

RE:MODEL

**Five Questions That Reshape How You See
and Build Your Church**

Dr. Gavin Adams

SAMPLE CHAPTERS

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INTRODUCTION

Your Ministry Needs a Remodel

One of my favorite sayings is “Hope isn’t a strategy.”

I first heard it from the late Tony Morgan, founder of the Unstuck Group. Tony was one of the sharpest ministry strategists I’ve ever encountered, and that phrase stuck with me long after I heard it.

If you lead a church, you know hope isn’t a strategy.

And yet.

Hope so easily becomes our strategy.

The Pressure You’re Already Feeling

Most churches are doing their best.

Preaching faithfully. Hosting groups. Running programs. Praying hard.

And still not seeing the kind of growth they hoped for.

You’ve probably felt it. You look around your church and quietly wonder:

Why are so many people still stuck?

Why do mature believers feel under-challenged — or just leave?

Why do new believers drop off after a few weeks?

Why are so few people actually becoming disciple-makers?

Why aren’t more lost people showing up?

Here’s what I’ve learned after nearly two decades in ministry leadership, thirteen of them as a lead pastor:

The problem is rarely passion. It’s rarely theology. And it’s almost never effort.

The problem is design.

Accidental Ministry

No church leader sets out to build an unintentional church.

You didn't wake up one morning and decide, "I hope our ministry drifts." "I hope our people stall." "I hope we stay busy without actually moving anyone forward."

That's not you. That's not any pastor I know.

But without an intentional plan, an unintentional strategy becomes the default. Every time.

Here's how it happens. A staff meeting becomes a calendar conversation. A vision discussion becomes a programming discussion. A question about people becomes a question about events. Before long, the calendar is full, the team is exhausted, and the people — the actual people your church exists to serve — are still stuck.

This is accidental ministry.

Not lazy ministry. Not faithless ministry. Accidental ministry.

It's what happens when churches build programs before defining who they're for. When they communicate broadly instead of intentionally. When they design from the inside out instead of the outside in. When they start with what they want to say instead of who needs to hear it.

The results are predictable: a lot of well-meaning activity that doesn't consistently move people forward.

Activity and effort are high. Intentional design is low.

And that gap — between what your church is doing and what it's actually producing — is where the pressure lives.

One-Size-Fits-All Isn't Working

Here's the deeper problem underneath the surface.

Every person in your church is different. Some are exploring faith for the first time. Some are brand-new believers. Some are applying their faith and growing. Some are mature and ready to multiply.

But most ministry systems treat them all the same — one message, one method, one funnel for everyone.

And when you lead everyone the same way, you end up moving nobody anywhere.

You bore the mature. You confuse the curious. You stall everyone in between.

The only tangible result is a busy church that's not actually making disciples.

You Need a New Lens

This book isn't a program. It's not a curriculum. It's not a step-by-step system you implement and then forget.

It's a new way of seeing.

Once you start seeing ministry through this lens, you can't unsee it. Every decision — every sermon, every ask, every environment, every next step you offer — gets filtered through the same five questions.

That lens is called The 5 Rights.

Effective ministry — any ministry, in any context, for any purpose — always includes:

The Right Person — not everyone is the same, so stop designing like they are.

The Right Message — people need to hear what's appropriate for where they actually are.

The Right Time — even the best challenge fails if they're not ready to receive it.

The Right Way — delivery must be accessible and relevant to their real lives.

The Right Next Step — people don't move without clarity on what's next.

This isn't a new theology. It's a new lens.

A way of thinking about how people grow — and how churches design for that growth intentionally rather than accidentally.

Why We Start With Discipleship

In this book, we'll apply The 5 Rights most deeply to discipleship.

That's intentional.

Discipleship is the broadest and most important mission of the local church. It's the Great Commission in action — helping people meet Jesus, trust Jesus, and grow into the likeness of Jesus. Everything else the church does either supports that mission or distracts from it.

If you can learn to see discipleship through The 5 Rights, you can apply this lens to anything.

And that's exactly what we'll do. Because once you've seen how The 5 Rights transforms your discipleship pathway, we'll show you how the same thinking applies to your generosity ministry, your volunteer pipeline, and your communications. The lens doesn't change. The application expands.

One paradigm. Every ministry.

What a Remodel Actually Is

When you remodel something, you're not starting over.

You're not tearing the whole thing down and walking away. You're not saying what you built was worthless or that your effort was wasted.

A remodel means you look honestly at what you have, identify what's working and what isn't, and redesign with intention. You keep the good bones. You rebuild what's not serving the purpose. And you make sure that every room, every system, every element is designed for the people who actually live there.

That's what this book is asking you to do with your ministry.

Not scrap everything tomorrow.

But start asking better questions today.

Questions like:

Who is this actually for?

What do they need to hear right now?

When are they most ready to take a step?

How can we make it easier for them to engage?

What's the clearest possible next step?

When those five questions drive every ministry decision, something changes. The pressure doesn't disappear overnight. But the direction becomes clear. The design becomes intentional. And the people in your church start moving.

A Better Plan

Hope alone won't get us there.

We need a better plan.

Not a more complicated one. Not a complete overhaul that overwhelms your team and empties your calendar.

Just a better way of thinking.

A paradigm that puts the person first — every time, in every room, at every step.

That's The 5 Rights.

And it starts with the most foundational question in ministry:

Who are you actually designing for?

PART ONE

The 5 Rights Paradigm

What It Is, Why It Matters, and Why Most Churches Are Missing It

You already have a ministry strategy.

The only question is whether you chose it.

Every church — regardless of size, denomination, or theological tradition — is operating from a set of decisions about how to deploy time, attention, people, and resources in service of the mission. Most of those decisions were made gradually, accumulated over years of planning meetings, budget cycles, and calendar conversations. Most were never examined as a whole.

That's not a criticism. It's just how ministry drift happens.

It doesn't show up as failure. It shows up as a calendar full of good things that don't quite connect. As programs that people attend but don't grow through. As a staff that's working hard but can't clearly articulate where any of it is leading.

Motion without direction.

The four chapters in this section are about changing that. Not by adding more strategy on top of what you already have. But by introducing a new way of thinking that reshapes every decision from the ground up.

We call it The 5 Rights. And it begins with the most important question in ministry design:

Who is this actually for?

CHAPTER 1

Who's at the Center?

Most churches don't mean to misfire on ministry.

In fact, every church I've ever worked with cares deeply about the people they're trying to reach. The mission statement says so. The staff believes it. The volunteers live it.

The problem isn't the heart. It's the starting point.

I've watched it happen dozens of times. A strategic planning session that turns into a calendar planning session. A conversation about people that turns into a conversation about programs. A room full of leaders who walk out with a full whiteboard and an ambitious event schedule — and nobody stopped to ask the one question that could have changed everything:

Who is this for?

That question sounds simple. It isn't.

Because the honest answer, in most churches, is: us.

Three Ways Churches Operate

Let's name the options clearly.

Most churches operate from one of three centers. And your center determines everything — your strategy, your metrics, your calendar, your culture.

The first is Church-Centric.

Here, everything revolves around preserving or expanding the institution. Budgets, buildings, attendance, staffing — all valid concerns, but quietly mistaken for the mission itself. The priority is keeping the machine running. "How many showed up?" becomes the gold standard of success.

The second is Program-Centric.

Slightly better, but still misaligned. Here, churches run programs and assume that participation automatically produces transformation. The problem? Programs are tools, not outcomes. A discipleship class is not the same thing as a disciplined person. A small group structure is not the same thing as spiritual growth. Neither is evil. But neither is sufficient on its own.

The third is Disciple-Centric.

Now we're talking.

A disciple-centric church doesn't start with the calendar. It starts with the people it's trying to serve. It asks: Where are they in their journey? What do they need next? How do we meet them there?

Disciple-centric churches don't build content and then look for people to fill it. They start with people and create content around them.

That distinction sounds subtle. It isn't. It changes everything downstream.

Your Center Determines Your Strategy

This isn't just philosophy. It's intensely practical.

If your center is the church, your strategy will lean toward preserving the status quo. You'll celebrate full rooms and healthy budgets. You'll protect programs that have been around a long time, even when they've stopped producing growth. You'll ask, "How do we keep people coming?"

If your center is programming, your strategy will aim for volume and variety. You'll measure signups and participation. You'll keep adding new options, hoping something lands. You'll ask, "What should we teach this semester?"

But if your center is the person, your strategy focuses on movement. You measure where people are and where they're going. You ask, "Who moved? What changed? What's next?"

Movement requires design. And design requires knowing who you're designing for.

What Business Leaders Know That Church Leaders Often Forget

Let's borrow a page from business for a moment — specifically from Peter Fader's work on Customer Centricity.

Fader argues that growth doesn't come from trying to reach everyone equally. It comes from identifying your best customers and designing around them. Not at the exclusion of everyone else, but with the clarity that different people need different things at different times.

The translation for ministry is direct: you can't lead everyone the same way. And if you try, you end up serving no one particularly well.

Churches often cling to a "treat everyone the same" philosophy, assuming that fairness equals effectiveness. It doesn't. What moves a spiritually curious person will stall out a maturing disciple — and vice versa. What engages a first-time giver will bore a long-term tither. What recruits a new volunteer will feel patronizing to a seasoned leader.

You don't disciple a toddler the same way you mentor a college graduate. You don't recruit a first-time volunteer the same way you commission a ministry leader. You don't

ask a brand-new giver for the same thing you ask from someone who's been tithing for a decade.

And yet, churches attempt this kind of blanket approach constantly — and then wonder why nobody is moving.

You Measure What You Prioritize

The clearest sign of a church's center is what it tracks.

Church-centric churches track attendance, giving, and square footage. Buildings and butts, as the saying goes.

Program-centric churches track participation, signups, and retention. Better, but still missing the point.

Disciple-centric churches track movement.

Not just “Are people showing up?” but:

Where were they six months ago?

Where are they now?

What changed?

What's next?

Participation is not the same thing as progress. Involvement is not the same thing as maturity. A full room is not the same thing as a growing church.

Busyness can masquerade as health for a long time. Until it can't.

A Story You've Probably Lived

I once worked with a church that ran a wildly popular midweek program. Great teaching, strong attendance, solid feedback. On paper, it was a win.

But after a few years, something troubling emerged. People loved the event but weren't growing in faith, community, or mission. Many attended the midweek and nothing else. No groups. No serving. No deeper engagement.

They had created a spiritual cul-de-sac: easy to enter, comfortable to stay in, and going nowhere.

When we evaluated the program, we found that it had been designed church-centric in origin — “How do we keep people coming?” — and program-centric in execution — “What if we teach through Romans this semester?”

What it had never been was disciple-centric. It hadn't been designed with a specific person in mind. It had no clear next step built into it. It was an event, not a pathway.

People didn't leave because the program was bad. They stayed precisely because it was comfortable. And comfortable, in ministry, is often the enemy of growth.

The Question That Changes Everything

So here's where we start.

Not with your calendar. Not with your programs. Not with last year's attendance numbers or next year's budget.

With a question.

Who are you designing for?

If your answer is "everyone," let me stop you there. Everyone is not a person. You can't design for everyone any more than you can have a conversation with everyone. And when you try, you end up with ministry that feels generic — because it is.

Clarity about who you're leading is the first step to helping them grow.

And it's the first Right.

In the next chapter, we'll talk about what happens when programs become the destination instead of the pathway — and why good intentions alone will never produce the kind of growth you're hoping for.

Then in Chapter 3, we'll introduce the four types of people already in your church — whether you've named them or not.

And once you see them clearly, you'll never go back to designing for everyone again.

CHAPTER 2

Programs Don't Make Disciples

I wish they did.

Truly. If running a great program automatically produced spiritually mature people, church leadership would be a lot simpler. Launch the right class. Build the right small group structure. Promote it well. Watch people grow.

But that's not how it works. And deep down, you already know that.

Here's an uncomfortable confession most church leaders need to make at some point:

Your programs might be working against your mission.

Not because they're bad. Not because your team doesn't care. But because programs, by their very nature, create the illusion of progress without always producing it.

The Grand Discipleship Illusion

Early in my ministry career, I was all in on creating environments. It was part of our strategy. Our mission was to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ, and our method was creating environments — small groups, church services, volunteer teams — that encouraged and equipped people to pursue intimacy with God, community with each other, and influence with outsiders.

We were excellent at putting people into environments.

I'm less confident we were excellent at helping them grow.

What I witnessed — and what I've seen replicated in churches across the country — is what I call the grand discipleship illusion: confusing participation with progress.

People showed up. Numbers looked good. Programs were full. And we assumed growth was happening because activity was happening.

Sometimes it was. Often it wasn't.

I used to say from our stage, "It will be impossible for your faith not to grow if you join a small group." I believed it. I promoted it. And then I watched people engage in our church for years without any discernible movement in their faith.

They were involved. They were not necessarily growing.

Those are not the same thing.

The Program Trap

It's hard to escape this because churches genuinely love programs. And honestly? Programs aren't the enemy.

Programs are predictable. Scalable. Easy to promote and easy to measure. They give people something to do and give leaders something to point to. When a program works — when people show up and engage — it feels like momentum.

But here's how the trap works:

A program is successful, meaning people show up. You double down and expand it. Eventually the program becomes the strategy. And nobody stops to ask the question that actually matters: Is this moving people forward?

When a program becomes the destination instead of the pathway, it stops producing growth and starts producing attendance. And attendance, by itself, produces nothing.

You've probably heard this sentence in a leadership meeting — or said it yourself: "We've done that class for years, but I'm not sure it's really working."

Exactly.

And if you've been in church leadership long enough, you also know that saying it out loud can be hazardous to your job security.

Maps vs. Menus

Here's a way I've started thinking about this.

Most churches don't offer a map. They offer a menu.

A menu gives people options. It says, "Here's what we have. Pick what looks good." A menu is organized around the provider, not the journey. Nobody walks into a restaurant and asks the server, "Where will this meal take me?" They just order what they want and leave when they're done.

That's how a lot of churches function. A Bible study here. A serve opportunity there. A small group on Tuesday nights. A retreat in the fall. Good things, all of them. But disconnected. No clear direction. No sense of where any of it leads.

A map is different. A map shows you where you are, where you're going, and how to get there. A map is organized around the journey. Every step is connected to the next.

Discipleship is a journey. It needs a map, not a menu.

The most effective churches don't just offer ministry options. They create a ministry movement. Every environment is designed with movement in mind. Every program has a next step built into it. Nothing is a dead end.

Why Participation Isn't Enough

There's a reason your well-structured class or content-rich study doesn't automatically produce life change.

Information alone only changes people to a point.

Transformation happens at the intersection of three things: intentional steps, relational environments, and real-life application. That's the formula. And most church programs check maybe one of those boxes.

People don't change just because they learn something new. They change when they're invited into a journey where belief, practice, and accountability work together over time.

You don't need more content. You need more movement.

When I was a lead pastor, we saw this confirmed in an unexpected way. When churches reconvened after the pandemic lockdowns, a significant number of people simply didn't come back. And a clear reason emerged: they had been away from church for several months — and their lives hadn't gotten worse.

They didn't miss it the way we assumed they would.

That's a hard thing to sit with. But it's an important signal. For too many people, church attendance had become a habit disconnected from genuine spiritual formation. When the habit was interrupted, they discovered the habit was the whole thing. There was no deeper root.

Engagement and participation, outside of an intentional plan, weren't actually driving growth.

The Death of "Ought To"

There's a larger cultural force at work here that we can't ignore.

For decades, churches were full — not necessarily because people were growing spiritually, but because attending church was the culturally expected thing to do. As a child, I never asked my parents if we were going to church. The answer was obvious. Of course we were going to church.

Those days are gone.

Cultural Christianity is dead. The "ought to" and "should" that once guilt-tripped people into church buildings on Sunday mornings have dissolved. People no longer feel social pressure to attend. They no longer feel cultural obligation to participate.

And on top of that, sermons and spiritual content are available everywhere. A person can access world-class Bible teaching on their phone at 6 a.m. without getting dressed or driving anywhere. The church's monopoly on spiritual content ended a long time ago.

Put it all together and our church challenges start making sense.

People are busier than ever. More selective than ever. More capable of accessing content on their own terms than ever. If what your church is offering feels like “more information in a room,” most people will pass. Not because they’re lazy. Because they’re discerning.

If it doesn’t feel transformational, it doesn’t feel worth it.

If it doesn’t feel like it’s moving them somewhere, eventually they’ll stop showing up.

What Actually Makes People Grow

So if programs aren’t the answer, what is?

Start thinking in steps, not events.

This is one of the foundational shifts of people-centered ministry. Every experience — every sermon, every group, every conversation, every ask — should be part of a pathway, not a pit stop.

Here’s what actually helps people grow:

Intentional, incremental movement. We overestimate what people can do in a week and underestimate what they can do in a year. Start small. Just make sure it’s forward.

Relational environments. People are shaped more by who they’re with than what they’re taught.

Real-life application. If a truth can’t be lived out this week, it’s likely to be forgotten by next week.

Clarity on what’s next. People rarely take a step they can’t name.

None of those are complicated. But all of them require intentionality. They don’t happen by accident. They have to be designed.

From Events to Ecosystems

This doesn’t mean cancel every program tomorrow.

A ministry built around The 5 Rights still has programs. The difference is what those programs are designed to do.

The question isn’t whether to have programs. It’s whether your programs lead somewhere.

If a program leads back to itself — if the only outcome of attending is being invited to attend again — it’s not a pathway. It’s a cul-de-sac. Easy to enter. Comfortable to stay in. Going nowhere.

Churches that make disciples build ecosystems of development, not collections of disconnected events. Every step is connected to a next step. Everything flows somewhere. Nothing is a dead end.

That's the shift. From filling a calendar to building a pathway. From measuring who showed up to tracking who moved. From church-centric programming to person-centered design.

You're not in the event business. You're in the people business.

And that business demands clarity about who you're serving, what they need, and where you're taking them.

Which brings us to the next chapter.

Because before you can design for people, you have to understand them. And the first step in that understanding is recognizing that not everyone in your church is in the same place — spiritually, emotionally, or relationally.

They never were. You just may not have had a framework for seeing it.

Until now.