

**WHEN DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT
TAKE OVER AND STRATEGY END?**

by

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the principles of strategy. It adds biblical principles with emphasis on the Holy Spirit. It is concluded that the mix of strategy and reliance on the Holy Spirit can guide organizations. Two case studies are presented that show success using both principles of strategy and guidelines from the Holy Spirit.

INTRODUCTION

A number of instances involving efforts for church/ministry growth over the years seems to defy ordinary reason. Strategy planning has been used as a tool to develop and expand churches and religious nonprofit organizations. We have both observed two definite instances of what seem to be extraordinary occurrences that have given two churches the opportunity to expand to meet their purpose/mission/vision. Examples of the intermingling of strategy and Spirit indicate there is another less understood dimension to decision-making.

First Example

Members of a church in the Southwest began praying for a valuable piece of property adjacent to the church's small facility. The price was \$198,000—ten times what could be afforded. As prayer increased, vision grew. After a year or so, the petition, forged by the Spirit through many months of corporate prayer, became deeper, more meaningful, and very specific: "Father, provide this property for the future outreach of the church; either give us the resources to buy it, or bring the price down so we can afford it." It all came together one cold January morning when the council ventured out of the warm building onto the frosted desert and marched around the property, jumping over humps and tumbleweeds in the Name of the Lord. One of the elders led the charge. After that prayer they knew something was about to happen.

The chain of events that followed directly related to the prayer that had continued each step of the way without any knowledge of what might eventually come about. The congregation measured developments by the prayer meeting as the plan unfolded from prayer meeting to prayer meeting.

Forgive the detail, but it is the only way you can get the picture of what really happened. First, the city decided to take a four-foot strip off the front of the church property to widen the

road. The settlement was \$2,400 for the land and after lengthy negotiations the assessor awarded \$45,000 for damages. Hence \$47,000 was placed in their hands from a totally unexpected source.

Several months later the city took over the expensive property the church was praying for and reappraised it for \$38,000 because it had become landlocked from the same road-widening project. The city offered the property to the church for the adjusted price of \$38,000. The congregation paid cash with the money the city had recently given them.

After purchasing the land, the bank evaluated the property and said the value went back up to \$154,000 because, by becoming joined to their existing parcel, it was no longer landlocked. Consider the facts: The original owner got his price from the city. The city paid the church for a tiny strip of land the church did not need. The amount the church received was enough to pay for the adjusted price of the land they needed. The value of the land jumped back up in value because it was no longer landlocked. The attorney, who was a member of the church council and watched the whole thing happen, said "Deals like this just don't happen in real estate. Nobody is smart enough to put all this together. It had to have been the prayer!"

After the two years it took to complete all of this, the church had the land prayed for and the money in the bank for improvements. At each breakthrough, everyone was so happy about what God had done they could have stopped praying and failed to move on. Instead, God gave them the vision, faith, and perseverance to keep trusting and see how He would move strategically to accomplish what was actually a rather complex plan. It is easy to think you have prayed enough when you see part of the answer. How much better it is to keep on praying until God is finished with His exceeding work.

Second Example

Another example occurred a few years ago in the southeastern part of the United States. The visionary pastor contacted the author to assist in developing a strategic plan for the church. A

series of structured meetings were held which included the pastor, his staff, and elders. Slowly but surely the group began to understand the philosophy and process of strategic planning. Various committees worked on identifying purpose/mission/vision for the church. Other committees were formed for environmental analysis, strengths and weaknesses, and assumptions. The work of these committees set the stage for discussions on objectives and strategy.

The planning committee determined a good objective would be to grow by 1,000 members over the next three years. Major problems were financial resources, space, parking, and lack of facilities. The committee could also see the need to expand the church school. As usual, finances just were not there to handle the various building projects. All through the process there was continued prayer. There was a can-do spirit by all involved.

One member of the environmental analysis committee in charge of gathering a wide range of facts discovered plans to expand a major north-south state road to a national expressway—public information, but few in the area were aware of it.

The church property was on the northwest corner of a busy intersection a few miles east of the proposed expressway. Over the years the pastor had inquired about property on two of the other corners. Serious negotiations started as part of the planning committee work. An option to buy was negotiated for two of the intersection corners. A sizeable down payment that stretched the church's finances was made. If the church did not exercise the option within the time frame the down payment would be lost. What the planning committee was banking on was the increased value of the property due to the highway expansion.

Many in the church congregation were skeptical. The planning committee had planned and prayed and prayed some more. Everyone, including the author, felt a confirmation in his or her spirit—it was the right thing to do.

The highway expansion went on as planned. Strip malls, gas stations, and other commercial ventures began at a rapid pace. A few miles to the east the church property value was going up. They exercised their options and bought both properties. Shortly thereafter, they sold one of the corner lots for cash. The money from the sale paid off the other lot, expanded the church, put in a new parking lot, provided for school expansion, and bought robes for the choir. That church continues today to meet its purpose/mission/vision.

CONCLUSION

Where did strategy end and the Spirit begin? The answer remains unclear. A combination of what we know about planning and organization was used. Every step of the way fervent prayer took place for guidance, the Lord's will, and the struggle to make the right decision.