

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



# *10 Questions*

**CHURCH LEADERS SHOULD BE ASKING  
(BUT PROBABLY AREN'T)**

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Questions have a curious function in the life of a leader. A good question can often propel us forward more than a great answer. Our roles in leading our churches requires us to not only work in our ministry but to also take a step back and work on our ministry. That means that from time to time we need to step back and ask questions that we don't normally ask about our ministry.

**I know this can be hard to do during the weekly crunch of getting our services organized, caring for our community, and completing all the various tasks that we are called to do in our churches.** To help you start conversations with your leadership team around the development of your church, I've put together this list of ten questions that I hope will help guide you to a deeper conversation, even if they're just a jump-off point to new questions that might stir in you.

**What's happening this weekend at your church that's compelling enough for people to drive to it?**

We're living in an increasingly isolated age. More than ever, people are experiencing the world from a virtual point of view. There was a time when you needed to actually get in a car and come over to a church if you wanted to hear great teaching or experience incredible worship music. These days, anyone who wants to learn and worship can simply download podcasts or connect via Facebook Live.

**What is it that we're doing that would invite people to walk away from their screens and actually interact face-to-face?** I'm still a firm believer in the gathered body of Christ. I do think that there is something powerful about people getting together and worshipping and learning together. Not only are we living in an age where people are increasingly connected digitally, but for the first time since the advent of the car we are seeing an annual decline of people's willingness to drive in their vehicles. [\[ref\]](#)

This presents a challenge since most of our ministries are based on the notion that people will drive across town to come to our churches this weekend. Your church needs to do things that transcend both the screen and are powerful enough to encourage people to get in their cars and come visit you.

**Would you attend your church if you weren't a paid staff member?**

This is a convicting question for me. I can say there are weekends here and there that, if I'm honest, I'm not sure I'd attend church if I wasn't being paid. Those days are usually in the middle of the summer when it's super nice out, and I look out and think, "Wow, it would be great to go to the beach today." However, over the long arc of my ministry I've been proud to serve in the churches that I have. I feel bad for people who serve in churches that they're not excited to be a part of.

This question is as probing as it is a bit disturbing as it could reveal a betrayal in our hearts. If you're in a place where you wouldn't attend your church if you weren't being paid to be there, I'd encourage you to reach out to friends for help and see if there's a way to restore your passion for the mission to which God has called your church.

### What is your succession plan?

Recently I was talking to an elderly church leader about the future of their church. While I found his energy and desire to keep reaching out and impacting the community inspiring, I was concerned because this leader didn't seem to understand that his days in ministry were numbered. **Many church leaders continue to work far beyond a date they maybe should in order to push the ministry forward.** But the success of your church relies on you not only having a successor but the people who report to you having successors. Are the people on your team the kind of people who could end up replacing you (even with a short or long-term development plan)? What about the people that report to them? Succession plans need to not only cover an immediate, tragic situation but they need to work for the long term in order to move your leadership on to the next generation.

### How is your church systematically increasing people's generosity?



Finding ways to encourage your people to give generously to the mission is an important function of senior leadership in every church. In fact, in some circles it would be considered a normal part of your role to spend between 20-30% of your week thinking through how you're encouraging people to be good stewards of what God has given them. **The reality is that your ministry will function more effectively when your people's generosity is**

**increasing.** Build the future of your church by finding ways to increase generosity such as:

- Offering talks
- Holding year-end campaigns
- Launching major capital initiatives

A good long-term goal would be to grow your generosity at a faster rate than the growth of your church. This will create a flywheel effect that will ultimately help your church reach more people.

### If your church closed its doors today, would anyone in town notice?

I recall a conversation I had years ago with a friend in the ministry. We had announced that we were launching a new campus for our multisite church in a new location. My friend said that his dream for our church was to see home values increase in that community simply because the value of our church was so widely recognized that our new campus would reflect in the financial value of those homes.

How is your church making a difference? How are you getting people out of their seats and into the streets? **Prevailing churches are not just drawing people in to their big buildings, but they are also moving people out of those buildings and into the streets to serve the last, least, and lost of their communities.**

### Who are the young leaders that you are irrationally trusting to lead parts of the ministry?

Chances are, if you're reading this and you're reflecting on your own leadership, that there were leaders with seniority who irrationally trusted you with a portion of the ministry early on in your development. **In fact, you know that they had no business passing on what they did to you.** However, because they did your leadership developed, and you were able to make a difference and grow as a leader. Now it's your turn to find young leaders to hand whole portions of the ministry over to; this is how we pass the ministry on to the next generation. If you want to move up, you're going to have to give up. There are things that you're doing that you frankly need to pass on to other people.

### What reasons do your people give their friends about why they should attend your church?

Understanding what is unique about your church can be a difficult thing. **I often think that we have a certain amount of nose**

**blindness when it comes to our own churches; we see our church in the way we want to see it, rather than how our community sees it.** One way to find an honest perspective on what sets your group apart is to learn what your people say when they invite their friends to come to your church.

Whatever it is that people are talking about is what your church should double down on and invest in more. What your people tell their friends about is most likely a unique aspect of your ministry that God is using! Understanding this uniqueness is vitally important as we look to make a difference in our community.

### What is it you do that only you can do?

You're probably doing too much. In fact, there's probably a large portion of your to-do list this week that you simply should not be working on. **You need to delegate. Chances are there's about 20% of what you do that returns 80% of your results.** My friend [Carey Nieuwhof encourages people to focus 80% of their time](#) on that 20% thing that brings 80% of the results.

Stop trying to do everything. Pick your best piece and run with that. Hand everything else off, delegate, or just let stuff fall off the plate. As you find what you're called to do, improve at that, and exercise those gifts, you'd be amazed to what God will do in your church.

### How can your church increase its evaluation culture?

Churches that make a difference don't shy away from asking, "What are we doing well? And where do we need to grow?" **Learning cultures within churches are at the very core of how God is driving those churches to be more effective.**



It all starts by asking. Survey your team regularly and ask for feedback on what's working and what isn't. Encouraging every team member—whether they're staff or volunteer—not to shy away from giving, receiving, or seeking feedback will develop the kind of culture that will help your church take steps forward. **Our churches are simply not going to be more effective if we're not able or willing to look at what we're doing squarely in the face. Understand it and evaluate what's working and what's not.**

Another part of an evaluation culture includes seeing metrics for what they are. Rather than just investigating how we feel about things we need to ask, "What numbers are telling us what is working effectively?"

### Where is your church investing in research and development?

All of our churches need to have an R&D department or an area where we're trying new things—things that we're not sure are going to work. Maybe you'll try:

- An innovative new way to do announcements
- New ways of inviting people in your community
- A new social media platform
- Experimenting with getting more people connected into groups

As we're learning to take steps and try out things that may potentially fail, we'll learn how to become more flexible as an organization. It has the potential to lead us to innovations that could change the world. **When we look around at other church leaders who have gone before us, we see that we were able to benefit from their innovations.** They were willing to try new things and make mistakes along the way of the trying process.

### Bonus: Where are we looking for new inspiration?

Finally, being the kind of leader that's open to questions is important for you as we go into the future. 94% of all churches in our country are losing ground against the growth of the communities they're in. We need to stop looking at the models in front of us and instead look around for the new things that are happening.

**It all comes down to putting yourself in contact with people who maybe aren't from your immediate tribe or denomination. Look at the various approaches that God seems to be using; ask yourself what is it that is working there and how you could apply those lessons.**

That's a part of the reason why we do our weekly podcasts at unSeminary because we want to expose you to leaders in prevailing ministries. In so doing, we're hoping it will provoke you to think differently about what you do and to take actions in a new direction.

Finally, bringing in an outside coach or outside voices to help your team get some perspective on ministry can be a vitally important function in painting a clearer picture of what's happening within your church. Taking time to listen to people who are a bit farther down the road can give you clarity. **Finding places and people who are willing to ask you questions that no one else is asking will ultimately help you and your church be stronger.** What questions are you asking these days?

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