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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction3

LESSONS

Lesson 1 – The Theology.....3

Lesson 2 – The Strategy17

Lesson 3 – The Numbers28

Lesson 4 – The Communication38

Lesson 5 – The Media48

Lesson 6 – The Accountability58

APPENDICES.....66

LESSON 1: THE THEOLOGY

Introduction – Read to the Group

Our team at The Provisum Group once worked with a church that did everything we asked them to do. They agreed to ask for contact info in every service. They had a five-step video welcome series. They held quarterly reach events and monthly connect events. Everything we asked them to do, they agreed to but still they weren't growing. So we looked at the database and realized they had not entered a single new piece of contact info in months.

I had a friend that lived near their church and I asked her to attend that church and to do everything that was asked of her as a visitor. And, whether asked or not, give them an address and an email address. She did that. Weeks passed and no one ever reached out to her. I asked the pastor if I could talk to the people whose job it was to execute the process.

I met a very nice lady named Harriett. Harriett was the office administrator. The first thing I noticed was Harriett was a very busy person. When I pressed her, I realized she was an unhappy person who did not have time for all this “un-important database work.” Harriett did not have an evangelist's heart. She did not grieve when someone did not hear the gospel or connect with the body of Christ.

So I talked to the pastor about the five-fold ministry gifts promised to the Church in Ephesians 4:11-13. We talked specifically about the evangelist. I asked him if he could think of anyone who relentlessly helped to connect with people and to reach people who live far from Jesus. Was there someone in his church who was unsettled and anxious about connecting with the neighborhood around the church? I could tell a name popped in the pastor's mind. I could also tell that there was angst surrounding this person.

I pushed him to share the name. He did. His name was David. The pastor also told me that David rubs him the wrong way. He said “This guy is never satisfied. Anytime we miss anything when it comes to reaching and connecting, anything at all, he is in my office acting like there's a five-alarm fire.”

I said “You mean like not following up with a single visitor in months?”

As a group...

We agree to freely offer ideas and opinions without the risk of judgment. As we endeavor to make necessary changes in our thinking and in our approach to growing our church, we will offer sufficient grace to each other as we take steps toward become more effective in reaching our surrounding community.

We agree to read the assigned *Connect* book chapters in preparation for each meeting.

We agree to completing the assignments we are given and reporting back to the group in the following meeting.

Response:

Let everyone who agrees give a verbal response of agreement.

3. When was the last time you visited a new place whether it was a different church, a business, a school, or some other setting? What did you experience? What was helpful to you? What might have been frustrating to you? How did the experience make you feel?

If it was a church, think about how (or if) you were greeted when you entered. Think about getting the information or you needed. Think about the kind of direction first-time guests were given. Think about a next step that was offered to you. Think about how the experience made you feel. If you were looking for an answer, would you go back to that church?

If it was a new business, think about how (or if) you were greeted when you entered. Think about getting the information or locating the item you needed. Think about the purchase process if you were buying something. Think about how the experience made you feel. Will you go back there?

4. What do you think it's like to visit your church?

With the group, go through the process from the website to the parking lot to the front door to the sanctuary and worship service to what visitors do after the service. Does your process ensure connection between your church and the visitor?

The Big Ideas

Watch the following video segments, then pause the video and discuss the videos as a group.

Watch the *How to Grow Your Church* video 1.

1. Jesus instructed His disciples to “go and make disciples.” What has your church done to “go” in the past? What does going look like in the 21st century? (Hint: Digital)

Focus on all of the ways unchurched people connect with your church: website, community event, service project, your building and location, worship services, etc. Discuss the methods your church used in the last three times (worship or event) where your church proactively invited, connected, followed up and re-invited visitors.

2. How many people visited for the first time in the last 12 months?

If this number is not readily available, then assign someone from the group to investigate the number. In the meantime, what is the group’s estimate of the number of visitors in the last 12 months.

3. What is the difference between meeting someone and connecting with them? What are some ways your church is connecting with undisciplined or unchurched people currently?

Meeting someone involves a greeting, a handshake, and an exchange of names. Connecting with people involves meeting them, collecting their contact information, and maybe getting a sense of what they need. What questions are they asking? What answers are they looking for?

Unpause the video and watch the *Minority Christian Culture* video.

4. In the video, Don said, "In a majority Christian culture, when people walked in the doors of your church, they were looking for a church. Today, in a minority Christian culture, people are looking for an answer." How have you noticed this difference at your church? What are 5 things people are looking for that they think they could find in a church? How would they find out how they would find that in your church?

1. *Community*
2. *Meaning*
3. *Service to others*
4. *Training for children*
5. *Hope*

5. According to Don's video, in a minority Christian culture, the church must switch from passive means of connection to active means of connection. How is your church currently connecting with visitors? How active are these connections?

Passive (Visitor Initiates)

Active (Church Initiates)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

6. What are you currently asking your visitors to do? Fill out a card? Go to the connection center? Something else?

What means are you using to collect contact information? They could send a text message, fill out a card, download a church app, or something else.

If they are filling out a card, what do they do with the card? Do they take it somewhere; put it in the offering; where does it go?

Think about the specific language you use when giving direction to visitors. What is the name of your connection center/welcome center/information center/VIP area/next steps? It doesn't matter what you call it, as long as you are consistent between the signage, printed instructions, and spoken instructions.

Unpause the video and watch the *Defining Your Brand* video.

7. What is your church's current branding statement?

Do you have a slogan in the bulletin, on the church website, or on your church sign? What is it? Do you have a vision statement for your church? What is it?

8. What do you want people to say about your church behind your back?

When a member of your church meets someone, what do you hope they will say about your church? When people who don't attend your church talk about the church, what do you hope they will say? How do you want the church to be regarded in the community? Craft a statement (no more than 3 sentences) that you wished everyone said about your church to people who live far from God.

Practical Application

1. In Chapter 1 (Day 1), you were given three questions to ask every person you lead in ministry.

"One mistake I see many ministry leaders make is the assumption that everyone already knows. The number one rule in marketing and communication (especially in ministry) is "You are not them." Here are three questions you could ask every person you lead in ministry:

1. What is the greatest commandment in the Bible?
2. What is the Great Commission?
3. Who was the apostle Paul and what did he do?

How many laypeople that you lead in ministry do you think could answer all three questions correctly? Give it a try. You might be surprised. Over the years, I have seen many pastors' and ministry leaders' jaws drop when they see how few people in their churches today have what just thirty years ago was considered a very basic understanding of Scripture. This lack of spiritual and scriptural understanding is a byproduct of our Post-Christian era of spiritual relativism" (Connect page 11).

How well do you believe your people understand these biblical concepts? Why is this important?

(Hint: The point of this lesson is that we need to rethink what we assume most people believe about church. If 80% of Americans think of themselves as Christian, they are not “lost.” We might think of them as un-churched, de-churched or re-churched. But what do they think about themselves? If they are being honest, “un-disciplined” is probably the closest term to match their self-identity in the church.)

a. What is the greatest commandment in the Bible?

*Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” **Matthew 22:37-39***

b. What is the Great Commission?

*Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” **Matthew 28:18-20***

c. Who was the apostle Paul and what did he do?

Originally called “Saul,” he was a Jewish Zealot who persecuted the church until his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) when his name was changed to “Paul.” He went on four extensive missionary journeys throughout the Mediterranean, preached the Gospel, and established churches. Thirteen of the 27 books in the New Testament were written by Paul.

If you would like to further test your congregation’s understanding of these things, then conduct a survey like the one on page ????. Contact The Provisum Group at info@TheProvisumGroup.com and someone will set it up for you.

2. When you think of brands, you typically think of products on store shelves. You probably don’t think about your church as a brand. Yet, your church represents something. Your church is known for something. This is the very definition of a brand. What do you want your church’s brand to say? Take a few minutes to discuss the following questions to get a better idea of the “brand” your church is projecting.

a. Who are you trying to reach? (Hint: "Everybody" is not the answer).

Discuss where they live, their ages, their life situations, their employment situation, their socio-economic status, level of discipleship, their ethnicity, and so forth.

b. What answer(s) can you help them solve?

Think about things like relationship skills, biblical knowledge, marriage tools, parenting methods, childcare, stress management, financial planning and budgeting, debt reduction, weight loss and other health concerns, facing addiction of various kinds, GED completion, learning English, meaning and purpose in life, and other answers.

c. How is your church uniquely positioned to answer their questions?

One church in the Midwest made up of older adults chose to address opioid addiction in their community. They were not experts on drug rehabilitation, but they could cook, care, offer community, and love them. The church members regularly provide meals and opportunities to personally connect. The pastor admits that this isn't what he thought his church would be doing, but it's what their community needs. They offer what they have and are meeting a need.

d. What is your competition for their time and attention? (Hint: It's not another church).

What are people in your community involved in? Recreation. School activities. Kids' sports. Entertainment. Internet. Screen time. Busyness. Caring for children. Work. A second job. Childcare. Special needs children. Aging parents. Cable news. Addiction to drugs/alcohol, porn, television, internet, smartphones, food, exercise, etc.

e. What are five words that describe your church?

Adjectives – Be realistic. Add your own.

Friendly	Bible-based	Loving	Caring	Busy
Kind	Polite	Helpful	Judgmental	
Outgoing	Interested	Relevant	Christ-centered	
Kid-friendly	Relatable	Stern	Aloof	Preoccupied

4. Day 3 focuses on the five offices described in Ephesians 4.

“These five offices were appointed that the church would be built up, and all would become mature and attain the fullness of Christ. In this verse, the Bible tells us that some are appointed to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers. So not everyone is appointed to be a pastor and not everyone is appointed to be an evangelist. Apostles go. Prophets exhort. Pastors shepherd. Teachers teach. Evangelists connect. As ministry leaders, it is important that we know to which of these offices we are called, and just as important to know to which offices we are not called. It is the heart of the evangelist that burns for those who live far from Jesus. It is in the passion of the evangelist that undisciplined people hear the gospel and connect with the body of Christ” (Connect, page 22).

Identify who on your team fulfills each office. Who is the first person who comes to mind for each of these offices?

Apostles go. Think missionary, pioneer, church planter, or entrepreneur.

Prophets exhort. This could be foretelling, but is usually more forthtelling or preaching. They are the guardians of Holiness.

Evangelists connect. While this could be a soul winner to tele-evangelist, think more in terms of some who has never met a stranger and naturally connects with others. They desire that no one be without community or connection.

Pastors shepherd. Think about pastoral care rather than the title of Pastor.

Teachers teach. They are the guardians of truth. This is fairly straight forward.

5. What is your church's actual attendance?

“Let's say a given church gets 100 people each Sunday in worship, never more, never less. Eighty people come more than once per month and twenty come less than once a month. That means this church fills 5,200 seats per year (100 X 52= 5,200). However, to calculate how many unique individuals it takes to fill these seats requires that we know the average number of visits per month for each group.

I run a charity (TheProvisumGroup.com) that manages churches and faith-based charities all over the United States. Some of our church clients take attendance every week and we keep those databases for some of them. Once a year we take all that data and put it into one database and “do the math.” I can tell you that all the people who attend one or more times a month average 2.75 visits per month (33 visits per year). People who attend less than once a month average .2 visits per month. Now in this group of less-than-once-a-month visitors are all the “one and dones” too. These are the people who come one time (like to visit Grandma at Christmas) and do not return again in that same year. Regardless, as a group they average .2 visits per month (which is 2.4 visits per year)” (Connect, pages 30-31).

Here is an example:

	Percent of Weekly Worship	Seats Filled per Year	Group Avg. Visits per Year	Unique Individuals per Year	Percent of Total
12+ Visits per Year	80%	4160	33	126	22.54%
11- Visits per Year	20%	1040	2.4	433	77.46%
Total	100%	5200		559	

Now, make the calculation for your church's actual attendance:

What is your average worship attendance? _____

Multiply your average worship attendance by 52: _____

(This is your Seats Filled.)

Percent of Weekly Worship	Seats Filled per Year	Group Avg. Visits per Year	Result: Unique Individuals per Year	Percent of Total (Divide by Seats Filled)
80% of Seats Filled		/33		
20% of Seats Filled		/2.4		
100% of Seats Filled				

6. When a person gives the church their contact information, what do you believe they are expecting from the church?

People responses like an email or email sequence, a phone call, or an invitation to a next service, group, or personal meeting. They expect a personal response. They want someone to ask about their questions and needs. They expect information and answers for the questions they are asking. They are saying "contact me."

Strategic Execution



1. In the Connect book, the following action items are given for each chapter ("Day 1" corresponds to Chapter 1, etc.) Ask for volunteers from this group to complete the assignments this week. Also list any resources or tools each person will need to succeed in completing their assignment. At the beginning of the next meeting, the group will be asked about the progress on these assignments.

Day 1: Cast the Vision

Ask all the leaders and staff in your church these questions: What did you do this week to help people know that we are a people called to make disciples of all people for the transformation of the world? What will you do next week?

Assigned To:	Tools for Success

Day 2: Define Your Brand

Have a discussion with a leader or staff member about specific ways they saw your church living the brand. If you don't have a branding statement, start a discussion about what your church would like people to say about it behind its back.

Assigned To:	Tools for Success

Day 3: Clarify Your Calling

Identify at least one person in your church with an evangelist's heart and meet with them. Ask them to dream with you on how you can reach your community and neighborhood. Then together, try and turn one of those dreams into reality.

Assigned To:	Tools for Success

Day 4: Know Your Audience

Pick a current communication and have someone show you how the communication accounts for all people (saints, disciples, community and neighborhood) as well as all levels of attendance. How does it move the neighborhood to community and move community to disciples (being made)?

Assigned To:	Tools for Success

Day 5: Assume Desire

Actively contact one person who recently appeared on your file. Ask that person to describe their expectation. Ask them if their expectation was met. Ask them if you could pray for a specific need for them. Invite them back to the next outreach or connect event.

Assigned To:	Tools for Success

2. Should you include anyone else in these meetings? If so, invite them to your next meeting.

If the evangelist you identified is not currently a member of the group, then invite him or her to your next meeting. If the assignments seem to be too much for this group, then invite more people into the group to help accomplish what you need to do on a weekly basis.

If you need more copies of the *Connect* book, go to: <https://theprovisumgroup.com/get-connect-now/>

Close in Prayer

Pray about the group's openness to new ideas and trying new things. Pray for the lost people who will enter your church in the coming weeks who are searching for answers. Pray for insight into how your church is best equipped to help and how to offer that help.

Preparation for Lesson 2

Read Chapters 6-10 of the *Connect* book