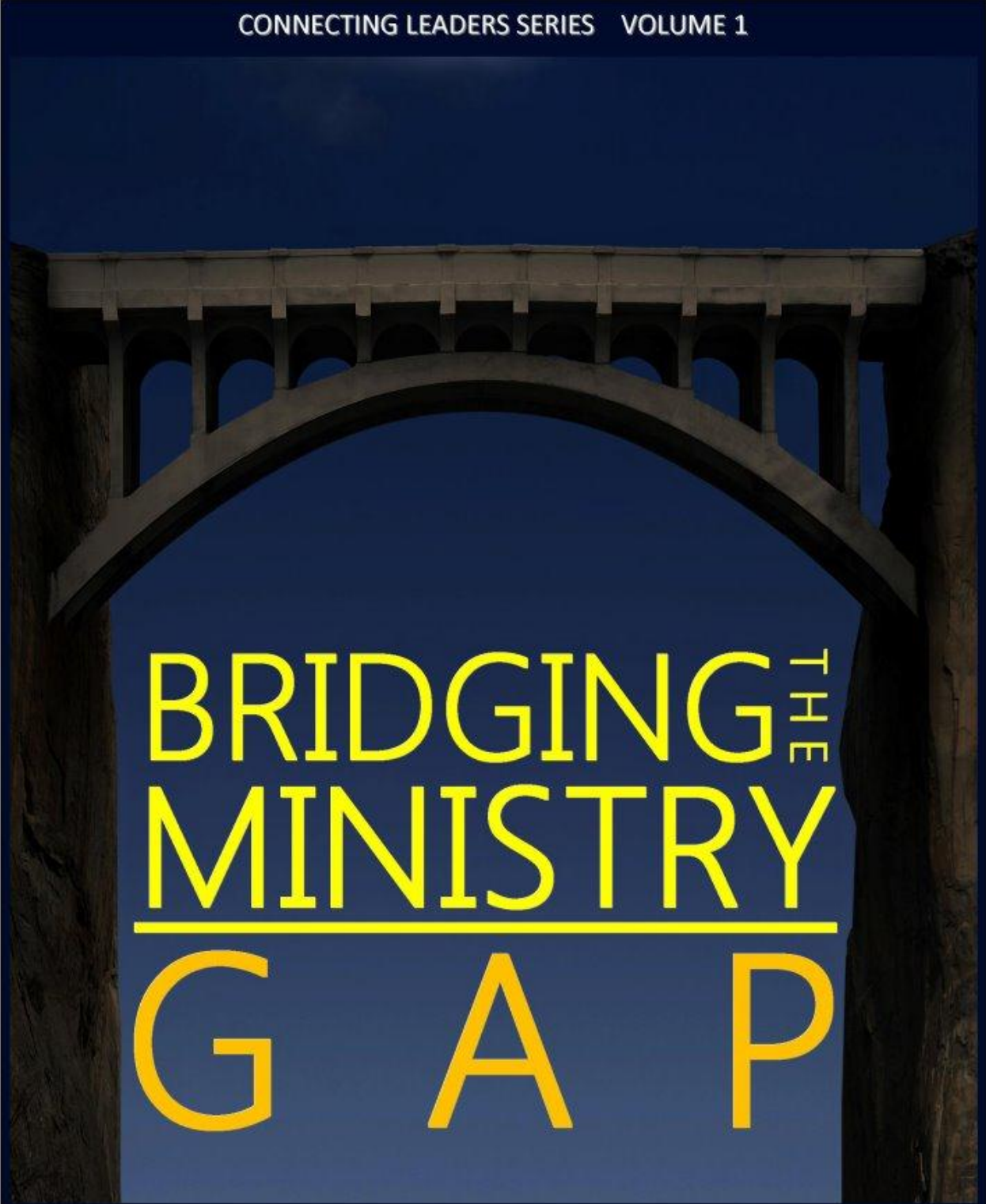


CONNECTING LEADERS SERIES VOLUME 1



BRIDGING ^{THE}
MINISTRY

G A P

JEREMY AMICK

BEYOND FEAR TO BIG GOD STUFF

“Be strong and have courage.” I love that verse from Joshua 1:9. But it haunted me as I stood at the very edge of this suspension bridge, the highest footbridge in America, nestled between two peaks of the Appalachian Mountain range. I am not typically afraid of heights, but this seemed ridiculous. It was the classic risk/reward situation, as I knew the view from the bridge must be breathtaking. So in my typical fashion, I began to analyze and rationalize while trying to muster up the courage to take one step forward from my paralyzed position. I visually examined cables that held the mammoth steel beams. I tested out the walking deck with one foot on and one foot off, checking the stability. I had one foot down and 227 more to go.

I looked up at the gigantic towers that held the cable. It was an illusion, I knew, but they sure seemed to be leaning. I wondered, “How deep is the foundation below the towers?” (I just want to make sure that if this area were to experience its first earthquake in recorded history, it would hold me during the thirty seconds I am on this structure to take a quick picture. I have to be able to prove that I actually did this, right?) Then a gust of wind blew and I suddenly realized why they named this the “Swinging Bridge” at Grandfather Mountain.

THE INTERESTING STRUCTURE OF SUSPENSION BRIDGES

Before that point in my life, I had never considered the design of a bridge. Yet as I pondered this structure, I thought of ministry. We are in the bridge-building business also, but *our* bridges reside in the spiritual and relational realms. Nonetheless, we can learn much about physical bridges that applies to ministry in the local church.

The first thing I noticed was the suspension cables. These cables make all the difference, because they support the structure. It is possible that the bridge deck would momentarily stand without the cables, but not for long. I realized that the cables are like the life-changing results that we see in ministry. When believers are faithful to the call of God, He does miraculous works through us and the world will “see your good works and glorify God.” (Matthew 5:16) Life-changing results encourage us to continue in ministry.

The deck is the walkway on which patrons cross. Ministry is the spiritual path of serving and the way to experience the abundant life that Jesus promised His followers in John 10:10. There is no greater joy than serving God in the unique way in which He has created you.

The bridge towers guide the cables and provide the support for the entire structure. Likewise, God places the responsibility of ministry support onto the shoulders of leaders. This should cause us both trepidation and joy. We tremble because this task of leading is a call to take care of God’s greatest resource—people—even as we rejoice that God has given us a task that is so close to His heart.

The sturdiest part of the bridge is often what is unseen. It is the foundation that is deep within the ground, holding up the giant towers. As Christians, our foundation is built upon the promises and revelation of our God. We treasure the Bible and study it daily, because it is the tool the Holy Spirit uses to guide us in knowing God and His will. Having a rock-solid belief in Christ will give the necessary foundation for ministry and a lifetime of fulfilling service to our King Jesus.

In church leadership, we are building bridges. We are building because we see the great chasms that hinder ministry. We build bridges because our Lord Jesus built bridges. One of the most glaring canyons in the church is between the people of God and life-changing ministry. All of us can think of faithful servants who seem to be volunteer superheroes. But before we elevate these believers to superhuman status, we should consider that God can do miraculous things through anyone who He chooses. Maybe that person is you or me?

MEET ELMER (ordinary superhero)

I love to tell people about my friend named Elmer. For me, he defines both faithfulness to Christ and the model of someone who has discovered his calling. Elmer is a Sunday School teacher who has served in the same class (of the same church) for thirty-two years. Although he is beyond his eightieth birthday, you will find few people who are more excited about ministry. He connects deeply with each of his class members. He prepares diligently, goes all out decorating his educational space, and brings a truckload of energy into the lesson each Sunday morning. Did I forget to mention that Elmer has always taught *First Grade boys*?

Do you have an Elmer in your church? Maybe you have quite a few. Is this not the kind of attitude that every leader would hope for? Is this not the enthusiasm for ministry that God would want all of His people to possess? Ministry is a joy. *By the power of the Holy Spirit, each person can be used by God for life-changing service.*

In this book, we will look at ministry from three locations: the living room, the classroom, and the leadership laboratory. In the living room, I will share stories and experiences of those who have experienced the joy of ministry. In the classroom, we will enhance our knowledge base. But knowledge must be practiced, so we will test these ideas in the leadership laboratory by looking at actual ministry experiments. With this said, let's go into the classroom for a brief moment.

WHEN GETTING VOLUNTEERS IS NOT SO EASY

"Times have changed. People are not interested in serving in the church." This was the statement of a frustrated and overworked pastor. He was right and wrong at the same time. Today is different than fifty years ago. I disagree, however, that people are less interested.

Churches that refuse to adapt to changing trends in volunteerism fail to provide a necessary ministry. According to Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin, “As a basic rule of thumb, growing churches will have a minimum of sixty percent of their church members involved in an identifiable ministry role.” (*Finding Them, Keeping Them*) These tasks are not “busy work” but “Kingdom work” that touches people with the love and care of Christ. Creating opportunities for ministry that fulfill the mission of the church is critical.

Recent trends in church volunteerism have changed the landscape of the modern ministry. Jonathan and Thomas McKee state, “Whether we like these changes or not, they’ve produced a new breed of volunteer.” (*New Breed: Understanding and Equipping the 21st Century Volunteer*) These authors explain six “seismic shifts” that have occurred and how these shifts have greatly affected volunteerism in the church. They pinpoint the following: a changing family dynamic, a shift from community to individualism, scheduling flexibility, lack of experience, “from face-to-face to cyberspace,” and the exultation of knowledge over skill.

Marlene Wilson also agrees that the times have changed. “The fact is that people are volunteering—just not in the ways you may remember.” (*Volunteer Recruitment, Interviewing, and Placement*) She continues by comparing the “Good Ole Days” when few women worked outside of the home and volunteers could be recruited by simply putting out a sign-up sheet. On her list of twelve trends affecting church volunteerism, she includes: the expanding worklife, family activities, other competing organizations, a motivational shift, volunteer expectations, more options for church service, changing technology, and the rising cost of volunteer training. With all these factors swirling around, it is no wonder church leaders hesitate to ask someone about serving. What can be done to encourage and assist church leaders? In light of these trends, churches will benefit greatly from a coordinated, strategic, and intentional process for volunteer ministry. Church leaders also need to understand what motivates people to serve.

I grew up in an era when we were taught in school: “You can do anything. You can change the world.” Right or wrong, that was ingrained into our impressionable heads. Now, tens of millions of young adults are wandering around, trying to figure out how they can begin a revolution.

Today, people are not moved by a commitment to the community, as many were fifty years ago. My generation has seen too many commitments fail. Instead, they are motivated by compassion for a cause. People have to see that their volunteer work will make a tangible and substantial difference in the world.

Recently, I spoke with a number of leaders from growing, dynamic church ministries. There is a word that continues to be used in conversations such as these— passion. Churches that are involving large percentages of members in ministry seem to have an ability to tap into, or even ignite, a deep passion for a particular ministry.

Passion is the product of the Holy Spirit’s work in a person’s life. When a person is using his or her spiritual gifts to edify the Body of Christ and bring glory to God, there is a joy that only God can supply. When people fail to possess any passion for their service, church leaders must take notice and counsel with these members regarding their commitment. Maybe God is calling that member to another ministry assignment—one that will bring joy to the member and edify the ministry to the Body of Christ.

Where does a church leader begin? The best point to start in developing a volunteer ministry is to gain a realistic view of where your church is right now. You may be reading this book because your church has a high number of volunteers and you want to go to the “next level.” You may be reading this book because you are utterly frustrated and “burned out” as a leader. You may find that most, if not all, of the trends mentioned by Marlene Wilson are affecting your church ministry. You may know where you are right now, but you need to see what the potential is for your church. Regardless of your situation, there is hope, because of a simple promise of our Lord Jesus. “I assure you: The one who believes in Me will also do the works that I do. And he will do even greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.” (HCSB) When Jesus cast the vision for ministry in John 14:12, the

original disciples were astounded. We are no less awestruck today. Have you considered the possibility that God wants to do something great and amazing with *your* life?

GOD WANTS TO DO BIG STUFF

A couple of years ago I celebrated my 37th birthday, and it was nothing monumental. But out of curiosity, I researched some of the great accomplishments people have achieved before their 37th birthday. Michelangelo finished painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Robert Jarvik invented a pneumatically-powered heart. Frederic William Herschel invented the contact lens. Francis Scott Key wrote “The Star Spangled Banner.” Amelia Earhart flew in an airplane across the Atlantic by herself. Last year, I successfully replaced a broken tail light on my car *all by myself* (applause please).

The greatest accomplishment in the world came nearly 2000 years ago—when Jesus paid the penalty for sin as He died on a cross around the age of thirty-three. Just a few days before this event, the Lord told His disciples something truly amazing and intriguing. “You will do greater things than I have done.”

We need to rewind for a moment. The Son of God came to this earth through a miraculous birth and lived a perfect life. He performed countless miracles and emerged as the greatest teacher to ever live. He shouldered the weight of our sin, and in perfect humility and obedience, made the greatest sacrifice of love by offering Himself for us. (And He rose from the dead!) What could someone do that is *greater* than the sum of these? What could possibly be considered greater than the works of Christ? Who could do these works? How are these works accomplished? The answer to these questions is the key to fruitful ministry. It is also essential to ministry leaders who enlist and train the people of God for Christ-honoring service.

Jesus was talking about the results of the message that would occur after His death and resurrection. This was all part of God's plan. Jesus was preparing the disciples for a worldwide movement. What the body of Christ can do together in unity is incomprehensible.

When we see a verse like John 14:12, it is our unfortunate tendency to soften it. Jesus must have meant that the *first* disciples would do greater things, right? For example, after Peter's first sermon, 3,000 people trusted Christ for salvation. Numerically speaking, that result was a "greater work." The Apostle Paul would take the Gospel throughout the entire Roman Empire. That geographical progress was a "greater work." We can think of many people throughout church history who have achieved great things for the cause of Christ. There is a problem with thinking that Jesus is talking about people with some kind of elite spiritual status: verse 12. He said, "*Whoever* believes in Me..." Jesus states that every believer has this potential.

These "greater works" coincide with the "Great Commission" found in Matthew 28:19 and Acts 1:8. Bruce Milne suggests, "The 'greater works' therefore are the works of the greater mission in 'Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.'" (*The Message of John*) This is the calling for every Christian.

DO WE NEED ANOTHER BOOK ON CHURCH LEADERSHIP?

The purpose of this book is to help you understand God's design for ministry service. Growing in ministry is also essential to growing in Christ, as He has commissioned us for Kingdom work. You are likely reading this because you have leadership in some capacity and you want to see the people on your team (in your church) follow Christ. You want to see God's people fulfilled and joyfully worshipping Christ through service. You want to know how you can help. So, we will look at leadership. You believe that everyone in your church has value and possess unique gifts. Yet, the hard part is helping people find their "right fit" in ministry.

In the four parts that follow, we will explore ways to celebrate what God is doing. You will want to set aside some time for personal reflection, as you will be challenged in each chapter to evaluate your current ministry context and set some goals for immediate action. For, God wants to use you to connect people to life-changing worship of our Lord Jesus. Are you ready to begin pouring some concrete? Let the foundation for the ministry bridge begin.

PREVIEW FOR REST OF THE BOOK

PART ONE: Setting the Foundation for Ministry “Called by God to Serve Together”

Topics Addressed: The Calling of God, The Worship-Service Link, and the Teamwork Aspect

PART TWO: Raising the Towers “Leaders Equip People”

Topics Addressed: Defining a Leader, the Task of Equipping, and the Personal Approach

PART THREE: A Deck for Spanning the Distance “Gifts and Tools for the Task”

Topics Addressed: Spiritual Gifts, Using Ministry Tools, and the Purpose of Ministry

PART FOUR: Providing Stability “Glorifying God, Edifying the Body, and Finding Joy in Serving”

Topics Addressed: The Ultimate Purpose, the Corporate Result, and the Personal Benefits

Initially, this book will have availability in an electronic format only (Kindle, Nook, iBooks, PDF, etc).

Find out how to purchase *Bridging the Ministry Gap* at Jeremy Amick’s website or on social media:

www.FollowOneLeadOthers.com

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