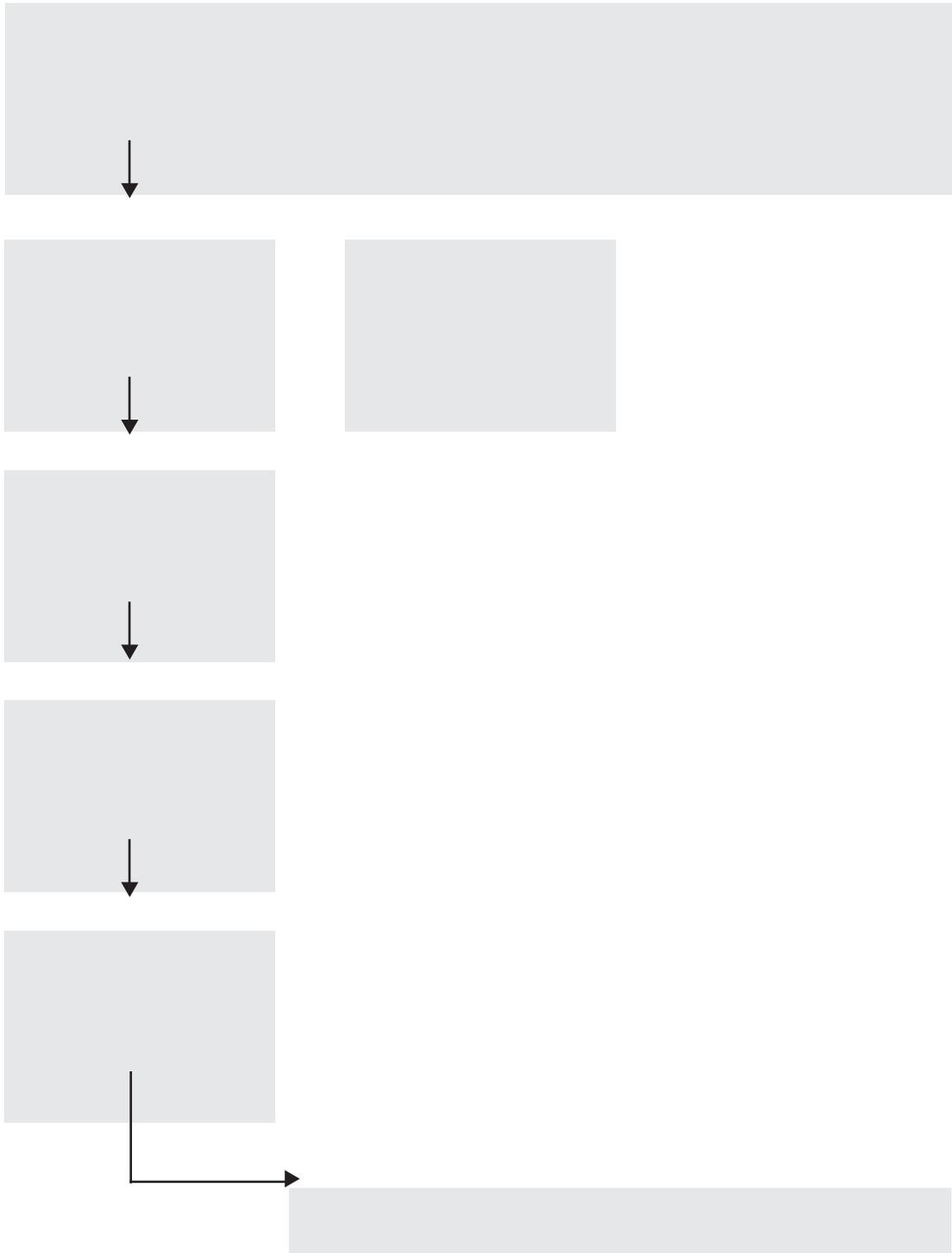
John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, *so that* _____.”
_____.”

Romans 12:2 “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds *so that* _____.”
_____.”

How does scripture’s use of the “*so that*” principle expand your understanding of fruitful leadership?

Some churches may experience silo ministries or maintain a lot of activity, but are not braided together by a common purpose or mission. How does “*so that*” thinking allow shared mission to be achieved or help a congregation maintain focus and sustain momentum for its mission?

The authors assert “so that” thinking should undergird every ministry or work area within the church. As described in pages 24-30, complete the graphic organizer to apply the “so that” principle to 1-3 current ministries within your church.



How could adoption of “so that” thinking result in a more fully mission shaped church and change the ways your congregation fulfills its mission?

From Fruitful Management to Fruitful Leadership: The Power of Vision

The authors state, “The essential element for fruitful church leadership is the discernment and implementation of God’s *vision* for a community of faith at a particular time in their journey.” Describe a time when you felt a part of God’s vision in your current or previous church.

Old Testament characters Moses, Esther, and Nehemiah are offered as leaders who gained *discernment of God’s vision*. What is the difference between personal vision and God vision? Why is this distinction so important? How do you know the difference?

The authors state that fruitful leaders are those who can articulate God’s vision for their lives and for the church. Four questions are listed on p. 39 for discerning God’s vision for your ministry. What is your response to “What is **God** trying to accomplish here?”

The next most important question for fruitful leaders to ask is, “What can we do that would serve God’s reign at this time in this place?” Apply this question to your current situation. How does answering this question help strengthen your understanding of God’s vision?

Two other important questions in regard to discerning God’s vision are “How does my personal calling serve God’s desires?” and “How can my unique gifts and talents be put to use here?” Answer these questions for yourself. Why is answering “*What brings particular joy to your congregation?*” also an important question to consider?

Fruitful Leadership in Established Congregations

What are some leadership challenges unique to established congregations?

Chapter 5 states, “Values from the past are essential to fuel energy for the future. There must be an alignment between where God is calling the church to go and at least some of its cherished values. Fruitful ministry begins when the congregation and pastor are together on achieving God’s vision in ways consistent with the best of the church’s heritage.” (p. 50) Describe how your church’s *story* could fuel God’s vision for your church’s future.

Using the guidelines on pages 51-52, craft and share an engaging *creation story* about your church that lasts no more than 5 minutes.

How does having a *creation story* allow a church to gain consensus about the broad vision that God has for it through the past, present and future? How and where might this story be used in your congregation?

Serving God's Vision: One Pastor's Story

The authors describe the importance of *God-sized Vision* on pages 56-57. Describe your understanding of a *God-sized Vision*. Why is *God-Size Vision* an essential part of fruitful leadership? What might be a *God-sized Vision* in your church?

In beginning a *God-sized vision*, the authors state the importance of the church doing what God is blessing, rather than asking God to bless what they are doing. Explain this important distinction.

Describe some of the human anxieties *God-sized visions* can create. Explain why God might be comfortable with church leaders feeling overwhelmed with some of these anxieties.

Chapter 6 states, "The reason God does not show us the difficulty of the journey to our destination is that if we could see it, we would never begin." Explain why fruitful leaders may be those who are willing to take the next faithful step as opposed to those who have mapped an entire plan.

Explain what it means to say “*God-sized visions* allow room for God to work.” What examples of “signs and wonders” do you see happening or emerging in your congregation?

Zerubbabel was a leader who received a God-sized vision. Review and discuss the four lessons taught through the Old Testament character Zerubbabel described in pages 61-65. What lesson from Zerubbabel do you most need to hear for your leadership? Why?

Prayer is essential to know God’s vision. Use your own prayers or use this prayer for a church seeking a *God-sized vision*.

“Lord God, I know that you are loving and faithful, and I know that you long for us to join with you in the work of advancing your reign *so that* Christ will be exalted, the good news will be preached to the poor, and people looking for significance will find it in you. Give our church a *God-sized vision so that* we might fully experience your power *so that* we may one day tell stories to our grandchildren and others about the amazing signs and wonders you performed in our midst. In your dependable and powerful name we pray. Amen.”

Giving Life to the Vision

1. Using the example of William's trip to Guatemala and his vision for ministry in Chapter 7, explain why some visions never gain momentum.
2. Why is an understanding of a church's culture key to a clear vision?
3. Why is it important for key groups in the church to share the vision? What are these key groups in your church?
4. The authors suggest that the congregation is the most essential group to have clarity around the church's vision but the most difficult to keep informed. What are the benefits of achieving congregational clarity around your church's vision? What are the most effective ways to communicate the vision in your church?
5. What practices can governing boards and church councils use to realize a vision? Church staffs?

3. Pages 83-91 use marathon training as an analogy for building endurance in fruitful leadership. Give a fruitful leader example you could apply in your current setting for each of the marathon training principles listed:

A. Take time to stretch:

B. Move at the pace of your success:

C. Be discerning about pain:

D. Make time for recovery:

E. Find a cheering section:

F. Remember the dream:

EPILOGUE.

1. Answer the question posed by Tom's lay leader, "What good things are happening in your church?" After recording your answer, describe how you are amazed about what God can do.