

J A Y M C S W A I N



connecting God's people  
to meaningful ministry

*foreword by Dr. Jeff Iorg*

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Published in Atlanta, GA, by Jay McSwain

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McSwain, Jay

Are You Committed? / Jay McSwain

Includes bibliographical references

ISBN 1-930856-59-8

Printed in the United States of America

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# Chapter Summaries

Following are chapter summaries for Jay McSwain's book, *Are You Committed? Connecting God's People to Meaningful Ministry*. Jay's book presents the complete, integrated process for ministry mobilization from which all databases, assessment tools, reports, and resources on [mobilyzr.com](http://mobilyzr.com) are drawn.

## Book Cover

The assimilation/mobilization goal of each church should be "Every member a minister." This goal applies, regardless of the paradigms and methodological models we may use, because it is a biblical mandate, according to the Great Commission and other passages on discipleship, and it embodies the priesthood of the believer. We have been failing in this task of multiplying disciples. We need a system that shows us how to do our part to make that happen.

## Introduction

PLACE Ministries was inaugurated in 1998, co-founded by Jay and Ginger McSwain. Jay wrote their premiere resource, the PLACE assessment inventory. It identifies people's personality, spiritual gifts, abilities, and passions. By 2004, it was clear that there were disconnects between this effective identification process and actually connecting people into meaningful ministry. Jay had functioned on a wrong assumption, that if we just help people identify their ministry design, everything else would work out fine.

The main disconnect occurred when referring to church staff members those who had taken the PLACE assessment. For a variety of reasons, staff members were uninformed about the identifying process, unskilled in supervising and mobilizing volunteers, and/or unwilling to incorporate volunteers.

The results for potential volunteers were confusion, frustration, and a sense of trust being broken. Many did not find a meaningful role in ministry, while others endured a disappointing experience.

The results for church and ministry staff were often confusion and frustration as they sought to cope with volunteers when they were not trained for that role, and burnout as they suffered the ramifications of volunteers exiting through the back door.

Eventually, Jay figured out that the breakdowns in mobilization “systems” occurred precisely because church leaders weren’t using a system. We typically attempt to piece together separate actions like PLACE which may have been good in themselves, but they do not add up to a coherent process. *Are You Committed?* gives the results of Jay’s strategic work to critique the mobilization process and develop a complete, holistic process that integrates six elements simultaneously: connecting, identifying, equipping, empowering, encouraging, and multiplying.

# 1

## Is the Church on Steroids?

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The purpose of the Church is to glorify God. The mission for carrying out this purpose can be organized according to the five-fold approach of discipleship, evangelism, fellowship, ministry, and worship. However, the Church in North America has gotten off track with this mission. And our imbalances yield some severe consequences.

Just as athletes can pump up their performances by using steroids, churches can pump up their numbers by overfocusing resources on producing worship components that draw people in. A vital worship service may prove an effective way to reach non-Christians. However, worship services have not shown an ability to “close the back door” by which attendees leave because they are not able to get involved in meaningful ministry.

So, steroid strategies have a down side. They create extremes that stress the very systems they are meant to promote and preserve. They embrace seemingly positive short-term gains without consideration for negative long-term consequences.

Here are key destructive long-term system results of a church on steroids:

- Overemphasis on worship depletes resources from the other four parts of the five-fold ministry (i.e. discipleship, evangelism, fellowship, ministry).
- An attempt to be too culturally relevant creates an atmosphere that is moralistic (do the right thing), therapeutic messages (feel good about yourself), and/or deistic consumerism (it's all about me).
- Burnout of vocational staff, disappointment of current volunteers, and loss of potential workers.

The purpose of *Are You Committed?* is to explore why the ministry mission objective needs to be reformulated for churches. Jay views connecting God's people in meaningful ministry as key to rebalancing ourselves so we can fulfill our purpose of glorifying God through the entire five-fold mission of the Church.

# 2

## Where Do We Begin?

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With the popularity of Dr. Henry Blackaby's book, *Experiencing God*, Christians are more accustomed to looking outside ourselves to "find out where God is working and join Him." When we do this, we see myriads of needs.

However, today's world presents so many needs, we cannot meet them all. We must steward our time, energy, and gifts well just to meet some of the needs we see – whether they are inside the church or out in the community. Only passion-driven ministry is sustainable in the long run. So, this means it is essential to help disciples identify where they best fit in ministry, if we want to carry out the Great Commission.

This does not mean all ministry activity can or should be driven by our areas of passion, any more than it should all be driven by areas of need. In fact, Jay suggests people consider using 80% of their available service time in passion/strength/gift-based ministry, and 20% in need-based ministry roles. If we attempt to reverse the percentages, we will likely find that volunteers burn out when they are slotted into a program that needs a worker, even though they do not fit the gift profile for that position. It simply is not sustainable



– especially because leaders can only motivate temporarily through guilt, shame, and/or charisma.

Still, when we know what our personality, spiritual gifts, strengths, abilities, and passions are, that does not automatically get us as disciples involved in meaningful ministry. Even churches like Willow Creek – which developed their Network resources for discovering personal style, gifts, and passions – found that connecting people in ministry was a “complicated” process.

Jay suggests the critical core problem in mobilization is this: It is not merely a complicated process, but we have attempted to use an incomplete process. He discerned this weakness from his own church staff experiences, as well as nearly 10 years of research, development, and evaluation of assimilation tools for PLACE Ministries.

PLACE Ministries’ new Mobilyzr system takes into account Jay’s findings on a complete process for fulfilling the ideal of “Every member a minister.” It offers a six-part approach to member assimilation and ministry mobilization that involves intentional connecting, identifying, equipping, empowering, encouraging, and multiplying of volunteers. Mobilyzr’s holistic, integrated, and sustainable systems include trainings in concepts and skills, assessment tools, and database features that track ministry mobilization and evaluate short-term and long-term results.

*Are You Committed?* gives the overall rationale for the Mobilyzr system, and each of the next six chapters focuses on one of the essential parts in this process.

# 3

## Committed to Connecting God's People to Meaningful Ministry

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Many churches include a statement in its vision or values about the “priesthood of the believer” or “every member a minister.” However, most church leaders have no objective data about how well their flock does at serving in ministry. They do not know the ratio of participators to spectators. Also, they may be prone to actions that prevent fulfilling the every-member-a-minister mandate.

For instance, even if leaders are unaware of the big picture, usually they know specific success stories of members involved in ministry. In fact, it is not uncommon for leaders to pursue “five-talent people” as “star” volunteers. While that does allow some people to connect with ministry opportunities, what about the others? What about the one-talent or two-talent disciple? If they are not valued alongside the five-talent performers, what does that really say about our “belief” that all disciples must steward their gifts?

Leaders may also pursue people with specific kinds of prominent gifts as volunteers – such as teachers, pastors, small group leaders. What about those with less flashy gifts – helps, administra-

tion, hospitality? Aren't they needed in the Body as well? And how about people of various spiritual maturity levels? Are only mature believers responsible (or allowed) to use their giftedness for the Kingdom?

Overall, the Church in North America is doing poorly at connecting God's people to meaningful ministry. Despite the biblical requirement that all followers of Jesus serve through their giftedness, our ministry mobilization systems glare with weaknesses. If we do not meet this challenge and correct the underlying problems, we can expect the Church in North America to drift further into irrelevancy.

Even if we do well at helping individuals identify their personality, spiritual gifts, abilities, and passions, our system falls apart if we fail to follow through and connect them with potential passion-driven ministry matches. We need an intentional strategy, sustainable structures, and wise workers to do this.

It won't work to expect people to connect with ministry opportunities only inside the church walls, any more than we should expect them to find their own way to appropriate opportunities in the community. And within the church, it won't work to expect people to limit volunteerism to public worship services. What about the other aspects of our five-fold mission: discipleship, evangelism, fellowship, and ministry? If we do not correct these flaws, it will compromise the future of our churches and leave us as irrelevant relics in our culture. How many people who do not yet know Christ may be influenced away from Him by our too-small picture of what He means for Kingdom ministry to be? We must incorporate more balanced strategies for allocations of time and resources in our mission to bring Jesus to the world.

Why would almost every church leader agree intellectually with the biblical mandate to use our spiritual gifts, but do so little

intentionally to allow every believer to experientially practice these truths? Where did intellectual assent depart from experiential reality? And why do leaders often blame the difficulties in connecting members into ministry with how “complicated” the process can be? Jay believes that the blame should go to leaders’ half-hearted commitment, use of an incomplete process, and/or inadequate training for a system of connecting, identifying, equipping, empowering, encouraging, and multiplying.

As a solution, the ideal connecting system includes intentional efforts by trained, non-ego-driven leaders to facilitate a complete process that values the contributions of all disciples for serving according to their gifts and spiritual maturity level. These are the goals of PLACE Ministries’ Mobilyzr.

# 4

## Committed to Identifying God's People for Meaningful Ministry

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Motivation in ministry is a “package deal.” In the long run, we are energized when our primary ministry service connects deeply with all of who we are. This is why identifying that providential design is so critical to being connected into meaningful ministry. Ministry works best when it calls forth our whole being as God has uniquely created each of us – personality, spiritual gifts, abilities, passions, and life experiences.

We cannot sustain long term a job that is a mismatch for how God made us. Even if a lot of “work” gets done, we will eventually be undone by it. No amount of external manipulation by charismatic leaders or negative internal motivating by guilt or shame can change this reality. But how do we positively identify what areas of ministry might be best matches for us? And then, what do we do with that knowledge?

People are not machines. We cannot simply “input” all kinds of products (such as spiritual gift inventories) and preachings (such as messages on stewardship and service) and expect these things to

work automatically in turning people into ministers. People are far more complex than that, products alone are not complex enough, and preaching is not the same as personal coaching. These all need to be woven into a coherent process that makes sense to people as they use the products and apply the preaching.

There are many kinds of ministry identification products available. Unfortunately, all lack an integrated, comprehensive mobilization process that encompasses connecting, identifying, equipping, empowering, encouraging, and multiplying. Most focus solely on identifying, and perhaps attempt to offer tools for electronic database matching of potential volunteers with programmatic job openings. Some contain the six elements, but they offer only disconnected bits and pieces that you have to figure out how to glue together, not an understandable whole. This lack of systems has become one of our key problems with helping people identify their potential best matches for ministry. It leads to minimal results in reaching our goal of incorporating more members into ministry – despite our sincere desires to expand God’s Kingdom.

God wants us to be doers of His Word. It is perfectly fine to expect members to fulfill the biblical ideal and mandate to serve in ministry. However, that will only happen with an intentional strategy that goes beyond gift identification and enters the realm of full assimilation for connecting members in meaningful ministry. If we fail there, we miss our calling and lose our cultural relevance.

# 5

## Committed to Equipping God's People for Meaningful Ministry

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When we talk about equipping in ministry settings, typically we focus immediately on the needs of the person who is being trained. Jay suggests that we begin instead by examining the qualifications of the one who does the equipping. He recommends four critical qualifications in equippers:

- Growing in an intimate relationship with God.
- Being a life-long learner who keeps up with the issues of the day.
- Willingness to risk disappointment and handling the failures of others with grace, such as when prot\_g\_s may fail to follow through with training situations or ministry assignments.
- Being a servant, including service in areas that might be perceived as below one's rank or out of one's comfort zone.

Without these characteristics in the equipper, training can only transfer theoretical information and task skills, not practical tools and life skills. We may think that theory and task “equip” our flock. However, such an approach ultimately creates a membership that may be wide but is inevitably shallow. Also, oversimplicity in training is not a wise response to cultural complexity. We need well equipped disciples to face the difficult issues of our time with maturity, wisdom, grace, and servanthood.

Jay offers two key reasons why the church in America now struggles to equip its members for ministry. First, people have changed their priorities from a life revolving around spiritual matters to one revolving around worldly matters. Second, we have succumbed to justifying the need for Christians to be involved with non-Christians in the non-Christians’ environment. In reality, this means we have exchanged time we used to invest in ministry equipping for activities that neither equip nor minister, and no equipping has been put in its place.

Also, it does not benefit the Kingdom when we lower the bar of equipping in our attempts to market our supposed cultural relevancy. So, it does not matter what methodology model of being/doing church we use – attractional or missional, house church or mega-church – if we put no intentionality, evaluation tools, or accountability in our equipping, then the long-term ministry results are minimal, despite perceived short-term success.

If we fail to connect, identify, and equip every member for meaningful ministry, then the gulf between “professionals” and “lay people” will continue to widen. And that is the same slippery slope as faced by the Church in Europe over many centuries. Given the dismal modern history of impact through the Church there, shouldn’t we expect similar negative results here?



Fortunately, there are now countless resources available as solutions for our general and specialized equipping needs. Many of these use multiple means of presentation and distribution. So, we can now better accommodate different learning style preferences of people and still transfer the essential information. However, much equipping will always need to be done face-to-face by committed, qualified mentors (or whatever other term we want to use). Only then will character issues and ministry skills remain integrated.

# 6

## Committed to Empowering God's People for Meaningful Ministry

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Empowerment is a nebulous term to many people. In general social and political usage, this term refers to when those in power allow or bestow influence, authority, and decision-making to those who have previously been outsiders to the process. Empowerment recognizes the right and responsibility of people to participate in decisions which directly and deeply affect them. In that sense, empowerment in the North American Church is about a new kind of relationship between vocational leaders and volunteers.

Empowerment in ministry requires church leaders to:

- Help God's people identify who He created them to be, and what He designed them to do.
- Equip, resource, supervise, and evaluate volunteers so they can minister more effectively.

- Take risks, give permission, release volunteers into service, and persevere with people and the process – knowing both leaders and volunteers will sometimes make mistakes and cause damage.

- Lay out expectations and procedures for evaluations, and only give responsibilities when you also give the authority to carry them out.

- NOT become hands-off or abandon volunteers, NOT micro-manage people or projects, and NOT control and quench volunteers under the guise of “coaching.”

Empowerment in ministry requires volunteers to:

- Willingly receive input, resources, training, and supervision.
- Follow through with accountability for the responsibilities they accept, and learn from supervision, mentoring, and constructive evaluations of their work/teamwork.
- Steward their whole lives for the Kingdom, not just their spiritual gifts.

Developing intentionality and accountability in our ministry systems requires knowledge. All of these empowerment aspects are blocked when we do not know exactly how many people are serving, in what roles, with what job/task descriptions, and whether those ministries are inside or outside the church. This is why a “Ministry Involvement Survey” proves a valuable tool for tracking so we can start evaluating our systems for how meaningful the ministry is, and then improve our processes.

Some typical fears that leaders express about empowerment are that they will lose control of the church, and – especially if

they empower people to serve outside the church – they will lose members’ financial contributions. However, research indicates that people give money where they first give their time and energy. So, if their involvement is not in and/or through a church, the church is at risk of losing those contributions anyway. Also, the reality is that churches can probably handle only 20% of members ministering in the church itself, which means 80% should be ministering in the community. We should see empowerment as a win-win-win situation for disciples, churches, and the Kingdom.

One way to empower more people in ministry is to divide existing jobs into specific tasks and responsibilities that can be given away to other individuals. Another is to create teams that work together to accomplish the same responsibility that was previously attempted by one person.

There are many compelling reasons for empowering others in ministry. Above all, it is biblical. Without empowerment, the biblical mandate to “equip God’s people for the work of service” never carries through to action. Also, empowerment creates strength and loyalty within a community, lowers conflict, and reduces burnout. These and many other reasons mean empowerment creates a more hopeful future!



## Committed to Encouraging God's People for Meaningful Ministry

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We could all use a broader perspective on encouragement. Usually we see it as giving compliments to individuals or groups about specific things we've observed them being or doing. One type of encouragement that every disciple needs to see is the big picture: How does my ministry involvement fit into the overall purpose of my church? Understanding and embracing our connection with the flow of an entire church deepens the meaningfulness of service. (And mobilization is all about connecting God's people with meaningful ministry, right?)

Most church leaders desire to get more people involved in ministry. However, it is easier to overlook those already committed and serving when we are focused on getting new people "on board." We would do better to ensure first that we encourage the ones who serve now. Studies show that "satisfied customers" tell others about good products and experiences. So, the more closely our volunteers feel connected with our church or ministry team, they more

likely they are to become natural recruiters who tell others of their positive experiences.

Jay details five basic aspects of encouragement, to create a constructive environment for ministry:

1. Encouragement needs to be both individual and corporate.
2. Encouragement should be specific.
3. Encouragement should be planned and intentional.
4. Encouragement needs to be both regular and unpredictable.
5. Encouragement needs to be mixed with correction and improvement.

Jay also relates the importance of “customizing” the ways we encourage, based on ways different individuals best receive it – just as we should adapt the ways we equip people according to their learning style preferences. So, he advocates using the framework from *The Five Love Languages* by Dr. Gary Chapman. Dr. Chapman believes that people give and receive love in one of five preferred ways. If we are to encourage and motivate people, we would do well to deliver that appreciation in the love language they can most readily receive it:

1. Words of Affirmation
2. Acts of Service
3. Receiving Gifts
4. Quality Time
5. Touch

There are many other specific ways we can create an environment of genuine, positive encouragement, while removing false motivation through guilt, shame, and criticism. It is important to remember that encouraging is as crucial to overall effectiveness in ministry mobilization efforts as the other five elements in the

system: connecting, identifying, equipping, empowering, and multiplying.



## Committed to Multiplying God's People for Meaningful Ministry

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Jay states: “Churches that take the commitment seriously to connect God’s people to meaningful ministry, will need to incorporate an intentional strategy to multiply and add more ministry workers. Multiplication’s importance for the continuing future of the Church has been taught for years as it relates to reaching non-Christians or transferring biblical truth from one generation to another. Rarely is multiplication taught as it relates to connecting believers into meaningful ministry and its relevance to the future of Christianity.”

Often, our supposed “multiplication” methodology consists of evangelism (adding new people to the Body) or merely teaching people what they need to know for a specific job. However, that just adds workers. It seems to be the rare church which actually wants to see multiplication of disciples, and perhaps even has a “succession plan” for every ministry leader by them training their replacements. However, if we are serious about integrating the biblically mandated element of multiplication (e.g., 2 Timothy 2:2), we need to mentor people so they not only learn the job, but



are equipped, empowered, and encouraged to transfer character and skills to other people. What could happen in our churches, our ministries, and God's Kingdom if we truly multiplied workers who were able to train others also?

Multiplication actually should go beyond just "job training." We should reverse the current trend that separates ministry involvement from both character development and learning a biblical worldview. When we reintegrate these three elements – character, worldview, and ministry – we are more likely to build up transformed disciples whom others will want to be like. And that makes true multiplication of disciples more likely!

This may become critically important for the future of institutional churches, as research indicates the number of professional clergy under the age of 30 is "remarkably small." If nothing is done, "the day might come when most American churches have no ordained ministers in their pulpits."

Mentoring is far more difficult in an era when people are so incredibly busy, and when we move so frequently. So, to do well in multiplied ministry, we must become far more intentional in cultivating relationships. We would also benefit from some tracking processes to evaluate our progress. Beyond that, we need to learn how to discern where people are at in their walk with the Lord and their spiritual maturity level. Then we can make it our aim to customize our mentoring in order to help them get to whatever stage is next in their pursuit of God. This will sustain waves of disciples for generations to come.

# 9

## Conclusion

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Are we committed to mobilizing people into Kingdom ministry, to raising up “every member a minister” for the churches and the Church? It will take more than half-hearted attempts which end in frustration and abandonment of the biblical mandate. It will take systems thinking, intentional incorporating of all six mobilization elements, and determination to persevere as long as it takes.

Chapter Summaries, version 1.0, November 2007

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