

FRAMEWORK

A Framework For Church Ministry



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At Reach Australia, we want to encourage and equip gospel ministers to become spiritually vibrant, theologically driven, evangelistically urgent, practically skilled leaders, and to lead churches with teams of people that also display these attributes.

In this e-book, we aim to outline five key ministry principles that lie behind pretty much everything we do. These principles run like a thread through the cohort programs we operate for pastors; they are the basis for the consulting we do with churches; and you'll find that we keep cycling through these ideas often at our conferences.

We think these five principles are very important, and we're confident that they are grounded in the Bible and its theology. But they are not the most fundamental truths of the Bible. Those foundations are deeper still. The sovereign love and grace of God revealed in the gospel of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ - that's the bedrock on which everything sits. God is at work in the world by his Word and Spirit, to save people from hell and bring them to heaven, to reconcile all people to himself through the cross, to bring everything together under the Lordship of Jesus. And in all this, we are his astonished, grateful and unworthy fellow workers, depending on him for everything. This is the deeper context for all our work, and it's why prayer should be one of the first instincts of the gospel minister. We call on Him to be at work. And then we preach His Word, because it is His Word that has the power to bring life and change lives. All our thinking and strategizing, all our attempts to minister wisely and effectively - including via the five principles below - rest on these wonderful foundations.

The ideal way to read and benefit from this e-book would be in discussion with others. To find out about the opportunities that Reach Australia provides for engaging with other pastors and learning together in the Leadership Development Program go to reachaustralia.com.au.

The Reach Australia Ministry Framework: 5 Big Things

1. Clarify the big outcome

It's extraordinary how easy it is to lose focus in ministry - to be overwhelmed by the whirl of pressures and demands, or to descend into a rut of weekly activities and programs that we keep doing simply because we've always done them.

Clarity is like a shield and a sword. It allows us to deflect all the distractions and options that fly at us every day. It helps us to cut through the constant tangle of priorities and pressures and weekly activities, and keep our eyes on the prize.

Clarity allows us to say no to the many good and worthy things that we're constantly asked to do. Clarity allows us to resist the temptation to jump on the latest bandwagon that comes along every three or four years - whether that's a secular trend or issue that we're supposed to respond to, or the latest ministry silver bullet that we're being sold.

So what do we need to clarify? First and most importantly, we need crystal clarity about what we're trying to achieve. What is the goal or mission that we're pursuing? What's the big outcome we are labouring and praying to see happen?

This big outcome is not something we devise for ourselves. It's given to us by our Lord. It's Christ's mission and outcome, and we're graciously called on to be his fellow workers in it, to the glory of God. There's only one big outcome, but there are a number of ways we could express it. The Great Commission is an excellent one - the big outcome is *to make mature disciples of the risen Lord Jesus*. The Great Commandment adds richness - the big outcome is *to love God and love our neighbour by*

making mature disciples of the risen Lord Jesus. Or we could channel Paul in Colossians and Ephesians to say that the big thing is the apostolic mission *to gather all Christ's people into his great assembly, the church, and to present them before him mature and blameless.*

For the sake of convenience, we'll operate with the following summary of the big outcome: *to make mature disciples of Jesus Christ in ever-increasing number.* Whatever words we use to describe it, we need to clarify and fix our minds on the big thing, the singular and extraordinary outcome that the risen Lord Jesus has commissioned us to pursue. Every morning, every day, what am I doing? Working to see people become and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ in ever-increasing number.

2. Be faithful and wise in the means

The second key principle also involves some clarity, but faithfulness and wisdom as well. We need to be clear, faithful and wise in the means we use to achieve the big outcome. We're talking about the activities we do, day by day, in order to see Christ's big outcome or goal come to pass (to make and grow mature disciples). We preach and pray and work with people, and run meetings and Bible studies, and evangelistic events, and all the other things we do in order to achieve the end that Christ has set before us (of making disciples to his glory). If we wanted to use engineering language, we could describe these means as the 'inputs' that lead to the 'output' (or outcome). This may sound a bit mechanistic, and is probably not the language to use in your church newsletter, but it is a helpful conceptual distinction to have in our heads. Christ has commissioned us to be his fellow workers in seeking a huge and glorious outcome (or output), and he has also given us various means or methods (or inputs) that by his Spirit produce this outcome.

What are these means (or inputs)? Historically, they have been called the 'means of grace', and there are various ways we could summarise them. Essentially, there are three: the Word of God (in all its forms), prayer (for God's Spirit to work), and the fellowship of God's people. We must not lose clarity about the centrality of these means, nor cease being faithful and diligent in employing them. Our job is to speak the word truthfully and boldly, to pray earnestly and constantly, and to equip and mobilise one another to do the same.

We must never compromise or be diverted from these means or inputs - regardless of what the itching ears of people want to hear; regardless of the latest sociological research or ministry fad that

urges us to do something different; regardless of our weariness and weakness. However, faithfulness to the means or methods that Christ has given also involves being wise in how we employ them, in order to seek the big outcome of Christ's commission. We can never do anything other than preach the Word - but should we preach it for 30 minutes or 2 hours? Should we preach consecutively through Bible books or topically or both? Should we serve bacon and eggs at the evangelistic breakfast, or given that it's an outreach aimed at the Jewish community (maybe not)? Should we concentrate on small groups or put more energy into one-to-one ministry?

When we start to drill down into what the means or inputs look like day to day, and week to week, we are constantly called on to make wise choices about how to configure them; how to employ them in practice. You may have recognized the oblique reference in that last paragraph to the apostle Paul doing exactly this in 1 Cor 9. In the very same letter where he ignores the wishes of his hearers and inflexibly preaches nothing but Christ crucified (1 Cor 1:18f.) he also says that he is prepared to flex his practice in order to win different people to Christ (1 Cor 9:19f.).

This is where many ministries struggle. We get into ruts. We get stuck in particular configurations or versions of the means - particular practices or activities or programs. We toil on in them, week by week, year by year, even though they are not producing the outcome we are working towards (making mature disciples in ever-increasing number).

A wise and godly faithfulness would pause and assess and ask some hard questions at this point. The soil may indeed be hard, but are we using our God-given wisdom to try different ways of employing the means Christ has given us? Our task is not simply to use various means or inputs, but in wisdom to use them as effectively as we can to see the fruit of that work; to pursue the big outcome of mature disciples of Jesus. This brings us to a third key principle.

3. Take responsibility, give responsibility

The upshot of what we've seen so far is that we have been commissioned and charged by Jesus to do two things:

- to pursue the big outcome (making mature disciple);
- to faithfully and wisely use the means he has given us for this end.

There are two responsibilities here, not just one. We are responsible not only for the faithfulness of the work we do (the activities, the means, the inputs). We are also responsible to constantly seek and drive towards the outcome that those activities are designed to achieve. This is true not only for church leaders, but also for teams within the church.

Why are we making this semi-obvious point? Because Christian ministries often fail to give both of these responsibilities their due emphasis. On the one hand, if we focus mainly on outcomes and fail to be faithful in the means we're employing, we become pragmatists. We keep searching for the latest thing that 'works', that might achieve the outcome. We bounce from one church growth fad to the next. And tragically, we stop doing the very things that God tells us will bring growth under his sovereign grace - to preach the word and pray and work with people. However, there is an important and common failure on the other side as well. If we focus only or mainly on the means (or inputs), and don't focus also on the outcome, we find ourselves doing what so many churches do - falling into the rut of doing the same ineffective thing, year after year, with little or no concern that the big outcome that Christ has commissioned us for is not being achieved. And when the thought does start to bother us that things aren't going well, and nothing much is being achieved, we absolve ourselves by saying that 'God is not blessing us with fruit'. This is sometimes called the 'intermittent appeal to God's sovereignty'.

We're commissioned to make disciples, not just to preach and pray. Like Paul, we are called on to labour and strive, not for its own sake or as an end itself, but because all that ministry toiling is directed towards an extraordinary outcome by God's power - to present people mature in Christ (Col 1:28-29). This is a shift in thinking for some of us, but it is a vital one. The task we've been given is not simply to keep turning the wheel of the activities of ministry. It's to configure and organize and reform and re-energize those activities so that (as far as it is up to us) they start achieving the outcomes that

God designed them to achieve (to make disciples). We're responsible to pursue and drive towards and (under God) achieve the outcome, not just do the activities.

To be completely clear, *no* outcomes will be achieved unless God gives the growth. He is the sovereign; we are planters and waterers in his field. And *no* means are open to us except those that God has kindly given us (the word, prayer, people). But the two are connected. God gives the growth through the means (the activities, the inputs) that we keep employing in different ways.

Let's take as an example the ministry of the early missionaries to Australia's indigenous population. Many of them laboured very hard in faithful, godly, sacrificial ministry. They poured out their lives to bring the gospel to indigenous people. However, many of them saw no fruit, and some of them eventually asked why. Now the answer could have been framed as 'Indigenous Australians are hardened to the gospel'; or 'God is not blessing our work with fruit'. However, some of those early missionaries began to see that although they had truthfully preached the word, they had failed to be wise in the way they did it. They had expected the indigenous people to come to them, rather than go out to where they lived. They had preached in English, rather than attempting to learn and teach in the local languages. They had often mixed in the call of the gospel with a call to conform to certain aspects of British culture (e.g. to dress in certain ways, or to adopt farming rather than hunter-gathering). They realised that they could do things differently - in a way that was not only faithful to the gospel, but faithful to the outcome they had been given to pursue, which was to make disciples among the indigenous people.

Input-only leaders are slow to reflect on their own part in the failure of outcomes. But someone who also focuses on the outcome jumps on that concern more quickly. If I take seriously my responsibility to seek the outcome, I will also take seriously my responsibility to question the wisdom of the means I am employing (the inputs). Am I doing something that is hindering the work? Is there a problem with the way I'm doing what I'm doing? Am I trying to win Gentiles but living like a Jew?

We all fall short in many ways, and our ministries never have a shortage of problems or failures. If not for the Lord's abundant grace and forgiveness, we would all have been sacked as his fellow workers long ago. All the same, if we own our responsibility to pursue the outcome, we'll feel a right sense of burden and pain when we don't see it achieved. We'll be quicker to ask questions and see problems, and quicker to address them.

Leaders who take responsibility not only for the means but also for seeking the outcome create a culture of urgency and responsibility in their churches - because it is not as if the responsibility rests only on leaders and pastors. The commission is for all God's people. We want everyone to take these responsibilities seriously, whether they are a small group leader or Sunday school teacher or welcomer or someone who reads the Bible one-to-one with people to encourage them.

We don't want small group leaders, for example, to think that their role is just to turn up and do the job they've been given - to run a Bible study and share some prayer points, until next week. We want them to see their role as part of the big outcome; that is, to seek a deep Jesus-shaped change in the lives of the group members through the word and prayer, and to keep thinking and working and changing things and praying to that end.

For all of us, whether as pastors or church members, it is really a question of faithfulness to our responsibilities - on both counts. Faithfulness in the means keeps us from being diverted or distracted from the key methods of gospel ministry, and losing our trust in their effectiveness under God. Faithfulness to the big outcome we've been charged to pursue means doing the hard and painful work of constantly seeking better and wiser ways of employing those means in order to seek their outcome: the making of disciples of Jesus. If this seems a bit overwhelming, it's because it is! And that takes us to principle number four.

4. Break it down

Imagine you're put in charge of the response to a natural disaster or some other massive crisis, like Lieutenant General John Frewen, who was put in charge of getting covid vaccines to every Australian. How do you even approach such a gargantuan task? You break it down. You divide the mammoth task into its component parts or stages, and then start steadily working on each of these parts. You start eating the elephant one mouthful at a time.

The same is true in ministry. 'Making mature disciples of Jesus Christ throughout Australia in ever-increasing number' - that's a mammoth all-encompassing outcome. How could we break it down into some mouthfuls that we can start to chew? What are the component parts of the big outcome?

Again, there is no one correct way to express this, but here's a way of breaking it down that many have found useful. A lot could be said about each one of these aspects, but briefly we could say that a mature disciple has five characteristics. We can think of these five characteristics as sub-goals or mini-outcomes that we're wanting to achieve.

a. Deeply trusts the Word

Given that the Word is the fountain and engine of the Christian life and of Christian growth, we'd want mature disciples to be living deeply in God's Word - to know it, to be soaked in it, to trust it and build their lives on it. This is the foundation of a mature disciple, and it flows out into everything else (which is why in the diagram below it's at the base). A deep trust and knowledge of the Word is the root from which all the other fruits of mature discipleship stem, including prayer. Prayer is the key verbal expression of a deep trust in the Word.

b. Loves God

A deep trust in the Word leads to a second aspect of mature discipleship. We want disciples not only to understand and trust the Word but to direct their hearts and their love to the God who speaks to us. This is a second outcome to work towards - to see disciples living lives of thanksgiving, prayer and praise in response to the God who has loved and saved us; to see them loving and rejoicing in God in all of their lives, and particularly when they gather together.

c. Belongs in community

A mature disciple is not a lone ranger. Christ's big purpose is to gather a people around himself, a fellowship, a community - and this of course is expressed in the local church gathering. One of the component outcomes we want to pursue, therefore, is to see disciples become deeply integrated into the fellowship of God's people; to belong; to be known and to know others.

d. Serves others

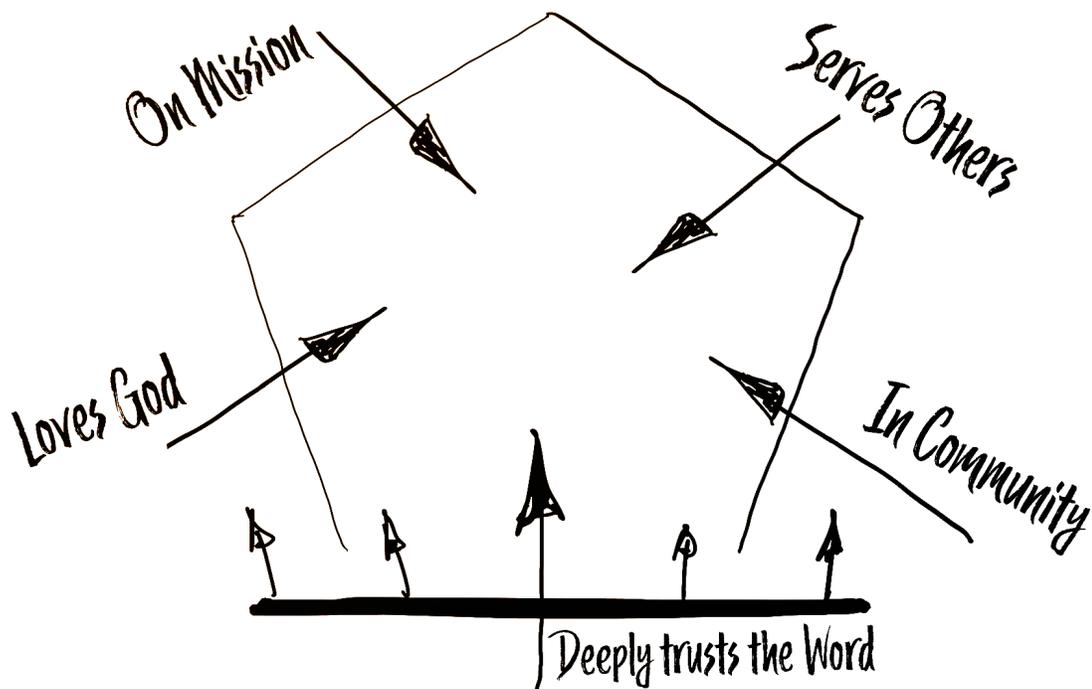
Mature disciples are people who gladly give themselves to serving others, whether formally or informally. This service pervades all of life, particularly the household of believers. This happens as people grow deeper in their trust in the word, and in their love for God, and as they become part of the community. However, it's worth identifying and concentrating on it as an important outcome in its

own right. To help and train and equip and mobilise people to serve takes intentional effort and investment.

e. Reaches out in mission

We will only have achieved mature disciples of Christ when they embrace the heart of God to seek and save the lost. This is not an extra or optional component, for really keen disciples only. We need to build disciples, and churches, that are on mission, praying for all nations and seeing people converted.

This last sub-goal highlights something that is true of the others as well: you can identify these different outcomes, but you can't neatly separate them. They're all connected. Is it possible to deeply trust God's word without loving God? Can you belong to God's church without serving his people? Is it possible to love God and not also love our neighbours and long to see them come to know and love God through mission? More on this below in principle 5. Let's try to represent this by not thinking of them as a list of five, but as a pentagon:



As we've already said, these five component outcomes are not the only way to slice up the big outcome into some smaller pieces. Some people have conceived it as a pathway that loops back on itself, containing four E's - that is, we want disciples to be, first, **evangelised** and converted to Christ, then **established** within the fellowship of God's people, then **edified** and built up in him, and then **equipped** to evangelise, establish and edify others.¹

There are multiple different ways to break down the big outcome, but it's important that we do so, because it allows us to pay deliberate attention to various things that need to happen in order for the outcome to be achieved.

The pentagon (to take that example) provides a conceptual map of the really important things we're trying to achieve. It guides us in how to faithfully and wisely employ the means God has given us in order to achieve the big outcome. It gives criteria for thinking intentionally about programs (which to start, to keep or to stop); for reforming ministry structures and activities; for thinking about which staff the church needs and how they could be deployed; and so on.

This is a vital point. Whether it's the 'pentagon' or the four E's, these are not descriptions of structures or particular ministries or staff positions. We are not talking about breaking it down into Sunday morning, Sunday night, Youth ministry, Women's ministry and Small groups. That would be to put the cart before the horse.

We start with the big outcome, and the means God has given us to achieve it. Then we break that down into smaller goals (like the pentagon). And only then, in order to achieve those component outcomes, do we start thinking about structures and programs and staffing and money and people and teams, and all the rest. We use the outcomes as the criteria to think about and organize and constantly reform the things we do (the means, the inputs).

¹ Col Marshall & Tony Payne, *The Trellis and The Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Matthias Media: 2021).

5. Think ecosystems

As we've already noted, the various outcomes we're responsible to pursue are inter-connected. They work together in order to achieve the big outcome of making a mature disciple. This is another rut we fall into. We partition off different aspects of the work into separate structures or programs, and fail to see the power of their interconnection.

For example, seeing people develop a 'deep trust in the Word' isn't something that just happens in small groups - so that if we put people in groups, that's our 'deep trust in the Word' goal done and dusted. People mature and grow in the Word in multiple ways - as they hear it preached in church, as they stand and sing about it, as they exercise the muscles of trust by putting the Word into practice by serving others, as they step out in faith and open their mouth to share the Word with a non-Christian friend. As all these different pieces work together, a deep trust in the Word grows. It gathers momentum. It gains heat.

This is true of all the outcomes we've spoken about above. A culture of enthusiastic, urgent mission is not achieved just by having an evangelism committee or team. It's also built by the nature of the preaching and the church gathering, the prayer focus of small groups, the outward-looking nature of welcoming and community, and so on. As we work on each of the outcomes and all of them, we begin to enjoy the benefits of a healthy ecosystem that produces (by God's grace) mature disciples of Jesus. It's a package, not a set of 'departments' without anything to do with each other.

All of this has massive implications for how we organize and mobilize people, and for what we choose to pour time and resources into. Once we have identified the handful of component outcomes we want to pursue (let's say it's the five we've summarized above), we can take some key steps forward. For example:

- We can build teams that work on each and all of these areas. Here we encounter another of the ruts to avoid. We tend to think that if we have church on Sunday and small groups and maybe a youth group, and a few rosters to get things done, then we have the bases covered. But if each of the five outcomes is important, and they all work together to achieve the big goal, we need to invest in all of them, and build teams (not rosters!) that work on all of them. Otherwise, we can end up with misshapen, unhealthy disciples, who are all head and no hand; who study the Bible but never

think to open it with a non-Christian; who take no real part in serving others; and so on.

- We can have a clear criteria for saying no to some things and yes to others. We have a framework of investing time and money and resources in the things that are driving towards the key outcomes. This is also a common problem. Our churches are full of activities and programs that may once have had a useful purpose, but which now contribute little to the goal of growing mature disciples. This was one of the key points made by *The Trellis and The Vine*² - that it's very possible to have a trellis (a bunch of ministry structures and activities) that are no longer promoting, supporting and enabling the growth of the vine. Being clear about the outcomes you're seeking together enables you to rebuild your trellis.
- We can have a vision and purpose that unifies us as a church, and as a leadership team. We can deploy staff to work on particular areas and outcomes, but within a larger, cooperative vision of all these different areas working together to achieve the big outcome. We can have a basis for specialising, and allowing staff to play to their strengths (in one or more of the particular outcomes), while at the same time not being siloed or isolated - because we constantly talk and plan together about how the different interconnected pieces work together to achieve the big outcome. We can have teams taking these responsibilities seriously, whether they are a small group leader or Sunday school teacher or MC or welcomer or someone who reads the Bible one-to-one with people to encourage them.

² Col Marshall & Tony Payne, *The Trellis and The Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Matthias Media: 2021).

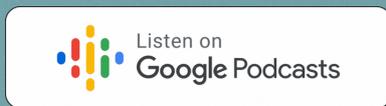
Conclusion

There's so much to do in our churches, and so much to do to reach Australia with the gospel of Jesus. The five principles we've outlined in this paper are not a magic formula for getting there, but we think they represent the key priorities to be working on. We need to:

- Clarify the big outcome
- Be faithful and wise in the means
- Take responsibility, give responsibility
- Break it down
- Think ecosystems

We pray that these five principles help you to think more clearly about ministry leadership, and to begin (or continue in) the hard work of growth and change. And we also pray that through our work together in these things, as we stretch and encourage and help each other as gospel ministers, God will achieve the great outcome that he has for our nation: to see multitudes of people from all over Australia bowing the knee to Jesus, and becoming mature, growing, disciple-making disciples, to his glory.

This e-book is accompanied by
a 5-part podcast season on
the Reach Australia podcast,
also available to view on youtube.



If you like this, you might also like
our other e-books, available at
reachaustralia.com.au



In this e-book we want to explore two particularly vital facets of pastoring. They are not the only two, and this is by no means a complete theology of ministry leadership. But these two aspects of what it means to be a pastor are (in our observation) often misunderstood or neglected. Our hope and prayer is that by exploring them we can encourage and stimulate you to think afresh about what it means to be a ministry leader among God's people.



Most Australian churches need more leaders. We're not talking about hiring more staff. We're talking about building and training more church members to become leaders of teams. We're not talking about quickly appointing someone to a new role and then moving on to more pressing problems. We're talking about a considered plan for developing the character, convictions and competencies required to serve and lead God's people in God's church.





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