

face bigger challenges for making a comeback, which are in the area of right attitudes, adequate finances, and good church facilities.

The authors offer healthy hope for the 21st century church, especially for those who have a genuine sense of responsibility to the church as well as those who are willing to make a difference. The paradigm shift proposed for revitalization is biblical, well researched, practicable, and applicable. Therefore, it is of global relevance. One powerful feature of the book is the stimulating stories from leaders that most pastors have never heard. If adapted and applied, it could bring about robust life and community transformation.

The intensity of the discussion and powerful emotion in the book could be felt as a result of the wealth of experience of the authors. The book is not entirely free from repetition of principles of evangelism, but it provides a feast of intelligent and challenging readings of surveys backed up by data. It would have been more appropriate to put the Church Growth Movement (CGM) in a better perspective because the churches they surveyed must have drunk from Peter Wagner's cistern for growth.

But despite the shortcomings, I recommend this book to readers interested in becoming acquainted with what biblical ecclesiology is and to those who desire revitalization of their churches. This classical piece of writing is not meant for lazy pastors. This is a valuable resource.

Malphurs, Aubrey. *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*, 3d ed. Grand Rapids, Baker, 2013. 376 pp. \$19.03

Reviewed by Chase Weeks, B.S. in Religion from Liberty University, M.Div. from Liberty Baptist Seminary, current D.Min. student at Southwestern Baptist Seminary, Founder and President of Real Ministries Inc. (North American and International Missions), pastor and speaker.

Aubrey Malphurs provides a strategic approach to ministry in *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*. He holds a Ph.D. from Dallas Theological Seminary and currently serves as senior professor of leadership and pastoral ministry at this institution. Malphurs is also the founder of the Malphurs Group which provides consulting services to churches and other organizations in need of structure (back cover). His vast knowledge concerning the current state of the church is evident in his writing, and the strategic approach that Malphurs provides as a solution allows him to remain true to the topic of the book.

Advanced Strategic Planning is an easily understood book that is very readable due to its overall format. Each chapter begins with an explanation of the information to be discussed and ends with some helpful review questions. The book also contains informative charts and an extensive appendix filled with worksheets and ministry information from other successful churches

(15–16; 227; 313–360). The book has three individual parts which contain fourteen specific chapters that focus on the individual leader and the corporate church.

At first glance, it may seem that the purpose of the book is implied rather than stated. The introduction by Malphurs suggests that the twenty-first century North American church is in a rapid decline and the solution is found in the development of S-curves in order to create new life cycles for church growth. In doing so, Malphurs makes it clear that the focus must be on strategic leadership and planning (7–17). His purpose is revealed late in the book as he discusses the current pounding that the church is experiencing due to rapid cultural change. Malphurs states, “The purpose of this book and the strategic thinking and acting process is to place the church in a position where it can function at its best in preparation for and during the pounding” (66). He provides details explaining how to carry out his purpose in the three-fold division of the book.

Part 1 of *Advanced Strategic Planning* examines the preparation that is necessary prior to the implementation of any strategic process. Malphurs uses the first three chapters to suggest that this preparation is to occur in the life of the leader, within the congregation, and also in the ministry of the church. In Part 2, he then develops the process for strategic planning in chapters four through seven by focusing on the mission, vision, core values, and strategy of the church. Individual steps to carry out the strategy are discussed in chapters eight through twelve. Part 3 concludes the book with two chapters that focus on the implementation of the proposed strategy and an evaluation of the efforts in a sequential manner.

The approach taken by Aubrey Malphurs is unique to other authors in that he focuses specifically on the twenty-first century church and its current decline. Although he acknowledges the problematic issues facing the modern church, he does not spend time addressing these issues. However, he does provide realistic solutions to these problems by suggesting a strategic approach to solve the struggles occurring within various ministries. The book addresses virtually every challenge facing modern churches and provides a biblical approach to initiate growth in spite of current trends in decline.

Aubrey Malphurs excels in his explanation of the strategic approach to twenty-first century ministry. His extensive experience with individual churches proves to be an influential aspect of his perspective concerning modern church strategies. The book is filled with strengths, but there are a couple of areas that require some attention. First, Malphurs attempts to clarify his choice of wording when referring to the pastor and, in doing so, he suggests that he recognizes women pastors (19). This is a debatable theological issue, and there are convincing arguments on both sides. However, Scripture affirms that the office of pastor is to be held by a man (1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9). This may be an overlooked aspect of the book, but it could diminish the authority of Malphurs in some evangelical circles.

A second possible weakness in Malphurs' discussion is found in his view of a gifted or a developed leader (25–26). In reference to the gift of leadership, Malphurs states, "A person without this gift can also grow and develop as a leader" (26). While this may be the case in some instances, the extreme position taken by Malphurs concerning strategic leadership would seem to better align with a gifted leader. He even comments on the biblical role of the pastor by stating, "God has provided a gifted pastor... for the express purpose of equipping the congregation to accomplish the church's ministry" (231). In the same vein, Malphurs also seems to make little of the specific call of God in reference to ministry teams (222). Scripture affirms the specifics of giftedness and calling as they relate to the ministry of the church (Romans 11:29, 12:6; I Corinthians 12). The position by Malphurs on the importance of leadership seems to necessitate being gifted and called by God into specific areas. This is a problematic issue within his overall argument. It must also be stated that these weaknesses had to be strategically located in order to be noticed due to the prevalent strengths found within Malphurs' writing.

The strengths found in Malphurs' argumentation are evident throughout the book. There are five specific areas within Malphurs' strategy that need to be identified for the church to function at its fullest potential. The first is found in his recognition of the two necessary elements for a church's revitalization. He states, "One is a church that is ready to be revitalized, and the other is a gifted, competent leader who can take the church through the process" (24). The church must have the mindset necessary to undergo such change and a pastor who can lead during the difficulties ahead. Malphurs affirms that the pastor must remain committed and patient throughout the entire process (288). He accentuates the role of the church in this process by stating, "If a church is not ready to commit strongly to strategic planning, it must not commence the process" (47). Malphurs makes a strong case for the coexistence of pastoral leadership and the church for success in ministry.

A second strength in Malphurs' argumentation involves his view of the church lacking a good visionary strategic planning or envisioning process (32). The decline in growth occurring within the modern church is the result of this failure. Malphurs argues that a church's strategy is "the thread that runs through all the church's ministries, tying them together and giving them meaning" (169). Apart from a clearly defined strategy, implementation is impossible and spiritual progress is immeasurable (205). This is a particularly strong aspect of Malphurs' ecclesiological stance.

Malphurs also provides a concrete argument for the consistency of the church's function. He states, "The functions of the church are those timeless truths that must never change. They are the same for the church of the twenty-first century as they were for the church of the first century and all the centuries in between" (70). He distinguishes between function and form while not negating the realities that exist within the context

of the modern church. In other words, the church must remain true to its original function in order to reach its potential within modern culture (Acts 1:8).

The development of teams as a strategy for effective ministry is also an evident strength in Malphurs' argumentation (29). He states, "Ministry is only as good as the people who lead and carry it out, and this needs to be kept in mind in this step – recruiting the teams and their leaders" (97). He even devotes the sole focus of chapter ten on the implementation of this strategy. Malphurs suggests that an effective team consists of leaders instead of individuals who are willing volunteers. This is just another avenue of Malphurs' strategic approach to ministry. The premise that he uses in defense of this argument is that "all of us can do more than one of us," and this is truly a biblical approach to the issue as seen in Exodus 18 and Mark 3:13–19 (210).

A final strength found in Malphurs' argumentation is the suggestion that communication is the key to effective ministry because it builds a certain level of trust (63). This process is two-fold in that it asserts information, but it also receives information. Malphurs states, "Good listening, not necessarily more talking, is the key to good communication" (85). This also involves listening to other staff members who may provide critical insight about a certain issue (229). If proper communication is not taking place in every area of the church, the church simply cannot function at its fullest potential (63–66).

Aubrey Malphurs is an influential leader when it comes to church revitalization. His experience in the field is visible throughout the pages of *Advanced Strategic Planning*. In spite of the two visible theological weaknesses found in the book, the assessment by Malphurs concerning the condition of the twenty-first century church must be heeded. If the church and its leaders do not readily acknowledge the rapid cultural shift, decline will continue. Through a progressive approach that stands in stark contrast to the regressive approach suggested by Rainer and Geiger in *Simple Church*, Malphurs offers an effective strategy for twenty-first century church and ministry leaders.¹

The strategic approach by Aubrey Malphurs would be beneficial to any modern church that seems to be plateaued or declining. His statistics are indisputable and the methods that he provides are biblical which make the combination resonate with urgency. Malphurs accomplishes his task of providing a realistic approach for the church to reach its fullest potential in the midst of rapid cultural change. The methodology that he employs makes this book an asset given the condition of the modern-day church.

¹ Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples*, Updated Ed. (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 3.