

Leader's Edge Summary

February 2026 Summaries

Missio Nexus

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*** Leadership ***



[Mission Design: Leading Your Ministry Through Organizational and Cultural Change](#)

By: Aaron Abramson

Intervarsity Press, 2025

208 pages

[Find it on Amazon*](#)

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Summary

Aaron Abramson holds an MPA from New York University and has for some years been the CEO of Jews for Jesus. Having served in various capacities in the organization, including his current role as chief executive officer, he speaks from a wealth of experience in helping reshape the organization into the effective ministry it is today – with offices in over a dozen cities around the world and some 280 full-time staff.

Mission Design is a guide for ministry leaders navigating the challenges of rapid change. Drawing on principles from design thinking, Abramson provides a step-by-step approach to help pastors, church planters, nonprofit leaders and new mission entrepreneurs adapt and innovate to reach their objectives. Including examples and case studies from both Jews for Jesus and other organizations, he provides insight into how to pivot, evaluate, and transition into greater effectiveness.

Best Idea

“Management expert Jim Collins noted how important it is for a leader to focus on team building in his business classic Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don’t. ‘Getting the right people, in the right seats on the bus’ is as true today as it has ever been. Mission Design requires assembling a team with a range of talent that can see things from different perspectives.” Kindle location: 868

“In my experience, teams of three to six people seem to work best. When a team gets too much bigger it becomes unwieldy. It becomes more difficult to get consensus and decision-making can get bogged down. On the other hand, if your team is too small, you may struggle with insular thinking and a lack of expertise to get your vision off the ground.” Kindle location: 882

Best Illustration

“Sometimes people tell you what you need to hear. I once took a class on nonprofit communications. After class I approached the professor, a Jewish woman who grew up in New York City. I asked how familiar she was with

Jews for Jesus and what she thought about our brand. She shared generally about communications and branding. But after around ten minutes she looked at me and said, ‘Aaron, let me level with you. I think Jews for Jesus has the shittiest brand in the Jewish community.’ She had my attention. ‘Why do you say that?’ I asked. She continued, ‘Look, I’m Jewish and grew up in New York. I encountered Jews for Jesus over the years and . . . Jesus shmeezus. I don’t have an issue with Jesus, but you guys were always in my way.’ I could have debated with her or written off her comments as being biased, but that would have been a mistake. Her feedback was valuable; it gave us an honest window into how our key audience viewed our organization and its outreach efforts. We need to hear unfiltered feedback without feeling the need to defend ourselves or write it off.” Kindle location: 1,152

“As our team began to experiment with a less ‘in your face’ approach to sharing the gospel with Jewish New Yorkers, we discovered a more nuanced picture of what was going on. We found many were curious or at least neutral in their attitudes toward Jesus. I began to suspect that the reaction we experienced from some was more related to our brand and our approach than to anything they knew about Jesus.” Kindle location: 1,402

Best Take Away

“Here is a quick look at the Mission Design framework. **Launch:** Identify and define. This stage is all about understanding where you are headed. **Explore:** Empathize and understand. To best serve your community, you need an understanding of who they are and what they care about. **Reentry:** Design and develop. In the Design Stage, we bring our findings back down to earth. We take what we have learned about our key audiences and begin to generate ideas and solutions. **Land the ship:** Refine and implement. In this stage, everything comes together. Once we have a number of tested ideas, we can begin to prototype, refine, and roll them out.” Kindle location: 534-552

Our Recommendation

This book is a solid approach for guiding new organizations in their endeavors or renewing existing ones into a fresh phase of stability and fruitfulness. Abramson speaks from years of grounded experience so his insights for developing/renewing organizations have been tested and refined through hard earned experience. Definitely recommended.

Best Quotes

“Ministry staff are typically over-employed, working two, even three jobs. We end up doing whatever is necessary to keep the ministry afloat, despite smaller budgets and strong competition for talent. Attrition due to burnout, financial constraints, and all sorts of personal reasons only makes things more difficult.” Kindle location: 56

“Rather than carve out the time to retool, build something new, or even just to stop and reflect on the situation in which we find ourselves, we end up running back and forth plugging holes like the proverbial Dutch boy trying to stop the dike from breaking.” Kindle location: 76

“I officially joined the Jews for Jesus staff in 1999 and have served with the organization in a number of different capacities. I’ve worked in San Francisco, Seattle, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem. I’ve served as a missionary on the field, director of young adult ministry, director of recruitment, NY regional director, COO, and now CEO—all roles which have required me to lead teams through lots of perplexing situations. Each of these roles came with unique challenges, but all of them had one thing in common: change.” Kindle location: 102

“Peter H. Diamandis and Steven Kotler in their book *The Future is Faster than You Think* explain it this way: ‘But now we live in a world that is global and exponential. Global, meaning if it happens on the other side of the planet, we hear about it seconds later (and our computers hear about it only milliseconds later). Exponential, meanwhile, refers to today’s blitzkrieg speed of development. Forget about the difference between generations, currently mere months can bring a revolution.’” Kindle location: 113

“Deep down, at the core, every generation is in need of the same thing: a life-changing encounter with the risen Messiah. But the specific concerns, needs, and desires are constantly changing. That is why the gospel, which doesn’t change, needs constant contextualization.” Kindle location: 120

“By integrating biblical wisdom, management concepts, and human-centered design principles, this book equips ministry leaders to ask critical questions, hone their vision, generate fresh ideas, and implement solutions to achieve meaningful, lasting kingdom impact.” Kindle location: 139

“All organizations have a life cycle, whether they’re big or small, new or long-established. Initially in 2006, I hadn’t given much thought to where our organization was in its life cycle. I just sensed Jews for Jesus was struggling to find its way forward. While all organizations are unique, most follow a similar growth trajectory with common phases or stages. Understanding these stages can help leaders gain greater awareness of where their organization is and what it needs to move forward.” Kindle location: 215

“The Georgia Center for Nonprofits offers this list of six common stages in an organization: **Idea:** A small yet committed team identifies a need (or needs) for a specific constituency and envisions a solution to meet that need. **Startup:** Programs and services are developed and launched to address the needs of its constituents. Starting to develop organizational capacity and experimenting with program design. **Growth:** As the organization hits its stride, it focuses on standardizing. **Maturity:** The organization has an established reputation. It is well managed by an executive leader and a board of directors. Structures and processes are aligned with its strategic plan. A mature organization has streamlined its programs and is highly efficient. **Decline:** The organization has become rigid and slow to change. It is more institutionalized with an increasingly hierarchical leadership structure. It is out of touch with the needs of its constituents and change is slow. The systems and structures act as a barrier hindering growth. **Crisis:** The organization is experiencing rapid decline. If nothing is done to address it, the organization will hit a point of no return. Leadership is struggling, attrition is high, and funding is waning. The organization has several options: close down, merge with another organization, or do the difficult work of a complete overhaul.” Kindle location: 220-226

“Susan Kenny Stevens, founder of the Nonprofit Lifecycles Institute, describes a turnaround point where organizations can avoid the Crisis Stage through strong leadership and a committed board of directors willing to do what it takes to reposition the organization for growth. This process is painful, and it requires strong leadership willing to make tough, uncomfortable decisions. These decisions will likely involve a combination of financial cuts, staff cuts, and programming changes.” Kindle location: 261-264

“Tim Keller put it like this: ‘A strong movement, then, occupies the difficult space between being a free-wheeling organism and a disciplined organization. A movement that refuses to take on some organizational characteristics—authority, tradition, unity of belief, and quality control—will fragment and dissipate.’” Kindle location: 285

“John Kotter, professor emeritus at Harvard Business School and author of *Leading Change* wrote in 2012, ‘Today any company that isn’t rethinking its direction at least every few years—as well as constantly

adjusting to changing contexts—and then quickly making significant operational changes, is putting itself at risk.” Kindle location: 333

“I enrolled in a Master of Public Administration program at New York University. The program covered a range of subjects, including strategic leadership, change management, nonprofit finance, budgeting, communications, marketing, board governance, and performance measurement. While there, I encountered **two management tools** that I have found especially useful in navigating complex ministry challenges.” Kindle location: 493

“ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP: Adaptive leadership distinguishes between technical problems and adaptive challenges. Technical problems are typically easy to identify and can be solved through a combination of time, money, and expertise. Adaptive challenges are complex, multifaceted problems with no obvious answers. They can be difficult to define. The most common cause of failure in leadership is produced by treating adaptive challenges as if they were technical problems. These kinds of challenges demand emotional intelligence. They require extra care and deliberation. Kindle location: 500-510

“DESIGN THINKING: Design Thinking is a problem-solving approach that puts people and their needs front and center. It begins by empathizing with and understanding the people you are trying to serve.” Kindle location: 515-523

“In the next section of the book, I have synthesized several models I have found most helpful into the approach I call Mission Design. Mission Design is a toolbox of useful leadership strategies that will help you ask better questions as you seek to make sense of your ministry.” Kindle location: 532

“There are many examples of well-established companies that have used these design principles to develop their business model, including Netflix, Amazon, and Uber. Back in 2009, Airbnb was only making around \$200 per week in revenue (that is not a typo). People had a hard time trusting that it would be safe to stay in someone else’s property or to share a room in their house. Joe Gebbia, one of the cofounders of Airbnb, noticed that people were posting dark and blurry images of their property listings and realized that may have been contributing to the problem. He then traveled to New York, where he took high-quality images of the rentals. After posting the new images, their weekly revenue doubled.” Kindle location: 552

“Mission Design utilizes the same design principles that helped each of these companies refine their core business, understand their customers, prototype potential solutions, test the results, and implement their strategy.” Kindle location: 557

“Launch Stage Part 1 Mission—What Is Our Purpose? A good mission has a finish line—you must be able to know when you’ve done it, like the moon mission or a mountaintop. Peter Drucker, largely recognized as the father of modern management, adapted the term for business leaders. He began advising business leaders to define their ‘mission—the organization’s purpose and very reason for being.’ Drucker popularized the concept of a corporate mission statement, which became common for businesses to craft in the 1980s.” Kindle location: 629-630

“Before launching anything, it’s important to clarify your mission. Called to what? Called to whom? You need to understand why you exist.” Kindle location: 643

“Using the analogy of the rocket, think of vision as the destination, the place you want to end up. The impact you hope to achieve. Think of your identity as who you are: your crew, the people with different roles to play to

make it happen. And finally think of the people you are launching this mission for in the first place: the ones you are there to serve.” Kindle location: 648

“Here are some indicators that can help us know if our vision is aligned with God’s vision: Our eyes are opened to the world around us. We are drawn to God and his Word. We sense his calling. We are ready to do what is necessary, even if that means putting ourselves at risk. Finally, before committing to any big project, the question ‘Why?’ is essential.” Kindle location: 695-720

“Daniel Goleman, author of Emotional Intelligence, argues EI is crucial for leadership success. ‘CEOs are hired for their intellect and business expertise—and fired for a lack of emotional intelligence.’ He concludes that self-awareness is ‘the keystone of emotional intelligence.’” Kindle location: 772

“Personality assessments like the Enneagram, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, StrengthsFinder, and Working Genius can be helpful tools to gain a deeper understanding of yourself. Additionally, StrengthsFinder and Working Genius emphasize the importance of having a mix of strengths and skills on a team.” Kindle location: 785

“The most successful companies strive to understand what customers care about before they know it themselves. They are willing to spend the necessary time and resources to make products and programs based on actual needs and interests. But those of us in ministry and in the nonprofit sector must continually seek to discover what our target audience needs and wants, and how to best connect our offerings with them right where they’re at.” Kindle location: 935

“In the past few years, Jews for Jesus has shifted toward ministry to specific key audiences. Each of our global teams now focuses on serving at least one key audience. The goal is to understand who they are, what they care about, and how we can best reach them.” Kindle location: 972

“When you focus on a key audience, a specific community to reach, you might not know much about them to begin with. Nevertheless, it’s imperative to first have an idea of the people you are trying to reach as you begin to flesh out the mission and how you want to accomplish it.” Kindle location: 981

“A quick glance around the internet will show different **Design Thinking** charts, but here are the basic steps: **Empathize. Define. Ideate. Prototype. Test. Get. Test.**” Kindle location: 1,065

“Awana is a good example of an organization that has learned to ask questions. In the 1940s, Awana started as a kids’ club in Chicago connected with a local church. By the early 1950s, it became its own nonprofit as churches throughout the U.S. wanted to use their Bible-based curriculum. However, the strong evangelical roots kept the programming rigid and monocultural. As it then began to expand internationally, it began asking different questions about the needs of the cultures it wanted to serve. Now it has expanded to serving kids and training leaders in 135 countries throughout the world.” Kindle location: 1,433

“Asking good questions is a skill that can be developed. Wherever you start, it’s important to refine your question—to frame and reframe until you find the questions that dig deeper and gain further insights.” Kindle location: 1,458

“As you explore insights into your key audience, it’s important to evaluate which opportunities you should act on and which you should not act on. You cannot and should not act on every opportunity that presents itself. You need to determine which opportunities are the right ones for right now. Which opportunities could make

the biggest difference to your community? Which could become a distraction from your core mission?” Kindle location: 1,477

“Remember, Jesus took a face-to-face approach. He was born into a poor Jewish family, he spent time with people, he ate meals with them, he heard their concerns, he touched them, he even wept with them. He didn’t do it to better understand them; he already knew their hearts. He was setting an example for us, and he drew close so his people could relate to him and could experience God’s love in deeply human ways. Whether we’ve been in ministry for decades or are just starting out, his example points us to a posture of humility—the only posture from which we can live as ongoing learners.” Kindle location: 1,482

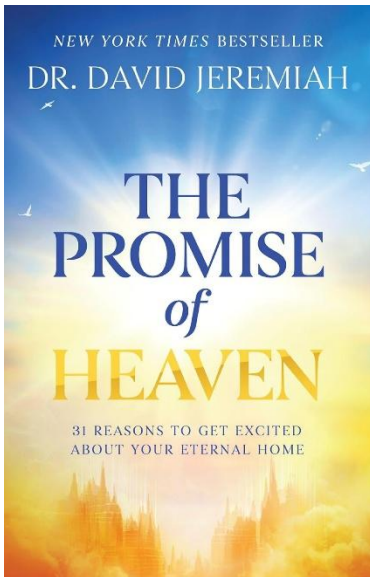
“Ideally, brainstorming sessions should be short and focused. Use a timer to keep the team on track. A typical session can last anywhere from five to thirty minutes, though I prefer focused bursts lasting between ten and fifteen minutes.” Kindle location: 1,492

“Here are some example questions that can be helpful as you determine whether your idea is worth taking to the next level: Did people interact or participate with your idea? Is your idea financially viable? Does it serve your key audience? Does it meet a need? Did they refer it to anyone? Was anyone confused? Do you sense God moving in this direction?” Kindle location: 1,722-26

“The ongoing evaluation of established ministry programs and testing of new prototypes are essential parts of Mission Design. Without defined goals or outcomes, leaders will lack a clear understanding of what is working and what isn’t. Yet some ministry leaders get squeamish about quantifying ministry. It’s easy to understand why. Reducing the work of the Holy Spirit to the number of decisions, baptisms, butts in pews, views on YouTube, or whatever else you count can feel deadening. Also, it may seem pointless to try to gauge spiritual impact since all fruit comes from God (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). However, I am convinced that measuring impact can lead to greater focus and increased ministry effectiveness.” Kindle location: 1,786

“Jeff Bezos is famously quoted as saying, ‘Your brand is what other people say about you when you are not in the room.’ In order to establish trust in your organization and in the services you provide, it’s essential to receive regular feedback from the people you serve.” Kindle location: 1,916

***** Spiritual Formation *****



[The Promise of Heaven: 31 Reasons to Get Excited About Your Eternal Home](#)

By: David Jeremiah

Thomas Nelson, 2025

382 pages

[Find it on Amazon*](#)

*As an Amazon Associate Missio Nexus earns from qualifying purchases.

Summary

Here is a book that covers every imaginable question a believer might have about heaven. Popular radio preacher, David Jeremiah, covers (as the subtitle suggests) 31 aspects about the afterlife and heaven. It is a book built on biblical truth combined with powerful real-life stories that make the truths relevant and relatable. The book will encourage the reader to set their hearts on heaven and to long for the glories that lie beyond the grave. Heaven will be more wonderful than what people imagine.

Best Illustration

“Our resurrection bodies will be astonishing, full of energy, bursting with enthusiastic power, and perhaps capable of extraordinary functions. If the glorified body of Christ could pass through walls and travel by impulses of thought, perhaps the same will be true for us. Without being dogmatic on the specifics, I’m convinced our glorified bodies will not have the same limitations we have today.” Kindle location 974

Best Idea

“God has some wonderful surprises for us in heaven. You may not like surprises as a rule, but you’ll like these! Our relationships will be deeper, our enjoyments richer, our recreation happier. If things are different in heaven, they will simply be raised to a new level of excellence.” Kindle location 3582

Best Take Away

“After all is said and done and all the explanations are made, there is only one thing that really matters when it comes to heaven: Jesus is there, and we will be with Him. He longs to be with us, and He plants in our hearts the eternal desire to be with Him.” Kindle location 1042

Our Recommendation

This book will encourage the reader to prioritize what is most important in this present life—preparing for and meditating on the glories of the next. Each and every one of us are going to enter eternity after our physical death. Although Jeremiah’s interpretive bias on last times events and timing is evident, it in no way takes away

from the comprehensive perspective of the believer's next existence in glory. Some would agree that it enhances it.

Best Quotes

"The reason we feel so disillusioned and so impoverished even when life is going well is because humanity as a whole was cast out from the perfection we were designed to enjoy." Kindle location 445

"When you feel out of place in this world—in your country or your community or even your home—don't be alarmed. Don't try to 'fix' that feeling by adapting yourself to this world. Instead, allow your longing for heaven to guide you toward home." Kindle location 487

"In this comforting image of the Father's house, we come face-to-face with the closeness, intimacy, and everlasting nature of heaven. Heaven is not a feeling or a fantasy. It is a prepared place for prepared people." Kindle location 593

"As someone has said, 'God makes a promise; faith believes it; hope anticipates it; and patience quietly waits for it.' Of all His promises, our Lord's simple words that He is preparing a place for us and will come again and receive us and take us to be with Him for eternity—well, could there be a better promise to believe, anticipate, and wait for?" Kindle location 618

"The word heaven is mentioned more than six hundred times in the Bible. Thirty-three of the thirty-nine Old Testament books talk about heaven, along with twenty-one books in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the primary Hebrew term is *shamayim*, which is a plural word meaning 'the heights.' The New Testament uses the Greek word *ouranos*, which inspires the name of the planet Uranus. The word refers to something that is raised up or lofty." Kindle location 686

"I'm not sure how it will work on a practical level, but every individual soul in heaven will enjoy fellowship with Jesus in a way that is deeply personal and far beyond our knowledge of Him now." Kindle location 811

"That's the second reason why heaven is precious for the children of God: because it allows us to enjoy our most important relationships for eternity." Kindle location 829

"Heaven is also precious to us because that's our place of residence. I'm not just talking about where we will live; I'm talking about our citizenship. When we experience the salvation offered through the gospel of Jesus Christ, we legally become residents of heaven." Kindle location 833

"But it's also true that heaven is filled with many types of wealth—many kinds of riches and rewards that comprise an incredible inheritance for the children of God. That's a key word: inheritance." Kindle location 852

"I'm talking about the physical transformation all followers of Jesus will experience at the moment of our resurrection and transition to heaven. That resurrection is more than resuscitation. It's more than simply coming back to life. It is a moment of transformation during which we will become something new." Kindle location 902

"This tells us we aren't going to be some kind of ghostlike phantom that floats around forever. We're going to have our same literal, physical bodies, but they will be risen, resurrected, and glorified—equipped for eternity. Just as Jesus took on flesh at the incarnation, so our heavenly bodies will be incarnate." Kindle location 916

“Next, our bodies will be identifiable. You will still be you in heaven, and everyone will recognize you. You’ll instantly know your loved ones.” Kindle location 925

“From the instant of our resurrection, our new bodies will never wear out nor grow old. They will be totally resistant to deterioration or decay. Your new body will be designed for eternity. It will not be subject to accidents, diseases, aging, or death. It will be pain-free and disease-free. It will never wear out and never die.” Kindle location 949

“Our bodies will shine with light, just like Moses’ face did after being with God. Just like Jesus did on the mountain. When we are raised in glory, we’ll shine like the sun. Psalm 34:5 says, ‘They looked to Him and were radiant.’” Kindle location 962

“The main thing about heaven is not the streets of gold, the gates of pearl, or even our reunion with our loved ones. As wonderful as those things are, the main thing is our Lord Jesus Christ. Heaven is heaven because that’s where Jesus is.” Kindle location 1018

“The Bible gives us the timeline for when these events will take place. First will come the rapture, in which Jesus will rescue His church. Then the Tribulation, where God will pour out His judgment and wrath against all evil. At the end of those seven years, Christ will physically return to earth as our conquering King, and all the saints will join Him. He will set up a preview of heaven on earth that will last for a thousand years—the Millennium. That era will come to an end with a new rebellion, or a new repetition of the fall from Genesis 3, followed by the Great White Throne Judgment.” Kindle location 1165

“That is the moment when ‘the heavens will pass away with a great noise.’ What we know and perceive as the universe will be disbanded and dissolved. Time itself will come to an end. The old version of creation will be consumed, and God will establish something new in its place: a new heaven and a new earth to be enjoyed for eternity. God has made that promise to you.” Kindle location 1170

“Instead of creation being annihilated, the present heaven and earth will be cleansed, glorified, and equipped for our eternal use. Rather than being destroyed, creation will be refined and promoted to a renewed perfection without the stain of sin.” Kindle location 1209

“Before going further, let me dispense with one idea. We will not be angels. Sometimes when a child dies, we hear someone say, ‘Well, he’s an angel with God now.’ Occasionally someone says something about our passing away and growing wings. No. Angels are angels, and humans are humans. There is nothing in the Bible that indicates we’ll take on an angelic nature.” Kindle location 1741

“Randy Alcorn wrote, ‘The marriage of the God of Heaven with the people of Earth will also bring the marriage of Heaven and Earth. There will not be two universes—one the primary home of God and angels, the other the primary home of humanity. Nothing will separate us from God, and nothing will separate Earth and Heaven. Once God and mankind dwell together, there will be no difference between Heaven and Earth.’” Kindle location 1757

“There will be no need to pray as we do now. We will live in the very presence of almighty God, and we will commune with and have an ongoing relationship with Him much more intimately than we do now. Even so, our prayer requests will all have been answered. There will be no need to pray in terms of supplication, no need to pray for others, no need to confess our sins, and no need to ask for healing.” Kindle location 1865

“Will there be anything in the eternal state that could possibly steal our joy? Lessen it? Dull its impact in our lives? No. ‘Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life’” (Revelation 21:27 NIV). Kindle location 2053

“Can you imagine a world with no sun? It’s coming, but that won’t produce a place of darkness. Far from it! No sun or moon means there will be no night. We will live constantly in the light of heaven—the light produced by God Himself. Think what that means for our lives: continual, uninterrupted fellowship and activity. Likewise, the depression and discouragement that often accompany darkness will be gone.” Kindle location 2126

“In Paul’s day, then, being called before the bema seat was a positive experience. For a participant in the games, visiting the bema to be ‘judged’ meant receiving both recognition and reward. The same will be true when we as Christians stand before the judgment seat of Christ.” Kindle location 2250

“As wonderful as our rewards are, they cannot compare with our ultimate joy—our great Rewarder, Jesus Christ. None of these crowns—not the Victor’s Crown, the Crown of Rejoicing, the Crown of Righteousness, the Crown of Life, nor the Glory Crown—can compare to our best, highest, and greatest reward of all: Him! Remember what the Lord told Abraham in Genesis 15:1: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.’” Kindle location 2416

“‘Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life’ (Revelation 2:10). I’ve already talked about rewards and crowns; but I believe every martyr in history, every person who has given their life for the Lord, will receive a special award to enjoy throughout eternity—the crown of life mentioned in that verse.” Kindle location 2602

“These men and women will recall the horrible deaths they suffered on earth and the moment when they sacrificed their lives for the sake of God’s kingdom. They will form a special league in heaven, eager for God to make things right and to avenge their deaths. Each one will be given a distinctive white robe and told to remain patient—to rest for just a bit.” Kindle location 2615

“In heaven, everyone will be kind and honest. No one will pretend. If someone says they love you, they will really mean it—and you will feel it. Everyone will treat each other with real love, all the time. For those reasons and more, our friends will be anything but boring in heaven.” Kindle location 2785

“When a person dies today without knowing Christ, that person’s body goes in the grave, and his soul and spirit go to hades, the intermediate ‘hell,’ until a particular point in time in the future.” Kindle location 2898

“But here’s what we need to understand. Revelation 20:13–14 says that after the judgment at the Great White Throne, death and hades will give up those who are in them, and they will all be cast into the lake of fire forever. There will be a moment of final judgment that is still to come.” Kindle location 2900

“In other words, Jesus took the Old Testament believers from Paradise into heaven. Since then, believers no longer pass through an intermediate heaven at death. The soul and spirit of every believer now go directly to heaven because Paradise is now in the presence of God (2 Corinthians 12:2–4). So here is the answer to the question, ‘Where are they now?’ If your loved ones were followers of Christ, I can tell you for sure where they are. Their bodies are in the grave, waiting for the day of resurrection at the rapture; their souls and spirits are in heaven! And in 2 Corinthians 5:1–5, Paul hinted at the fact that they have some kind of intermediate body as they await their full resurrection at the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).” Kindle location 2914

“To be honest, I cannot find any passage in the Bible that clearly teaches that those in heaven are watching us or keeping track of what’s unfolding in our daily lives. And beware! There is not a single passage of Scripture that

tells us we can or should try to contact someone who has passed away. Even if they can see us (which I doubt), we cannot see them or interact with them. Attempting to do so takes us into the dark world of the occult, somewhere we don't want to be." Kindle location 2965

"I believe we'll have better minds, better memories, and better maturity in heaven than we do now. We'll lose none of our faculties, but our new and increased knowledge will make sense of everything." Kindle location 3100

"Lightner wrote, 'In all of the Bible references to infants and young children, not once is there so much as a hint that they will ever be eternally lost and separated from God if they die before they have had an opportunity to respond to the gospel.'" Kindle location 3219

"There are two things we can say for certain when it comes to suicide and eternal security for believers in Jesus. First, suicide is a sin. It is rebellion against God and an active rejection of His stated will. Meaning, it is morally wrong. Second, suicide does not disqualify a Christian from entering heaven. It is not a 'mortal sin,' to use the vocabulary of the Catholic church. Those two truths provide all the guiderails we need to discuss this difficult but important topic." Kindle location 3296

"The Bible consistently teaches that ending a human life is wrong. That includes your own life, which means suicide is a sinful action. Ending our own lives is wrong because it fails to recognize both the gift and responsibility given to each of us—a gift that is wrapped up in the preciousness of life." Kindle location 3308

"Suicide is a loss of the time and life God has given us. God wants us to use each day wisely and trust Him, even when life feels overwhelming. Beyond that, suicide is a rejection of our God-given purpose." Kindle location 3361

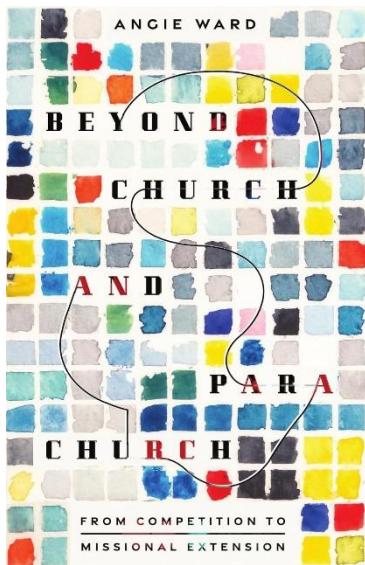
"There is not a single Scripture verse that commands burial or condemns cremation. Every sin known to man is condemned in some way at some place in the Bible, and those warnings are vital for our morality and behavior. But nowhere does Scripture command us to practice burial or prohibit us from practicing cremation." Kindle location 3451

"John MacArthur wrote, 'Obviously any buried body will eventually decompose (Ecclesiastes 12:7). So cremation isn't a strange or wrong practice—it merely accelerates the natural process of oxidation. The believer will one day receive a new body . . . thus the state of what remains of the old body is unimportant. . . . What we need to focus on as Christians is not how to dispose of our earthly bodies, but that one day new bodies will be fashioned for us like the Lord's glorious resurrection body. . . . That transformation will be eternal!'" Kindle location 3471

"Well, for starters, we know there will be animals on earth with us during the Millennium. More than that, we know the relationship between humans and the animal kingdom will be completely repaired during that time. According to the prophet Hosea, 'In that day [God] will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, with the birds of the air, and with the creeping things of the ground'" (Hosea 2:18).

"But this we know for sure: Those who trust Christ alone for the safekeeping of their souls will receive a rich welcome when they enter the pearly gates. We will fall down before our Lord Jesus Christ, and we'll thank Him for all He did to give us a life that will never end and a home that will never fade away." Kindle location 3723

***** Missions/Ministry *****



[Beyond Church and Parachurch: From Competition to Missional Extension](#)

By: Angie Ward

InterVarsity Press, 2025

201 pages

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Summary

The book explores the loaded concepts of church and parachurch that the author argues come from “a fundamental deficit in ecclesiology” (page 6). In the first half of this exploration, the book reviews and reflects on the current state of the church in its various forms, and of the history and theology of church and parachurch, and their related models, relationships, and challenges. For the rest of the book, the author presents the need to go beyond the current state of church and proposes “a comprehensive new way of thinking for the church for the twenty-first century and beyond” (page 140) through the concept of missional extensions.

Best Illustration

“In 2017, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) began to formally work together and reach out to other campus ministries to form a coalition. The resulting entity, EveryCampus, now includes more than one hundred partner organizations, including denominations and local churches.” Page 148

Best Idea

“The church (*ekklesia*) is the divinely established, called out, and sent collection of all the people of God around the world, animated, and united by the work of Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, who gather regularly in local embodied community to re-center their lives around God and who seek to live out kingdom values in their relationships with one another and with the world.” Page 89

Best Take Away

“But sometimes we simply operate out of bad models or mindsets (about church and parachurch). The four I see most frequently are a scarcity mindset, the wrong scoreboards, an overemphasis on institutions, and a lack of kingdom perspective.” Page 123

Our Recommendation

We recommend this book to senior pastors, mission pastors, denominational, missions, and other parachurch leaders who seek to find a practical way toward reconciling the challenging relationship between church and parachurch.

Best Quotes

“Church, and our belonging in it, is a state of being, not just a behavior.” Page 7

“The answer to the crisis of the North American church will not be found at the level of method and problem-solving.... It has to do with who we are and what we are for.” (Darrell Guder) Page 9

“The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality.” (Max DePree) Page 16

“The median congregation (in the United States) today has 65 attendees, down from a median of 137 people in 2000.” Page 19

“There were around 20,000 religious public charities in the United States in 1997, which grew to 58,000 organizations just ten years later. Today, according to some estimates there are over 100,000 parachurch organizations in the United States alone.” Page 21

“We live in a period of transition, on the borderline between a paradigm that no longer satisfies and one that is, to a large extent, still amorphous and opaque.” (David Bosch) Page 28

“Historically, monasticism could be considered the first appearance of what we now refer to as the parachurch and was one of the most significant such institutions in the life of the church for more than a millennium.” Page 38

“It must be noted that monasticism, at least for its first eight hundred years, was largely a lay movement.” Page 41

“The end of the Middle Ages gave rise to the first universities... also brought a new emphasis on Bible translation.” Page 44

“At the start of the twentieth century, denominations outnumbered special purpose groups two to one. By the mid 1970s, special purpose groups outnumbered denominations, leading to a radical restructuring of American religion.” (Robert Wuthnow) Page 55

“Today there are more than 1,800 megachurches in the United States.” Page 55

“The gospel always comes to people in historical robes.” Page 60

“Misunderstandings and outright tensions between the church and the parachurch and their respective roles in the life of the individual Christian are nothing new.” Page 62

“Throughout the majority of the New Testament, the ‘church’ refers to local assemblies of Christian believers.” Page 72

“Simply stated, the church was and is a fellowship, and the Christian life can be fully realized only in relationship to others.” Page 75

“The mission comes first, and the church exists because of that mission. The church is not the origin or center of mission; it is the fulfillment of God’s mission.” Page 79

“The church is special—a sacred, special-grace institution that belongs entirely to God.” (Edward Kline III)
Page 82

“Five different models or visions for the church are as follows: (1) church as institution); (2) church as mystical communion; (3) church as sacrament; (4) church as herald; and (5) church as servant.” Page 86

“Six theological perspectives about the parachurch (or para-local church) are: (1) local church only; (2) temporary legitimacy; (3) two structures; (4) church planting; (5) dual legitimacy; and (6) anti-institutional.” Page 101

“The Church was first established with a world-wide mission for a world-wide work.” (Roland Allen) Page 108

“The advantages of the parachurch are its reach, specialization, lay involvement, promotion of unity, and call for the church to be on mission.” Page 112

“While the variety of Christian ministry entities generally claim to be on the same team, they are not always great teammates.” Page 120

“I believe there are four key issues underlying the lack of cooperation among ministry entities. They are practicality, genuine differences, free enterprise, and unclear and bad models.” Page 122

“I believe we need to make five difficult shifts or movements pertaining to our models and mindsets: from confusion to clarity; from scarcity to generosity; from institutional to movemental; from empire to kingdom; and from control to freedom.” Page 134

“However, there is also great danger in institutionalism, in believing that institutions and organizations themselves are the center, the source, even the goal, instead of simply the means for equipping and unleashing the body of Christ.” Page 140

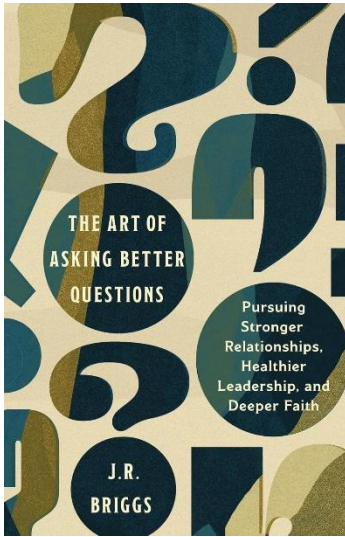
“In this model: (1) every entity is aware of its role in God’s greater mission; (2) every entity is connected to another; and (3) every individual is connected to a local congregation.” Page 142

“Mission Increase, a kingdom bridge-building organization, encourages nonprofit ministries to thank the leaders at each of the churches where their volunteers attend.” Page 157

“Let me recommend five key actions... to strengthen and unify the whole church... for the twenty-first century: elevate ecclesiology; update our vocabulary; equip and release laity; redesign structures; and commit to collaborations.” Page 173

[Listen to the interview here.](#)

***** Church Mission Leadership*****



[The Art of Asking Better Questions: Pursuing Strong Relationships, Healthier Leadership, and Deeper Faith](#)

By: J.R. Briggs

IVP Press, 2025

289 pages

[Find it on Amazon*](#)

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Summary

The Art of Asking Better Questions provides practical and theological guidance for those seeking to ask better questions as a tool to improve and deepen interactions with others. The book addresses common barriers to thoughtful questions and provides frameworks to navigate appropriate and inciteful question asking without overstepping bounds or asking with improper motives. Briggs provides an analysis of question asking in the Bible, focusing on the role of questions in Jesus' ministry. He also provides reflections on the role of question asking in leadership, emphasizing a shift from leaders as answer givers, to leaders as question askers. The last third of the book provides practical suggestions for improving our questions before, during, and after asking questions of others. Lists of helpful example questions are sprinkled throughout the book, delving into all aspects of question asking from simple get-to-know you questions to self-reflection and leadership skills. These examples make the book a practical treasure trove for all readers.

Best Illustration

The author was speaking with a reporter, asking him "simple, get-to-know-you type questions.... The reporter began to cry...I sensed he needed to share some thing that he'd been wanting to express to someone who would listen.... He poured out his story. His insecurities and doubts. His broken dreams... Trying to pay attention to what might be stirring below the surface, I took a risk and tried to move to the next level." (page 136) In this illustration, Briggs shares a real-life example of a significant encounter that began with simple questions and a willingness to listen, leading ultimately to deeper and more meaningful connection.

Best Idea

"Instead, this book is primarily about questioning-asking, where we seek to ask questions that emphasize honor, care, discovery, and growth.... These questions hold the power to unlock the doors of discovery and place us on the path toward new paradigms, creative solutions, and previously unimagined ideas." (Page 13)

As church missions leaders, we have seen teams and plans go sideways in unexpected ways. We feel helpless as we watch from half way around the country or the world. *The Art of Asking Better Questions* helps to equip us for the work of missionary care and support, a key part of every mission committee.

Best Take Away

“Why would an all-knowing, all-capable God, who created every detail of the universe and holds everyone of knowledge available in the world, ask questions?... The Christian faith affirms that God asks for much the same reason as we do: he desires a relationship with people.” Page 102

Our Recommendation

“This book is for people who want to go deeper, with God, friends, family members, coworkers, colleagues, and neighbors – and even with themselves.” (Page 13). This book is applicable to and recommended for many people in a variety of ministry settings. From a church missions perspective, this book is recommended for mission team leaders who need to quickly and effectively relate to people as they evaluate potential candidates for support and connect with missionaries visiting their church for a brief time. This book is helpful for team leaders striving to ask better questions in order to facilitate this process and deepen their connection with the missionaries they support.

Best Quotes

“The questions we ask often reveal the values we hold. The questions we ask determine the life we live.” Page 11

“Good questions are gifts we extend to others. They are like keys on a key ring, capable of unlocking doors and opening new passageways.” Page 17

“And questions are tools for engagement. Questions help us to lean in further, move conversations forward, and cultivate deeper relationships.” Page 28

“The best teachers I’ve ever had—whether in an academic setting or in the classroom of life – were those who asked great questions. A seminary professor frequently asked out class, ‘How will this information help you to love God and love your neighbor more fully.’” Page 32

“Unfortunately, a lack of curiosity can become a breeding ground for stereotyping, rigid thinking, dogmatism, and even discrimination...” Page 37

“The ability to arrive at the right answers depends in large part on the quality of the questions being asked.” Page 48

“Satan, the father of lies, knows exactly what questions to ask and how to ask them. He even knows when we are most susceptible to the lies implanted within those questions. He knows how to use questions to undermine and create doubt in our minds and hearts about God and his character and about our worth and identity.” Page 51

“Want generic answers? Ask generic questions. It’s as predictable as a communist election. But if you want more thoughtful responses, ask thoughtful questions instead. Ask and you shall receive.” Page 54

“Though it’s easy to assume that curiosity just happens to us, it doesn’t—we have to choose it. It’s a skill, a muscle we develop, and it’s essential to asking questions and ultimately to growth. Plain and simple, you cannot grow without curiosity.” Page 55

“Two of the most revealing differences between wise and foolish people are how they act and the questions they ask or refrain from asking.” Page 57

“If you change your questions, you change your life-and the lives of those around you.” Page 62

“If you long for deeper closeness with others, you’ll need to draw on your courage and lean in to ask a next-level question.” Page 72

“In a world saturated not only by ever-increasing loneliness but also by division, polarization, and fragmentation, genuine question-asking can provide healing and connection like almost nothing else.” Page 75

“I’ve heard hospitality described as making people feel comfortable in a new environment. My friend Tim describes it as giving the privileges of insiders to outsiders, which means that asking questions may be one of the best ways to offer hospitality to others.” Page 82

“Sadly, self-centered thinking is the dominant position in our age and is often celebrated.” Page 98

“...God knows questions create a deeper impact and transform us more than if he simply provides all the answers.... God wants all creation to know he values what we think and feel.” Page 102

“In fact, divine questions demand responses because an omniscient God has no need to ask them in the first place.” Page 104

“Jesus knew we learn and are formed best in experiences, stories, and questions.” Page 113

“Might there be more opportunities for growth and transformation if we considered adapting our approach and engaging others the way Jesus did?” Page 113

“Like his Father, Jesus wasn’t looking to gain more information; he desired to extend compassion along the lines of relationship. His questions often brought honor and restored people’s dignity.” Page 116

“Catch this: he [Jesus] was almost forty times more likely to ask a question than he was to give a direct answer.” Page 122

“Paradoxically, my questions of God have bolstered my faith, helping me to draw closer to him and feel more connected.” Page 131

“The power of a question lies in the fact that it reveals our true desires. The types of questions we ask God can give us a glimpse into what we think about him...” Page 131

“Might there be a connection between Jesus’ statement about becoming more childlike and asking questions? Questions help us to see things with new eyes, and children do that best.” Page 133

“‘Tears are essentially liquid prayers,’ I said. ‘I know you are not a religious person. But can you put words to the prayers that your face is praying right now?’” Page 136

“Lament realizes that pain is a terrible thing to waste and gives us permission to grieve, to go through the mess and not around it.” Page 138

“In times of lament—when we feel disappointment, abandonment, disorientation, and pain—it’s good to ask

three questions: What do I want? What do I miss? What do I need?" Page 140

"Despite all the pain and suffering, what is God doing in and through me right now? What might he want to do?" page 141

"God gives us clear permission to ask him questions, without apology, to help us express and emote as intensely as we desire in order to connect with him. What a gift. The power of a good questions is that it often reveals our true desires—and nobody more than God loves to know what we truly desire. He not only allows us to ask him questions but strongly encourages it." Page 141

"What if the best leaders aren't those who know the right answers but are instead those who ask the right questions?" Page 144

"A good question provokes us to think, feel, and act differently." Page 147

"Trust is built on thick bonds of relationship, and great questions build trust." Page 150

"If we want information, we can Google it. But if what we're after is clarity and connection, we need questions." Page 150

"Leaders who shape the future will be those who shift from a mindset of leader-as-answer-giver to leader-as-lead-question-asker." Page 151

"Great leaders amplify others. They help others succeed and reach their goals. They are quick to praise and celebrate others for their hard work and contributions. They focus on others and not on themselves. They are amplifiers." Page 154

"Avoiding tough questions and refusing to confront the difficult issues of life means neglecting a significantly transforming encounter with God." Page 159

"If you want to be spiritually formed to be more like Jesus, one of the best questions you can ask yourself is, What is God's invitation to me in this situation?" page 160

"But I do know God is a loving Father who takes immense delight in hearing what's on his children's hearts." Page 162

"One of the assignments he gave us was to read an Old Testament passage and generate a list of questions about the text." Page 166

"One of the most straightforward ways to learn to ask questions like Jesus did is to intentionally study the questions he asked." Page 167

"One of people's biggest misconceptions is that they have to generate all the questions themselves. Good news: you don't. Your job is to collect the best questions available from anywhere you can find them." Page 173

"Common Question: How are you? Next level question: what's been the most interesting part of your day thus far? Page 176

“Think about what you would want to draw out of others, what you would want to know about them, and what would lead them to feel valued as individuals.” Page 183

“Why am I about to ask this? To what end?... Am I trying to sound smart? Am I trying to trick someone? Or am I genuinely interested?” page 188

“The right question asked in the wrong way can become the wrong question.” Page 189

“When we create a safe place for people to share about their passions, aspirations, dreams, fears, and hopes, they get excited... People have a lot to share but few safe places to share it.” Page 194

“Instead of trying to find a solution, attempt to come through the backdoor. Invite people to ask only questions about the issue or problem.” Page 200

“If the quality of your life is determined by the quality of the questions you ask God, yourself, and others, how then will you live into those questions?” Page 214

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