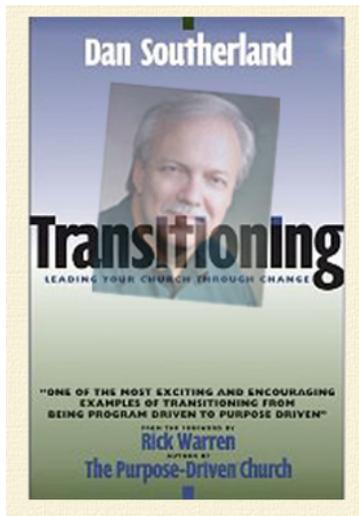


# Dan Southerland

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“The church has paid a terrible price for statistics!” Leonard Ravenhill



## Introduction

Dan Southerland is one of the pastors of *Next Level Church* in Charlotte, North Carolina. He is also the founder and director of *Church Transitions*, an organization that trains pastors and church leaders to effectively manage change. According to Zondervan... He has trained over 100,000 pastors and church leaders in the past seven years, and is one of the leading experts on implementing the purpose-driven paradigm in existing churches. [1]

His 2002 book *Transitioning.. Leading Your Church Through Change*, which is supposed to draw principles from the book of Nehemiah, is essentially a follow on to Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church*, being a step by step guide to changing an existing church from program-driven to purpose-driven. It is described by Zondervan who says it “takes readers through a step-by-step process that can help any church make the transition from being program driven to purpose driven”. [2]

The back cover of *Transitioning* says

“If the thought of switching from a traditional church to a purpose-driven church leaves you with mingled feelings of excitement and

fear, good! It means that, as a pastor, you know the incalculable worth of aligning your church with God's vision...Transitioning is written for you." (From the back cover).

And Rick Warren describes the book as being...

"One of the most exciting and encouraging examples of transitioning from being program driven to purpose driven." From the foreword by Rick Warren, Author of *The Purpose-Driven® Church* [3]

This is hardly surprising since Southerland says much of his understanding and material concerning purpose, target and strategy come from Warren. [*Transitioning* Page 45]. Warren also says in the foreword which he wrote [Emphasis Added]

As we move into the twenty-first century, I believe the greatest days of the church are all ahead of us and I firmly believe there is **hope for our older established churches** who will take the risk of rediscovering God's purpose for the church,

By the way *Transitions* was published on April 1<sup>st</sup> of 2002, which couldn't be more appropriate as you will see.

So lets take a brief look at this book that is supposed to help churches rediscover God's purpose for them. In particular we wish to take a closer look at the Bible verses and Biblical characters and stories (that of Nehemiah in particular) that much of the book seems to be based on. And the reason for doing so is that if an author bases his entire theme on bone headed interpretations of particular verses in Scripture then very little that they say can be trusted. While I am sure that other examples can be found, we will examine four in particular ... 1 Corinthians 2:9, Isaiah 43:18-19, 2 Corinthians 5:17 and the story of Nehemiah rebuilding the city of Jerusalem.

But before we do it is of vital importance that we go over one of the imperatives to the **right understanding of any passage** from the Scriptures.

### **Rightly Interpreting The Scriptures**

It has to be remembered that no verse in the Bible stands in isolation, but is part of a paragraph, which in turn is part of a chapter, which is part of a particular book. When the Bible was written there was **no such thing as**

**chapter and verse numbers.** These were added much later to facilitate locating a particular section or verse. However the down side of this is that chapter and verse breaks have sometimes been put in most inappropriate places, separating relevant material that should be grouped together.

Since no Biblical author simply strung together a number of lofty sounding phrases. You simply can not pick out a verse in isolation, but can only be properly informed by God's Word the way it is written... in its context. This means that virtually all verses in the Bible can only be **fully understood and assessed** as part of the surrounding verses, which form the setting, or the big picture.

The reader needs to try to get an understanding of what **the author meant** by the words he wrote, and what the **overall message** of the chapter is intended to convey. This means you should ignore the verse numbers and read **at least** a paragraph, if not the whole chapter perhaps several times. This will almost always result in the discovery of a very **clear theme** and **distinct message** running through the chapter.

But, since this takes a little more time, study and effort, most Christians are content with allowing a verse to be wrested from it's context, and twisted it to convey whatever meaning the speaker/author wishes it to convey which, all too often, is nothing but a corruption of the truth.... a perversion of Scriptures, done in order to persuade men that everything the false teacher says is based on Biblical truth.

The numbers in front of what we call "verses" can give us the idea that these verses stand alone in their meaning. However, it is well to remember that these number were not in the original documents, but added hundred of years later. No Biblical author simply strung together a number of lofty sounding phrases disconnected from one another. Since each verse is an integral part of a particular point the author was trying to make, no one should read, much less base their beliefs on, stand alone verses. The reader can only be accurately informed by God's Word the way it is written.

So for those who are willing to take the time to track the train of thought in the verses that Southerland quotes in his book....

### **Southerland's Take on 1 Corinthians 2:9**

In the book Southerland presents eight steps to the transitioning of a church.

The very first step, *Preparing for Vision* is based on an extremely faulty interpretation of 1 Corinthians 2:9. He says. [Second bold added]

**“Vision is not just a destination; it is a journey.** Preparation is a major part of vision. The reason lies in the essence of vision itself. Vision is not just a destination; it is a journey. Vision is not just a product; it is a process. Vision is not just the finish line; it is the whole race. Any business guru can tell you that research and development is a major part of producing a winning product. Any athlete knows that winning the competition begins with training. Any seasoned traveler can testify that front end preparation is vital to a successful trip. **Paul captured the essence of vision when he wrote these words:**

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him. 1 Corinthians 2:9”  
[Pgs 20-21]

Although not quoted literally, these words by Paul are from Isaiah 64:4. Paul then goes on to add in the next verse...

But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. [2:10]

These two verses have been used, or rather misused, by countless purveyors of false doctrine, who use them as ‘evidence’ that Paul’s “deep things of God” that “God has prepared for those who love him” refer to the doctrine they happen to be teaching.

So for those who are willing to take the time to track Paul’s train of thought.... And dig into what **overall message he intended** to convey in the chapter

In the opening verses of chapter 1 Paul expresses his wish that the Corinthians become united and cease indulging in useless divisions (1:10-16), with the rest of the chapter devoted to the wisdom of God as opposed to the wisdom of man. In fact, Paul uses the word wisdom some **15 times** in the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians, talking about how God chooses foolish things of the world, to put to shame the wise; and how God chooses the weak things of the world, to put to shame the things that are strong.

Chapter two opens with Paul telling the people that he came to them not in “excellency of speech” but that his preaching in weakness and in fear was a demonstration of the Spirit and of power [2:3-4]. He speaks of himself as a humble man who has no confidence in his own abilities and methods, but whose trust is in God alone.

In verse 6, Paul changes from the first person singular (“I”) to the first person plural (“we”), linking his message, and his methods with the other apostles, and saying that **they** speak “a wisdom not of this world, nor of the rulers of this world, who are coming to nought, but “speak God’s wisdom in a mystery” and that this mystery was foreordained by God “before the worlds” [2:6-7]

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[**Note** We usually think of a mystery as something that we have to figure out. For example a murder mystery is a “whodunit” (Who done it?), where the puzzle itself is the main feature of interest. However this is not what the Bible means by “mystery”. In Scripture, the word “mystery” refers to something that has **not yet been revealed**, not something that is incomprehensible, or even difficult to be understood. And what is this mystery? Jesus said to his disciples [All Emphasis Added]

**“Unto you is given the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all things are done in parables”.**  
[Mark 4:11]

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? And he answered and said unto them,  
**Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.** [Matthew 13:10-11]

**Note also** that the Bible also very clearly tells us when the mystery of God comes to an end... when the angel sounds the seventh trumpet...

“in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then is finished the mystery of God, according to the good tidings which he declared to his servants the prophets.” [10:7]

Paul then says that the rulers of this world did not know this mystery, for if they had, they “would not have crucified the Lord of glory”. It is now that Paul says the words quoted by Southerland..

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” 1 Corinthians 2:9

Paul is not capturing “the essence of vision” as Southerland says, but stating that those who belong to this world, including those that crucified the Lord, have no idea (No eye has seen, no ear has heard) what God has prepared for those who love Him. Note that the next verse begins with the word “*but*” (which seems to be completely ignored).

**But** unto us God revealed them through the Spirit”... 1Corinthians 2:10

In other words the world does not understand the mystery of God and what He has prepared for those who love Him **but**, through the Spirit, God has revealed them to us. **A believer understands the *mystery*, which is the good news of the redemption of creation.. the Gospel.**

### **Southerland’s Take on Isaiah 43:18-19**

Similarly, on page 169, Southerland says “The process of vision is continual”...

“You never graduate from the school of vision. God always has something fresh and new to do in you and through you.

Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, now it will spring forth; shall you not know it? I will make a **road** (Hebrew *derek*) in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. Isaiah 43:18-19”

Almost every Bible translation has used the English “way” instead of road since the Hebrew word *derek* figuratively means a *course* of life or *mode* of action. For example

Genesis 6:12 And God saw the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their **way** (Hebrew *derek*) upon the earth.

Jeremiah 6:16 Thus saith Jehovah, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good **way** (Hebrew *derek*); and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls: but they said, We will not walk therein.

In fact Christianity in the early days was very appropriately called “The Way”

and asked of him letters to Damascus unto the synagogues, that if he found any that were of **the Way**, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. [Acts 9:2]

Isaiah 43:18-19, which Southerland has quoted in support of his statement that “God always has something fresh and new to do in you and through you”, was never about God springing new surprises on us at periodic intervals. While, in this passage, the deliverance from Babylon is foretold, **Isaiah is making reference to a far greater event**. In other words this “Way” that God was going to make in the wilderness was **a prophecy about Jesus and the ‘path of redemption’** for both Jew and Gentile.

This is further emphasized by noting Isaiah’s words that a new thing “will spring forth”. There can be no doubt that this too is reference to Jesus who is called a root or a branch of the royal stock, and was “to spring up” from the line of David, even though this lineage had fallen into disrepair. Joseph, the husband of Mary, though of the royal family of David (Matthew 1:20; Luke 2:4), was poor, and the family had lost all claims to the throne. Yet a “sprout” or “branch” was to come forth that would not only succeed David on the throne, but surpass the earthly king’s magnificence.

The word ‘branch’ occurs several times in the Old Testament and most, if not all, of these passages make express reference to the Messiah; [All Emphasis Added]

For he grew up before him **as a tender plant**, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. [Isaiah 53:2]

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David **a righteous Branch**, and a king shall reign; [Jeremiah 23:5]

‘In those days, and at that time, will I cause **the Branch of righteousness** to grow up unto David; [Jeremiah 33:15]

Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou and thy fellows that sit before thee; for they are men that are a sign: for, behold, I will bring forth **my servant the Branch**. [Zechariah 3:8]

### **Southerland’s Take on 2 Corinthians 5:17 (man is a new creation)**

On page 23 and 24 Southerland says

“Vision is an active process, an ongoing process. It is a continual search for what God is doing and wants to do.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.  
2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJ)

That is vision. Vision is the active process of following a dynamic God—which means we must keep dreaming and keep visioning to keep our churches, ministries, and personal lives from perishing.”

Once again, like all teachers of absolute crock, in describing 2 Corinthians 5:17 as being about “vision”, Southerland is paying absolutely no regard as to what the author’s meaning is and what he intended to say which, as said before, can only be done by examining the verse in context and following Paul’s train of thought.

Taking chapter 5 as a whole, we find **a very clear theme and distinct message** running through it...

Verses 1-5 compares the Christian’s earthly body with a clay pot but, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are assured of a glorious body. We desire to be in heaven, and to be clothed with immortality.

Verses 6-8 tells the reader that they should not worry excessively about losing their lives in His service since when we are absent from the body, we are at home with the Lord.

Verses 9-10 says that this assurance that we will leave these “disposable bodies” behind can not be an excuse for being careless about the way we live now. We know that our earthly body is only temporary, and that there is a coming day of judgment when each one will receive “according to what he has done”. Therefore, we have to make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto him.

Verses 11-15 we too have to endeavor to persuade others to flee from the wrath to come; The love of Christ motivates Paul and the other apostles to boldly proclaim the gospel and seek to persuade men to turn to Christ to be reconciled with God...

Verses 16- 21: ...which applies to every single believer who dies in Christ and is raised to new life in Him. All the old things are passed away and become new. God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and **given us the ministry of reconciliation**;

This means that all true believers can no longer live selfishly for their own benefit. Paul’s ministry was a reflection of God’s ministry inasmuch as God had reconciled Paul to Himself. Now Paul was out to reconcile everybody else to God. In exactly the same way, just as we have been saved, we have been appointed to make the Gospel of Jesus Christ known to the unbeliever. As Paul says in V.20

We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God.

Chapter 5 outlines the basis of the Christian faith... the new nature. It emphasizes that part of this “new nature” is that **through us** God entreats others to be reconciled. It is not “a continual search for what God is doing and wants to do”, since God has already made it very clear what He has done and what He expects us to do, which is not “keep dreaming and keep visioning”, but obey. This chapter has far more to do with **evangelism** than anything else.

### **Southerland’s Take on Nehemiah’s Mission.**

Southerland says the process of vision upon which this book is based comes

from the chapters one through five of the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. [*Step Eight... Evaluating The Results*. Page 228]. He states...

“When we first left Nehemiah he was preparing for vision. That is the first step in the process and it is detailed in Nehemiah chapter one. But something dramatic happens to Nehemiah in the four month time lapse between chapters one and two. In chapter one he is burdened about Jerusalem but has no specific plan. In chapter two he has the plan firmly in place. What happened in between? He moved from preparing for vision to defining a very specific vision”. [Page 43]

The problem here is that the above statement is simply not true. In chapter one Nehemiah is told for the first time that

“The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire” [V. 3].

On hearing these words, he immediately

“... sat down and wept, and mourned certain days” and “fasted and prayed before the God of heaven” [V. 4].

In his prayer of penitence he also ‘reminded’ the Lord that He had said that if the people returned to Him, and kept His commandments and did them, He the Lord would gather them from even the uttermost part of the heavens, and return them to Jerusalem. [Vs. 5-11].

In chapter 1 Nehemiah **was already praying to be returned to Jerusalem**, but it wasn’t until four months later that his prayer was answered when the king noticed that Nehemiah was not himself and enquired into the reason [2:2]. Upon which Nehemiah said that he could not be anything but sad when his city lay waste and the gates consumed with fire. [2:3]. It is here that the king asked Nehemiah what his request was and Nehemiah told him that he wished to return and rebuild Jerusalem. [2:5].

There is no evidence that anything “dramatic” happened to Nehemiah in the time between hearing the news and actually speaking to the king. It is more than likely that he spent the time in praying but, until the later conversation with the king, could not have known he would be allowed to return and

rebuild Jerusalem. He had to wait on the Lord who took four months to **answer his prayers.**

### **Nehemiah and Sanballat**

Much of the sixth step in Southerland's book... *Dealing with Opposition*, is again centered around Nehemiah. The rather lengthy quotes from the book are presented in order to show how much Southerland equates his approach with Nehemiah's re-building project, comparing church leaders and pastors who do not agree with him to Sanballat's opposition to Nehemiah's work (Nehemiah chapters 2 and 4). Southerland writes.. [Except for passage headers all emphasis has been added,]

**Expect Apathy.** Some people just won't care about the vision. Nehemiah experienced this. Nehemiah had leaders who were apathetic. You will too. Some people are leaders because they are visionary. Some people are leaders because they are **noisier** and more **opinionated** than others. In other words, they are **control freaks**. (Many pastors I know fit into this camp.) Leaders who are control freaks will be **apathetic** towards your vision because they perceive it to be a lessening of their control....

**Expect anger.** When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall he became angry and was greatly incensed. Nehemiah 4:1a....

**Expect ridicule.** If you have read Nehemiah recently, you will remember that Sanballat is Nehemiah's greatest critic and number one enemy. Let me put it plainer than that. Sanballat is a leader from hell. I have not looked it up but I am convinced that **the Hebrew word for Sanballat means leader from hell.**

It is a pity that Southerland did not do a little more digging into who Sanballat was. Because if the appellation (the Horonite) which follows his name indicates his origin, he was a Moabite of Horonaim, a city of Moab mentioned in Isaiah 15:5 and Jeremiah 48:2,5,34. [4]. According to the book of Nehemiah both Sanballat and Tobiah the Ammonite **together** opposed the building of Jerusalem. So who were they?

The incest of Lot and his daughters produced two nations: the Moabites and the Ammonites, iniquitous people who plagued Israel for many generations.

Both nations were excluded from God's assembly, with what seems to be only one exception... Ruth.

An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of Jehovah; even to the tenth generation shall none belonging to them enter into the assembly of Jehovah for ever: because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt, and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee. [Deuteronomy 23:3-24]

Additionally the name "Sanballat" is the Babylonian Sin-uballit, "may Sin give him life," Sin being the god of the moon in Mesopotamian mythology. And here is the really interesting part...

The **pre-Islamic** deities of Arabia which were most venerated were astral deities, especially the triad of the moon god, the sun goddess, and the god associated with the planet Venus. According to numerous inscriptions, while the name of the Moon-god was Sin, his title was *al-Ilah*, i.e. "the deity," meaning that he was the chief god among the gods. This term *al-Ilah* was shortened to *Allah* in pre-Islamic times. Note that Muhammad's **father's name** was Abdullah, which means *Servant of Allah*.

At the time of Muhammad the city of Mecca had shrines to many gods, chief of whom was the moon god *al-Ilah*. To end division among his people in Mecca, Muhammad elevated *al-Ilah* to the chief and only god.

The symbol of the crescent moon is found on the flags of Islamic nations, and sits atop their mosques and minarets. The 30-day Islamic holy month of Ramazan or Ramadan begins and ends with the sighting of the new (crescent) moon. This crescent symbol adopted by Islam came from *al-Ilah*, whose name was Sin in pre-Islamic days.

So church leaders and pastors who do not agree with the pack of wolves (Act 20:29) led by people like Warren and Southerland are likened to the Ammonites and the Moabites.. particularly Sanballat who was named after the god Sin... the Islamic Allah.

We all have some Sanballats in our churches. This is the guy who opposes whatever your propose. They guy who hates what you like. The guy who wants to back up every time you want to move forward.

You cannot call this guy **a leader from hell** to his face– but you could call him Sanballat....

“Check out good old Sanballat: He ridiculed the Jews (Nehemiah 4:1b). The word for ridicule here literally means to trouble, to rage against, to be indignant toward. Modern forms would include mocking, making fun of, putting down, and being sarcastic.

Note here that there is a world of difference between the opposition of a hostile unbeliever and the concerns of a believer! Southerland, however lumps all who oppose the type of change he is advocating as Sanballats, **even if they object on Biblical grounds**. As Tim Challies says in his review on Amazon.com... “There is no latitude given for those who oppose the change, Criticism is viewed as inevitable and unfortunate, but ultimately an attack on God Himself. The pastor is cautioned to remain on track with the change and not allow opposers to derail the process”.

“You will get some ridicule. One form of ridicule that is popular today is name calling. A few of the names that have been thrown at us are liberal, heretic, new ager, manipulator, and false prophet (and those are just the names I get called in staff meetings). Get the picture? You better expect some ridicule.

(What I find completely mind boggling here is that Southerland says that one form of ridicule is name calling, yet **he himself** calls pastors “leaders from hell” (apparently behind their backs). Other words he uses to describe pastors that do not agree with him are noisy, opinionated, control freaks and apathetic(above)... plus ornery and mean (below).

Did I miss something here?

“**Expect criticism**. Sanballat is still at it. The leader from hell is trying to prevail. Look at his next tirade:

‘What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? ...What are they building. .if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones. Nehemiah 4:2-3

“We have experienced two major sources of criticism during our transitions. The first is Christians from more traditional backgrounds. They sometimes struggle with transitions in the church. Not all of our

traditional backgrounded Christians have been critical – just the **ornery** ones. Our second source of criticism is traditional church pastors. Again, not all traditional church pastors—just the **meaner ones**. I believe that is because they do not understand what we are doing. I hope it is not our of jealousy of our results....

**“Expect a fight.** If you think your opposition will go away without a fight, think again. ... Notice what Nehemiah’s opposition group is up to:

They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. Nehemiah 4:8

They were not planning an out in the open frontal attack. They were trying to infiltrate the ranks;

‘Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work.’” Nehemiah 4:11

### **“Our Plans Versus God’s Vision”**

**Southerland then goes on to say that he loves this verse about vision:**

Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails. Proverbs 19:21

He elaborates [All Emphasis Added]

“This verse was written with today’s church in mind. Today, our churches tend to have many plans. They have numerous programs and multifaceted ministries. Never before in history has the church tried to offer so much. Yet I wonder if most of our churches have discovered God’s vision. Have they found the purpose that prevails”—which is God’s purpose? I believe that the numerous plans that we come up with won’t get the job done. Only God’s plan will prevail... What is vision? Vision **is a picture of what God wants to do**. Vision is a picture of what God will do in His church if we get out of His way and turn Him loose to do it. So the process of vision is the process of joining God in what He is doing and wants to do in His church.”

While it is absolutely true that, for the most part, churches have come up with “numerous programs and multifaceted ministries” and, in many cases, have totally lost sight of God’s original vision for the church, the question arises as to how we can **know** what God’s plan for the church was, and is.

In his forward to Southerland’s book, Rick Warren encourages pastors to buy a copy of the book for each of the staff and “study it together, one chapter at a time, as many have already done with The Purpose Driven Church”. He goes on to say that they should “discuss the implications of each chapter” for their church and “create a list of action steps” they intend to take”. [Page 10].

In other words we are to study yet another book that purports to tell us what God’s vision for the church is. However the question is... why are we not, so to speak, going straight to the horses mouth and see what God Himself has to say?

1) Did God, in His word, totally forget to mention what the purpose for the church is? 2) Is there no evidence in the New Testament that will clearly show us **how and why** the earliest church functioned? 3) Why exactly shouldn’t we study and emulate the inspired example of the first church instead of listening to Dan Southerland or Rick Warren quoting some out of context verses and thereby presenting their (totally skewed) ideas of what the purpose of the church is and how it is supposed to function?

So since the answer to the above three questions are 1) He didn’t. 2) There is...plenty. 3) We shouldn’t.... let compare what the Bible says with what Warren, Southerland and other purpose driven pastors say.

### **The Purpose of the Church (According to Purpose Driven Transitioners)**

Rick Warren seems pretty clear as to what the purpose of churches are. Dan Southerland... not so much.

In his book The Purpose Driven Church, Rick Warren says that Saddleback is not designed for those who wish to transfer there from another church, and that they are only welcome if they are willing to “serve and minister”. If all a person wants to do is attend services then they would rather save that seat for “someone who is an unbeliever”. He goes on to say that this position may sound harsh but he believes that they are following the example of

Jesus who “defined his ministry target by saying, *It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners*” (Mark 2:17)” He adds that they constantly remind themselves of this statement since it has helped them...

“stay true to the original focus” of their church; “to bring the unchurched, irreligious people of our community to Christ. [The Purpose-Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission [Hardcover] Zondervan; 3rd printing edition (November 27, 1995)]

However Southerland is a little more muddled. On the one hand, he says God’s primary purpose of the church is a little to reach un-churched people, but on the other hand, the church should be merely “sensitive” to “guests”. According to Southerland [Emphasis Added]

“Our OK Corral-style shoot-out came during a deacon’s meeting. One deacon decided it was time to confront me in front of twenty other deacons.....So in a two minute explosion, he said that I had quit preaching the gospel, that I did not care that people were leaving the church, and that the new music we were doing was awful. He concluded... with a statement: “We need to go back to the way we used to do church!” ...

“I said, “This is where I have to go. **I must do church for the unchurched; I can’t go back to doing church for the already convinced....**” [Transitioning Page 117]

A Nov. 13, 2000 article called *Long-Term Commitment By Pastor Called Crucial In Church Change* was posted by Shannon Baker on the Baptist Press website. In it she quotes Dan Southerland and pastor Hal Mayer, also of Fort Lauderdale’s Flamingo Road Baptist Church. Both men were sharing their insights on how to transition churches during the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary’s annual Layne Lectures [Nov. 7-8 2000]. In pastor Hal Mayer’s words [All Emphasis Added]

“Purpose is what you are about. ‘What is it God has called us to do?’ Target is ‘Who are we going after with this?’ Strategy is ‘How we are going to do it?’”

Southerland explained that most churches start with programming, which is strategy, but the focus first **must be on what God has called the church to do**, then the strategy can be developed.

He added: “There are four different groups in our communities: lost people who are not in church; Christians who are not in church; baby Christians in your community; and mature Christians in your community. Which one of those groups is your target?” He said that most churches will say it is the lost, but if one examines their programming, **the group that they are most designed for is mature Christians.** [5]

However in Southerland’s article called *Seeker Semantics* (found on Rick Warren’s Ministry Toolbox) he differentiates between what he calls *Seeker Driven* and *Seeker Sensitive* churches. Note that he defines his paradigm as being *Sensitive* not *Driven*. He says [Emphasis Added]

**Seeker driven models** tend to see the weekend worship service as being for seekers. Its goal, generally, is evangelism. In reality, this model is an old paradigm with a new methodology.

The traditional Baptist church I grew up in saw evangelism as the primary goal of the weekend service. This was evidenced by the fact that the sermon every weekend was a presentation of the gospel with a few new terms and a new theme to differentiate it from last week's sermon which was also a presentation of the gospel. The result was a church with many conversions, little discipleship, and no growth -- **because the back door was as big as the front.**

**The "seeker sensitive" church** sees that the weekend worship service is for believers while being sensitive to seekers. It is a place where the believer is taught. It is a place where believers worship. It is a place where believers gather. It is the church. But it is church with a twist: they choose to use "seeker manners."... The family is still present and is not abandoned. The main goal is still to eat and to fellowship together. But ...The purpose is still for the family of God to meet together, to worship and to be fed. But we realize there are guests at the table. Hopefully these guests will eventually choose to become family. But until they do, we honor them as guests. [6]

This issue is made even more confusing by Mary Southerland's in her article *For women in ministry: Managing emotions* [excerpted from her book, *Experiencing God's Power in Your Ministry* published by Harvest House]. In it she says [All Emphasis Added]

Dan was pastor of Flamingo Road Church for 13 years during which many **changes were made in order to reach the unchurched people around us**. The transition process of Flamingo Road was difficult and one of the main reasons for my two-year struggle with clinical depression. In the midst of all the changes, I broke. I did not know how to handle the blatant opposition, the emotional pain or the personal attacks. Part of my time in that dark pit of depression was spent, not only learning how to survive transition, but coming to the place of actually thriving on transition and change. [6b]

In one place Southerland says ... he “must **do church for the unchurched**” and cannot “go back to doing church for the already convinced...”. This is backed by his wife's statement that the Flamingo Road Church made changes in order **to reach the unchurched people** around them. While pastor Hal Mayer seems to criticize churches for claiming that their target group is for the lost, but in reality “if one examines their programming, the group that they are most designed for is mature Christians”.

But in another place Southerland claims ... that the “main goal” of the church is still to “meet together, to worship and to be fed”, but “the behavior is **modified** for the sake of the guests who are present”

So which is it? Are we doing church for the unchurched, or is are we just modifying our behavior for the unchurched?

Besides which, Southerland's statement that the result of the policies of the traditional Baptist church he grew up in “was a church with many conversions, little discipleship, and no growth -- **because the back door was as big as the front**” is ironic in view of the fact that there has been one particularly tragic result of all the transitioning ...

“... the churches the author proposes are custom-built to appeal to a very limited element of society. It is not mere chance that the author's church had the average age of attendee fall nearly 20 years over his transition period. The church was custom made to appeal to a certain

element of society at the expense of others. Who is building and planting churches designed to appeal to the elderly? [Tim Challies. Review of Southerland's book on Amazon.com]...

Certainly this was borne out in statements made by the Flamingo Road pastors themselves.

When he started at FRC, Southerland said, he was 33 years old. At that time, the median age of the congregation was 51 years old. Eleven years later, the median age is 33 years old, and he has been there longer than 90 percent of the congregation. [5]

What was that about the *back door being as big as the front* that Southerland said about the “traditional Baptist church he used to attend? Where did 90 percent of the congregation of Southerland's church go in eleven years? .. or is it, as I suspect, no one really cares because the end justifies the means?

However the new Testament is nowhere near as muddled as Dan Southerland's “visions”. If read with a modicum of attention, one will see that New Testament **never** equates the purpose of the church meeting with evangelism, but shows very clearly that evangelism was engaged in **outside** of the church meetings. Church meetings were **designed for Christians**.

### **The Purpose of the Church (According to The Bible)**

If the average Christian were asked why believers gather for church it is more than likely that one or more of four reasons would be given 1) for corporate worship, 2) to hear a sermon, 3) for fellowship, or 4) for evangelism. However, one would be hard pressed to find where the New Testament gives **any** of these reasons as being the central purpose of the church meeting.

Gospel preaching was commonly conducted in those places where unbelievers frequented, e.g., in the synagogues (of the Jews) and in the market places. While Jewish synagogues today are attended only by Jews, in the early days of the millennium they were also attended by God fearing Gentiles. Therefore it was only logical for Jesus, Paul and the other apostles to exercise their privilege of speaking in the synagogues, thereby reaching a very mixed audience.

Throughout the Gospels we continually read that Jesus went into the synagogues to expound the Scriptures or that multitudes followed Him as He walked throughout the cities. While there were obviously no churches in Jesus' time, Paul certainly himself established quite a few. However Paul's custom was to go into the synagogue and reason with the Jews from the Scriptures.. [All Emphasis Added]

And Jesus went about in all Galilee, **teaching in their synagogues**, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people. [Matthew 4:23]

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was **a synagogue of the Jews**: and Paul, as his custom was, went in unto them, and for three sabbath days reasoned with them from the Scriptures, [Acts 17:1-2]

So he reasoned in the synagogue with Jews and the devout persons, **and in the marketplace** every day with them that met him. [Acts 17:17]

In Corinth Paul “reasoned **in the synagogue** every sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks. [Acts 18:4]

At Ephesus Paul “**entered into the synagogue, and spoke boldly** for the space of three months, reasoning and persuading as to the things concerning the kingdom of God”. [Acts 19:8]

What the New Testament does not show is that any preaching was done in the church meeting held on Sundays. On the contrary the context of I Corinthians 12-14 makes it very clear that this church gathering was primarily **a believer's meeting**. Also note that the book of Acts tells us that **the church of the Lord was purchased by Him** with His own blood. This obviously does not apply to non-believers. says

Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. [Acts 20:28]

The very word translated into the English church is the Greek *ekkleṣia* which means a **called out group of people**, not a brick and mortar building. We do not **go to church** but **we are** the church, that unbelievers cannot be part of.

Certainly unbelievers may have been present at a church meeting, but they were not the focus of the gathering. In the words of Bob Deffinbaugh.... pastor-teacher and elder at Community Bible Chapel in Richardson, Texas [All Emphasis Added]

It is important to begin by focusing on the primary purposes of the church. The first text I would turn to is Acts 2:42, which tells us that the saints continually devoted themselves to the **apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer**. Instruction, worship, fellowship, and prayer are fundamental functions of the church. Note that evangelism is not a stated purpose for the church's gathering. That is because this occurs as the saints go out from the church into a lost world, proclaiming Christ.

A second text would be Ephesians 4:1-16 (especially verses 11-13), which is another central passage of Scripture. The purpose of the church is to **edify** (build up) believers and bring them to maturity. The purpose of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers is to **equip the saints (the church) for the work of ministry**. In that sense it is not the full-time employees of the church who are "in the ministry," as much as those in the churches that they serve. [7]

Also note that it was the power of the word, and not culturally relevant techniques or music that converted people. The prophet Jonah spoke just eight words to the people of Nineveh.. "Yet in forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed". Not exactly a message designed to 'win friends and influence people', but we all know what happened.. the entire city repented.

Similarly the message of John the Baptist was not what we would call "culturally relevant". All he said was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 3:2. And what happened? Verse 6 says "and they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."

### **Pragmatism and The Roots of The Strategy**

The back cover of Southerland's book emphasizes the fact that it is steeped in pragmatism, an approach that assesses the truth of theories or beliefs **by the success of their practical application**. It says

"Dan Southerland is the pastor/teacher at Flamingo Road Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida – a purpose-driven, contemporary

congregation that has grown from 300 in 1989 to over 2,300 today and launched seventeen other churches.”

In other words the end justifies the means.. if the church sees a numerical growth, the principles are working, therefore they have to be considered appropriate, acceptable and commendable, regardless of whether they are Biblical or not.

Southerland says the process of vision upon which this book is based comes from the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. However, as we have seen, Southerland’s appeal to the Scriptures to prove his principles are completely unsound, indefensible and altogether invalid. Therefore, if not the Bible, what do these principles stem actually from? Remember that Southerland says that much of his understanding and material concerning **purpose, target and strategy** come from Rick Warren. [*Transitioning* Page 45].

Okay... So where does Warren’s philosophy and business strategy come from? On May 23, 2005 Rick Warren was a guest speaker at the Pew and Religion Forum, where he said

"Peter Drucker ... he's my mentor. I've spent 20 years under his tutelage learning about leadership from him." [8]

In fact, in his *Weekly Work Place Wisdom*, Warren says that he reads “everything Peter Drucker writes”.

In an article based on a 2004 interview granted to Rich Karlgaard of Forbes.com, when Peter Drucker was 95 years old (he died in 2005), Drucker actually uses the words “purpose driven”. Karlgaard writes [All Emphasis Added]

The Drucker-Warren relationship may surprise many readers, but it goes back two decades, to when the young minister came to Drucker for advice. **Under Drucker's tutelage, Warren's own success as a spiritual entrepreneur has been considerable.** Saddleback has grown to 15,000 members and has helped start another 60 churches throughout the world. Warren's 2001 book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, is this decade's best seller with 19.5 million copies sold so far and compiling at the rate of 500,000 per month.” [9]

Southerland too quotes Peter Drucker in the chapter called *Defining the Vision* [All Emphasis Added]

Peter Drucker has been called the father of modern American management. He is certainly a recognized authority in today's business world. Drucker is probably best known for the two questions he most often uses. The first is "What business are we in? And the second is "How's business?"

In terms of the church's effort to define vision, I would suggest a three part adaption of Drucker's question. What business are we in? Who is our primary customer? How will we reach that customer?  
[*Transitioning*. Page 44]

## **"Spiritual Surfing" and Conclusion**

**According to Southerland**

"One of the finest books ever written about vision and purpose is Rick Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Church*. Rick opens his book with an analogy about spiritual surfing. Spiritual surfing has three parts:

See the wave of what God is doing. God is at work in the world today in major ways. You must first see what God is up to and wants to do in your community. Have you seen those pictures within a picture? The kind you must stare at for a while before you can see the real but hidden image? Vision is the same idea. Anyone can see the obvious stuff. But what is God doing behind the scenes?

Catch the wave of what God is doing. After you spot the wave you must catch it. That in itself is no small feat. It takes timing, courage, and skill. It also requires risk taking because you must leave the safety of the shore to catch the biggest waves.

Ride the wave of what God is doing. A lot of surfers can get up on a wave. The goal is to stay up and surf the wave as far and as long as you can. You don't want to abandon the wave; you want to ride it out all the way." [Pgs. 24-25]

One certainly has to take one's hat off to Rick Warren for painting pictures that are bold and inspiring. After all who would not want to be thought of as

that free spirited surfer who boldly goes into the water, and catches an enormous wave and rides it all the way until it dissipates itself on the shore. This person is depicted as skillful, courageous and bold... a 21<sup>st</sup> century achiever. And, by implication, the exact opposite of the timid one who cowers down on the beach behind an umbrella.

However the problem is that ‘catching the wave’ of what God is doing’, once again means that we have to take these people’s word for it that **only they know** what “what God is up to”.

In short the theories behind Purpose Driven Transitions have been foisted on an unsuspecting public unaware of the true background of these principles. It is mind boggling to imagine how many churches have been fed yet another wriggling worm, and have swallowed it whole, blindly accepting that it is the way to do church and implementing these completely unbiblical methods. Decisions are made and programs are accepted according to “a vision” dreamed up by man and based, not on the Bible, but on techniques borrowed from the word of business.

I can not help but wonder how much the principle behind Isaiah 31:1 applies here... considering that Isaiah confronts Judah with two sins: the sin of trusting in Egypt and their military might, and the sin of not looking to the Holy One of Israel. Putting one’s trust in worldly things pretty much means forsaking the Lord, since one cannot trust in both.

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help  
And rely on horses, And trust in chariots  
because they are many and in horsemen  
because they are very strong,  
But they do not look to the Holy One of Israel,  
nor seek the LORD!

We would do well to remember the words of the Psalmist:

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses;  
but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.  
Psalm 20:7

## End Notes

All URL’s were valid as of July 2010

[1] <http://www.zondervan.com/Cultures/en-US/Authors/Author.htm?ContributorID=SoutherlandD&QueryStringSite=Zondervan>

[2] <http://www.zondervan.com/Cultures/en-US/Product/ProductDetail.htm?ProdID=com.zondervan.9780310242680&QueryStringSite=Zondervan>

[3] <http://www.zondervan.com/Cultures/en-US/Product/ProductDetail.htm?ProdID=com.zondervan.9780310242680&QueryStringSite=Zondervan>

[4] Net Bible <http://net.bible.org/dictionary.php?word=Sanballat>

[5] Shannon Baker. *Long-Term Commitment By Pastor Called Crucial In Church Change*.  
<http://www.baptistpress.org/bpnews.asp?id=6843>

[6] Dan Southerland. Seeker Semantics.  
[http://www.pastors.com/blogs/ministrytoolbox/archive/2004/02/23/\\_2700\\_Seeker-semantics\\_2700\\_.aspx](http://www.pastors.com/blogs/ministrytoolbox/archive/2004/02/23/_2700_Seeker-semantics_2700_.aspx)

[6b] Mary Southerland For women in ministry: Managing emotions

[http://www.pastors.com/blogs/ministrytoolbox/archive/2006/02/07/For-women-in-ministry\\_3A00\\_-Managing-emotions.aspx](http://www.pastors.com/blogs/ministrytoolbox/archive/2006/02/07/For-women-in-ministry_3A00_-Managing-emotions.aspx)

[7] <http://bible.org/question/our-pastor-recently-stopped-doing-altar-call-invitation-end-services-biblical>

[8] [saddlebackfamily.com/workplace/images/building\\_on\\_your\\_strengths.pdf](http://saddlebackfamily.com/workplace/images/building_on_your_strengths.pdf)

[9] [http://www.forbes.com/home/management/2004/11/19/cz\\_rk\\_1119drucker.html](http://www.forbes.com/home/management/2004/11/19/cz_rk_1119drucker.html)