

Steering Through Chaos

(Scott Wilson)

Summary

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Steering through Chaos:

Mapping a Clear Direction for Your Church in the
Midst of Transition and Change, Scott Wilson

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You can avoid times of chaos by continuing to do
what you've always done or you can steer through
the chaos necessary to continue to grow.

If you choose to steer through the chaos, this book
provides some helpful tips on how best to do that.

1-Turning Points and Transitions

- Inevitably, pursuing God’s vision involves making changes to your staff structure.
- All change, even positive change, causes stress.
- Don’t forget that the transition you are planning (or currently executing), however positive, will cause stress.

Thriving through Transitions

To thrive in the midst of transition, you’ll need four things.

1. **A Clear Vision of God’s Calling:** Just because you are following God’s will doesn’t mean you should expect smooth sailing, comfort, and applause. Ultimately, the vision God gives is about accomplishing His purpose: rescuing the lost and turning them into fully devoted followers of Christ.

TIP: Before each service or event, ask:

- What is the big idea for this service or event?
- What do we want people to know?
- What do we want people to do?
- What assignment should we give to help people apply the message?

2. **Excellent Communication:** The key to excellent communication during times of transition is the patient process of informing and enlisting key leaders. Never communicate beyond the level that your leaders have embraced.
3. **Relationships of Affirmation and Authenticity:** When people feel threatened by change, they become defensive and suspicious. Be sure to identify and point out the good things people are doing around you.

4. **Tenacity:** Every person God uses has deserts and valleys. Expect some obstacles and resistance. Keep pursuing God for clarity until He confirms His calling in each leader’s heart.

Looking Ahead

Care more about God’s calling than your own comfort.

- Delight in the things that delight God (**Php 3:8**).
- Take up your cross and follow Him (**Mat 16:24-25**).

Self Assessment

How true are the following statements for you?

	not true <—>completely true
I am clear about the vision God has given me.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
I patiently inform and enlist key leaders during times of transition.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
I identify and point out the good things people are doing around me.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
I keep pursuing God for clarity until He confirms His calling in each key leader’s heart.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

Ask God where He wants you to make some changes related to your self-assessment.

2-Vision

All leaders must do the hard work of pursuing God for their own vision. Vision isn’t something you determine. It’s something you discover as you walk with God day after day.

While asking God to clarify your church’s vision, answer these questions:

1. What do we do exceptionally well?

2. What are we passionate about?
3. What are the demographics of our community?

Every leader in your church should be able to state the vision of the church.

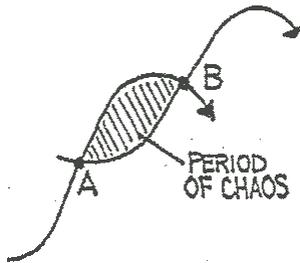
When something sounds like a great idea, the first thing to do is determine if it fits your vision and values. If it doesn't, don't do it.

Transition Questions

- Who has God best positioned us to reach?
- What are we currently doing that is making it difficult to reach people?
- What do we need to stop doing?
- What do we need to start doing?
- For each event or ministry, ask: How is it helping or hindering our efforts to reach people?

3-Timing Your Change for Growth

Throw a Curve



Point A = a period of growth and momentum

Point B = a period when roadblocks cause a loss of growth and momentum (typical roadblocks are too little parking, inadequate childcare, 80% or more seating filled)

Period of Chaos = time between envisioning a change and experiencing upward movement as a result of implementing the changes

Choosing the Point of Change

- Point A is the optimal time to begin planning for changes.
- If you wait until Point B to consider changes, you will forfeit momentum and time. Growth will decline before you are able to put changes in

Calling and Conceit

- Every ability, talent, spiritual gift, and personality trait we demonstrate is a gift from God. He expects us to use each one with gratitude and passion.
- When we forget His grace, we can fall prey to the twin errors of false humility and selfish conceit [**Rom 12:3**].
- We should live for an audience of one.

place. You will have avoided the period of chaos at great cost.

Preparation Phase

- **Communicate Your Vision for the Change:** Clearly and frequently explain how the change will achieve God's vision for your church. Though you may grow weary in doing this, it tends to allay people's fears and build their enthusiasm for the change. Paint verbal pictures to help them grasp the vision. Share stories of changed lives.
- **Assess Key Roles:** Some roles may not fit with the changes. Besides character, competence, and compatibility, assess each person's capacity to handle the higher complexity or responsibilities of the new role. Some staff members may not be a great fit for the changes. When that happens, look for other places where they may fit or help them find a better fit elsewhere.
- **Adjust Your Strategy:** While your vision should be rock-solid, strategy is flexible. Tangible things are in the realm of strategy and should be open to change.

4-Authenticity: Motivating People to Follow the Vision

People aren't there to help you fulfill the vision. They are the vision. Everything you do is about their faith, growth, and joy in knowing, loving, and serving God. People need to know that you truly love them. They need you to be a shepherd, not a general.

Be Proactive

Take time to connect with people in meaningful ways. Spend time with key leaders individually. Share your heart and vision. Explain the strategy. Tell how

the change will affect them individually. Listen to them. Seek to understand them.

Cascade Communication

- Once you've met individually with key leaders, bring them with you to meet with key volunteers.
- Follow this with a meeting open to all volunteers. Be sure to ask your key leaders and volunteers to be there with you to show support.
- Finally, announce the changes to the entire church.

Don't Ignore Relational Tension

- Establish a policy to speak the truth in love. Use [Matthew 18:15-20](#) for conflict resolution.
- Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit [[Eph 4:1-3](#)].
- Unity doesn't mean everyone will agree on all details. It does mean that each person pursues God, respects others, listens well, resolves conflicts, and lives for a cause bigger than their own comfort.

- Unresolved hurts don't get better. If someone has hurt you, be honest with them [[Rom 12:18](#)]. If you have damaged a relationship, stop the hurtful behavior and seek forgiveness [[Mat 5:23-24](#)].

When Stress is Too Much

- Find a mentor who can provide encouragement and perspective. They can be your sounding board.
- Find competent people to whom you can delegate some tasks. You must trust them enough to handle it so you won't worry.
- Schedule regular time to recharge your batteries (30 minutes per day + 1 day per week).
- Prioritize relationships. Make sure you spend quality time with God, your spouse, and your children.
- Remember Jesus. It's not easy being a shepherd. Even when no one around you fully grasps the weight of responsibility you shoulder, there is always one who does, Jesus.

5-Corporate Prayer: Trusting God Together

- We need God to speak to all the leaders of the church so that His direction is unmistakable.

If God be near a church, it must pray. And if He be not there, one of the first tokens of His absence will be a slothfulness in prayer! -Charles Spurgeon

- When each leader hears from God, the leaders as a group will trust Him through thick and thin. It helps to ask ourselves:
 - ▶ How do we see God at work among us most powerfully and obviously?
 - ▶ What needs in our community are we positioned to meet so that we can build bridges with unbelievers?
- Too often, we avoid corporate prayer when we need it most, in times of tension and turmoil.

- When we put the events and emotions we are experiencing in the context of God's truth, we are able to respond with faith, hope, and love instead of doubt and fear.
- When we pursue God to hear His voice, we will deal with physical stress, relational tension, and spiritual conflict. Satan wants to get us off track any way he can. Often, he does this through distractions, temptation, and accusation.
 - ▶ Get rest and exercise. Physical weakness opens doors to spiritual problems.
 - ▶ Guard your mind. Be aware of your thoughts. Arrest those that wander toward things that are outside of God's calling. Focus on the truth of God's Word.
 - ▶ Feed your soul with the encouragement of trusted friends and family.

6-Recognizing Opportunities and Avoiding Obstacles

Opportunities

Times of transition and chaos create both new opportunities and unforeseen difficulties.

Opportunities come in all shapes and sizes.

- **Seasonal Momentum:** Schedule evangelistic outreaches during the natural momentum times of the year. During downtimes, focus on getting systems ready to handle the next harvest.
- **New Creativity:** Be creative in eliminating barriers that keep people from growing in their faith. A bit of creativity can capture people's attention and give you an opportunity to present the gospel.
- **New Building:** Often there's an influx of visitors to a new building. If you want people to stay, you must recruit and train skilled volunteers to serve them. Doing this before the new site opens its doors is best.
- **New Strategies:**
 - ▶ All leaders need time to pray, think, and dream to identify opportunities God has given them.
 - ▶ Ask each leader to create a 90-day plan that lists both the opportunities they want to seize and the problems they need to solve.
 - ▶ Only approve plans that align with your vision and values.
 - ▶ To accelerate improvement, always analyze what went right, what went wrong, and how to improve things next time.

Creative Problem Solving

- **Normalize the Reality of Problems:** Remind people that we all have problems and make mistakes. Balance authenticity with discretion.
- **Watch for Flash Points:** When you react emotionally or become bitter, ask God to heal the underlying hurts. Ask for His help in responding in a more positive way when circumstances open old wounds.
- **Don't Jump to Conclusions:** Don't assume everything is someone else's fault. Ask God to give you the proper perspective and to use trials to strengthen and mature you ([Rom 5:3-5](#)).
- **Perform Triage:** Every problem is not the end of the world. There are some problems you must handle immediately. For others, gather information and formulate a process before addressing them.
- **Be Patient:** Avoid the extremes of frantic activity and analysis paralysis. People problems tend to be the biggest problems. People need to know you care about them. Listen. Ask questions. Involve them in formulating the solution. Help them learn to pray, think, plan, and look to God for direction.
- **Get Outside Help:** You don't have to walk alone. Ask for advice from someone you trust.

7-Celebrate Every Step of the Way

Joy is the serious business of Heaven.
-C.S. Lewis

- Joy is central to the nature of Christ ([Luke 10:17-24](#)).
- From [Luke 17:11-19](#), are you more like the thankless nine or the one who came back to give thanks to Jesus?

Power of Celebration

- Celebrating God's character and power reinforces our calling.

- Celebrating individuals' contributions helps them feel respected and valued.
- When there's not something visible to praise, celebrating God's character strengthens our faith.
- Celebration:
 - ▶ Generates the energy you need to keep going.
 - ▶ Refocuses your heart on what's most important.
 - ▶ Crystallizes your faith on the character and purposes of God.
 - ▶ Relieves tons of stress.

Instead of complaining that God has hidden Himself, give Him thanks for having revealed so much of Himself. -Blaise Pascal

Hurdles and Roadblocks

- Our discontent flows from a confluence of our selfish natures and the powerful impact of modern advertising.
- The consumerist model makes us complainers and whiners.
- Our culture has shifted from self-sacrifice to self-indulgence.

Stories: the Language of Celebration

- Good storytelling is an essential part of celebration and thanksgiving.
- Tips for great storytelling:
 - ▶ Give details.
 - ▶ Talk about God's work in people's lives.
 - ▶ Keep it short.
 - ▶ Explain how the story impacts you.
 - ▶ Be clear on how the story fits your vision and values.
- Listen to gifted storytellers. Learn how they use a clear point of application to connect the point of the story to their listeners.

- Before you tell stories about people, ask for their permission.
- Without stories about how things impact people's lives, rolling out new programs may cause people to question your motives. Gripping personal stories remind us of the real reason we do anything big.

Multiply Your Celebrations

- Encourage cross-ministry affirmations. (Notice and name things you see God doing in other ministries.)
- Affirm and appreciate one another. (Tell how you have seen God using specific people.)

Privately and Publicly

- Before you say anything publicly, say it privately.
- To be effective, affirmation must be specific and authentic.
- Choose words that will be most meaningful to the person you are recognizing. (The same words will not affect all people in the same way. Get to know what resonates with each person.)

8-The Leadership Gap: Finding a Great Coach

The Kind of Coach You Need

- Your coach should be someone who is totally devoted first to Christ and second to your development as a leader.
- Your coach should ask good questions that teach you how to dig and discover answers for yourself.
- Sometimes, even if you don't realize it, you need someone to push you.
- Your coach should have experience and insight that can help you adjust your plans to capitalize on the opportunities God has given you.
- Your coach should be objective, caring, and wise so you can spill out any ugliness, gain perspective, and move forward.

Before You Look for a Coach

Answer these questions before you look for a coach.

- What are your greatest needs (planning, finances, leading a diverse team, personal development)?
- What are the needs of your church?
- What are your strengths and development needs?
- What are the tangible benefits you are seeking from a life coach?

What to Consider in Selecting a Coach

- Does the person have the expertise and experience necessary to help you?
- How well does the person grasp the nuances of church leadership?
- Is the person's experience a good cultural fit for your situation?

- For your personal learning style, will you need face-to-face meetings or will phone calls work?
- Does the person have a temperament that is compatible with yours?

- What are the coach's expectations regarding holding you accountable to plans?
- What does this person promise to do for you?
- What will the termination agreement be?

9-Keep the Vision Fresh

Vision helps leaders get people very different from one another to pull together for a common purpose. Failure to build shared vision is the biggest mistake that gifted leaders make. -Bill Easum

Be sure people understand the difference between the vision and vehicle (strategy). Vision does not change, but vehicles do.

Every Difficulty is a Test

- Don't hide information from people. Enlist them to pray and trust God for solutions.
- To be a good leader of God's people, you don't have to have all the answers. You do need to remind people that you will all trust God to lead you where He wants you to go.
- Part of God's testing is to see how you respond when He wants you to wait ([Psa 130:5-6](#)).
- The major part of keeping your vision fresh is to deepen your dependence on God. See each difficulty as a test, not as a random roadblock.

- Rather than complain, seek Him for guidance and reassurance.
- Instead of assuming you are defective leaders because you don't know what to do, realize that the greatest leaders lived in ambiguity (Moses, Joshua, David, Abraham...). Trust God to give you hope and help in His timing.

Manage People's Expectations

- During times of chaos, the major source of people's frustration and fear is the gap between their expectations and reality.
- **Communicate clearly and often about every step along the way.**
 - ▶ Give regular progress reports.
 - ▶ Share setbacks as well as successes.
 - ▶ Give credit to others, but refuse to point fingers of blame.
 - ▶ Explain how fulfilling the vision will affect individuals and families.
 - ▶ Remind people that you are trusting God together.

10-Endurance: Staying the Course

The tenacity to endure during difficult times is one of the most important traits of a leader.

Created to Lead

- God has created all of us and infused us with talents and abilities to accomplish God-sized visions ([Eph 2:10](#)).
- We're most satisfied when we are convinced that what we're doing is the work God has given us to do.

Run and Keep Running

To fulfill your God-given calling, you need more than a great plan and an initial burst of energy. You need the tenacity to endure. Principles for endurance:

- **Lighten your load** so you can run the race God has for you. Throw off the habits that distract you and the desires that absorb your time and energy ([Heb 12:1](#)). Be honest and confess your failures.
- **Run your own race** in the lane where God has placed you. Say "no" to things that God has not assigned you to do.

- **Keep your eyes focused on Jesus (Heb 12:2).**
When your head is down focused on problems in front of you, the oxygen of faith becomes constricted.
- **Press on** by looking to Jesus as your example.
Delight in pleasing God. Find joy in knowing that you are going to be with Jesus in heaven.
- **Be at peace with His pace.** Difficulties are part of being a child of God (Heb 12:2). Accept God's timetable. He puts us in circumstances where we have to develop our prayer muscles, giving muscles, and faith muscles. This grows our faithfulness, hope, and patience

Above all, listen to Him and answer His call.