



Planning Your Next Ministry Calendar

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introduction

Nothing—outside of supernatural intervention—can propel a ministry forward faster than having a ministry plan. On the other hand, operating without a ministry plan will only guarantee one thing: more of the same.

Having a strategic ministry plan gives you something to lean on when leading in the trenches. It ensures that you stay true to the vision God has given you to accomplish. It ensures that you aren't swayed to go a different way—however attractive it may be at the moment.

The root of our focus on planning comes from the stewardship responsibility we have as church leaders. Every church has limited resources—time, space, money, volunteers, leaders, etc. Because there are limits, we have to be good stewards of those resources and invest them wisely.

“But don’t begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of money, and then everyone would laugh at you. They would say, ‘There’s the person who started that building and couldn’t afford to finish it!’” (Luke 14:28-30, NLT)

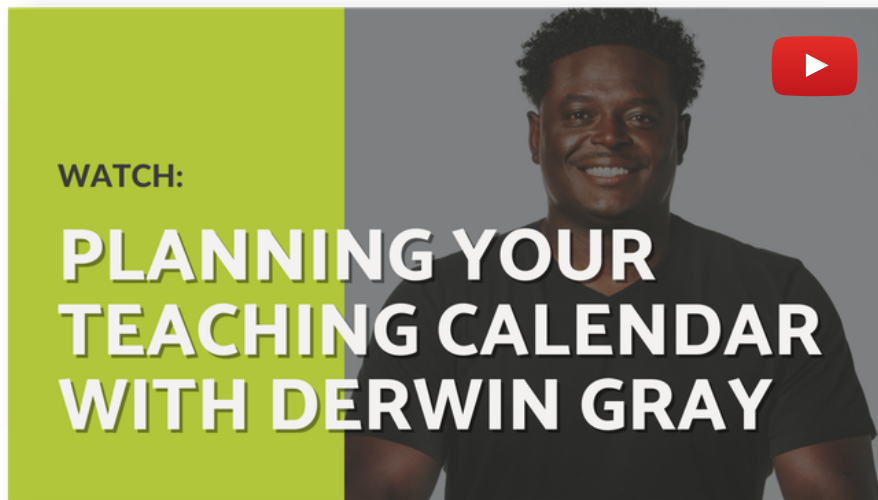
Your interest in this resource tells me that you understand the importance of having a plan for your ministry—the “why.” Now our hope is to help you get a better handle on the “how.” To facilitate this learning, I’ve brought in three church leaders from across the country to share their insights and give us a look into their planning processes.

We’ll start with teaching, move onto your events and outreach, and end with your leadership development calendar. Look out for relevant exercises and additional resources provided to help you along the way.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Morgan', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Tony Morgan

planning your teaching calendar (with Derwin Gray)



Planning our sermons and teaching calendars in advance serves two important purposes:

1. It gives the Spirit time to speak.
2. It gives our team time to prepare.

When we plan ahead, we leave room for **creativity, preparation, and excellence**. We also make space for the Spirit of God to speak to us and our team and lead us in the process.

Every team is different, but Derwin shared that his team plans series **4-6 months in advance**. When it comes to choosing the Scripture passages and topics, they often come out of his own devotional time in the Word. Then Derwin walks through a series of questions:

1. What do I want to teach from this?
2. What do I want people to think, feel, and do from this?
3. Where did I get the idea from?

Derwin also said he keeps “**the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other**”—meaning we should always be aware of our culture and context when planning our sermon series. From there, he brings the idea to his creative arts and music teams for suggestions and a discussion around the idea. He also invites other teaching pastors into the conversation.

*“We want to create a cohesive message that is true to the text, that is true to our context, and that is, above all, **compelling, Christ-exalting, and challenging.**”*

planning your teaching calendar (with Derwin Gray)

From there, Derwin's weekly sermon writing rhythm looks like this:

- Monday: prepare outline.
- Tuesday: discuss outline with creative teams.
- Wednesday & Thursday: continue preparing.
- Friday: rest/Sabbath.
- Saturday: dedicated time to crafting sermon.

This rhythm of planning leaves time and space for the whole team to contribute and execute together. Proper preparation is also necessary because we know that the Word of God has the power to bring life to all who hear it:

Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church,
for we who teach will be judged more strictly. (James 3:1, NLT)

Those who are called to teach need to steward that gift wisely and approach it with great caution and wisdom. Derwin put it this way: **"I have confidence in the Word of God.** I believe that the Spirit of God takes the Word of God and gives it to recipient hearts, and it brings people to faith."

planning your teaching calendar

exercise:

Sermon series planning done well creates a compelling invite opportunity for your congregation. If each time you begin a new weekend series you aren't seeing a bump in attendance and engagement, use this template to wrestle with **four critical questions** as a leadership team:

What questions are the people in our community asking?

Gather a sampling of your key stakeholders and ask them three questions:

What do you hear your friends and acquaintances asking questions about or saying they need?

Example: more time, parenting advice, etc.

What are the people you interact with in need of, but not talking about?

Example: marriage counseling, depression support, etc.

What are some ways we could creatively package those needs in a series that would be compelling?

Example: Seacoast Church in South Carolina planned a theming around the popular TV show *This Is Us* to address difficult topics like family dysfunction and dealing with grief.

What are the natural rhythms of people's lives in our community?

Plan your strategic sermon series for when you're most likely to get their attention.

SEASON	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Spring							
Summer	<i>Example:</i> Lake Day	<i>Example:</i> Summer camps	<i>Example:</i> Summer camps	<i>Example:</i> Summer camps	<i>Example:</i> Family vacations	<i>Example:</i> Family vacations	<i>Example:</i> Family vacations
Fall	<i>Example:</i> Prep for School Week					<i>Example:</i> High School Football Games	<i>Example:</i> College Football Games
Winter							

planning your teaching calendar

What critical topics need to be addressed and when?

Decide what topics you will address over the course of the year.

Month	Topic
January	
February	
March	
April	
May	
June	
July	
August	
September	
October	
November	
December	

How can we create a compelling invite for new guests?

Creating compelling invite tools for your current attendees to invite friends and family will drive weekend attendance.

Month	Sermon Series Title Ideas	Style for Graphics and Visuals	Promo Materials to Produce	Interactive Experiences	Other Ideas

planning your teaching calendar

key takeaway:

When we plan and we prepare, it gives the Spirit of God time and space to speak to us and our team.

more resources:

- [4 Questions for Better Sermon Series Planning](#)
- [Better Sermon Series Planning - Episode 369 of The Unstuck Church Podcast](#)
- [10 Ways To Sink Your Sermon Series](#)

planning your events & outreach calendar (with Tim Stevens)



When it comes to planning events, the urgent can often outweigh the important. If we're simply reacting to ideas or plans as they come, we miss out on the margin needed to filter these events through the lens of our mission, vision, and values. Whatever ministry area asks for a date, time, and space first will get a spot on the calendar—and there may be room for little else.

In order to make sure our ministry calendar reflects the mission of our church, we need to take a **“big rocks” and “small rocks” approach**. The leadership should identify what key events best reflect the church's mission and purpose and drive momentum toward the vision. Once those events are identified and scheduled, whatever else fits (within reason) should be allowed to fit. Anything that doesn't fit wasn't really vital to the mission in the first place.

As far as promotions are concerned, it's important that we keep our purpose clear and our messaging simple. Our world is full of noise, and the people who attend our church are likely balancing school, social, and work calendars on top of whatever events we offer. Our goal should be to reduce the noise and offer clear next steps. Realistically, this means cutting down to one or two announcements or next steps a week. If an event or program can't fit, we may need to reconsider its importance in the first place. And as your church grows, resist the temptation to add additional events and on-ramps unless absolutely necessary—after all, the bigger we get, the more focused we need to be.

One note for multisite churches specifically: In our interview with Tim Stevens, he suggests that rather than having competing calendars, every campus should be relatively aligned when it comes to key ministry events. When the schedule is done this way, all campuses can focus their promotional messaging on pushing toward the same event. This increases clarity and helps the church present itself as “one church in multiple locations.”

planning your events & outreach calendar

exercise:

As you approach your planning for the year ahead, revisit your ministry calendar from last year. If not already available, compile a list with every event your church offered in the year. Take time to review each calendar event and consider:

- Who did this event intend to serve?
- How does this event reflect and contribute to our core mission and vision?
- What tangible “wins,” next steps, or results came out of this event?

For example: **“Back to School” Supplies and Food Drive**

- Who did this event intend to serve?
 - Underprivileged families with children who attend local schools.
- How does this event reflect and contribute to our core mission and vision?
 - We believe that God has called our church to reach beyond our walls. Our mission statement is “to be a church for our community.”
- What tangible “wins,” next steps, or results came out of this event?
 - 10 new church members served at the event, 20 new local families entered our outreach database, and we continued to strengthen our relationship with local schools in our district.

If you find it difficult to answer any of these questions, it’s time to reconsider the event. After all, an event that may seem outwardly “successful” may not be a success at all if it took away necessary time and resources from the mission.

key takeaway:

When it comes to scheduling events, don’t let the urgent outweigh the important.

more resources:

- [Prove It: Do Your Events Improve Church Health?](#)
- [Why Events are Killing Your Church \(and Some Signs That You Need to Stop\)](#)
- [Reaching New People Through Events – Episode 334 | The Unstuck Church Podcast](#)

planning your leadership development calendar (with Eric Geiger)



Are leaders born or made? We believe that while leadership is a gift from God, it's also a gift that can be developed. And as leaders, it's part of our calling to develop future leaders.

Leadership development should be considered a natural part of the discipleship process for those who have the spiritual gift of leadership. If we see leadership development as separate, we may focus all our attention on developing a person's skills without ever considering the development of their spiritual life and character. The two should go hand-in-hand.

Like every other spiritual discipline, leadership development doesn't happen by accident. And if we don't plan for it to happen, it rarely happens at all. So just like we plan out our teaching and events calendars, we should also map out a plan for how we will intentionally develop and invest in our leaders (both staff and volunteers).

Eric Greiger likened a leadership development plan to a coach calling a play in a football game. Although the play likely won't go exactly as planned, it gives everyone a sense of direction and purpose for what they hope to accomplish. If we don't "call a play" and make a plan, we won't get very far.

Your leadership development plan should take two factors into consideration: the role of the person (or people) and the specific competencies you hope to develop in them. There is no "one size fits all" for leadership development—you would train and coach a worship pastor differently than a children's pastor.

planning your leadership development calendar (with Eric Geiger)

Eric shared one example of a leadership development plan for the pastors in his church:

“We have 35 pastors on staff and several who are on track to become pastors. This year, I’m set to meet with all of them in-person for 10 different sessions throughout the year. The core competency we’re focusing on is theology. We’re currently in the process of developing whitepapers for that curriculum on the 10 topics we hope to cover. We’re also reading a book together throughout the year, alongside the sessions, to facilitate discussion along the way.”

You can’t just “wing” these more complicated and nuanced topics—they have to be done thoughtfully. This isn’t something we can just throw together last minute.”

Eric’s yearly plan for his pastoral staff is a great model of the keys to leadership development: it’s **intentional**, **contextual**, and **planned** in advance.

So, you’re convinced of the need for a leadership development plan. But what should that plan include? What competencies and topics should you focus on and prioritize? There are two sources we can turn to: the guidance of the Spirit and the culture/context surrounding the development. Consider the competencies needed for their area of ministry or for the lifecycle stage of the church. We also want to focus on the struggles and needs of our people and bring wisdom from the Word to those areas of need. We should consider the context, prayerfully listen to the Spirit, and move in the direction that those two meet.

Creating leadership development plans for everyone under your care may seem like an overwhelming task. Our advice is to simply start somewhere. Eric suggested:

“Start small. Take one group of people—whether that’s your elder team, or a specific group of volunteer leaders—and commit to walking through a book with them over the next 6 months. This will develop an appetite and interest in your people to be developed and help you start thinking with a development mindset. Once you see the fruit, you’ll be encouraged to continue.”

Don’t allow the idea of complex leadership pipelines or tracking databases scare you away from your calling to develop the leaders around you. **Start small, but start.**

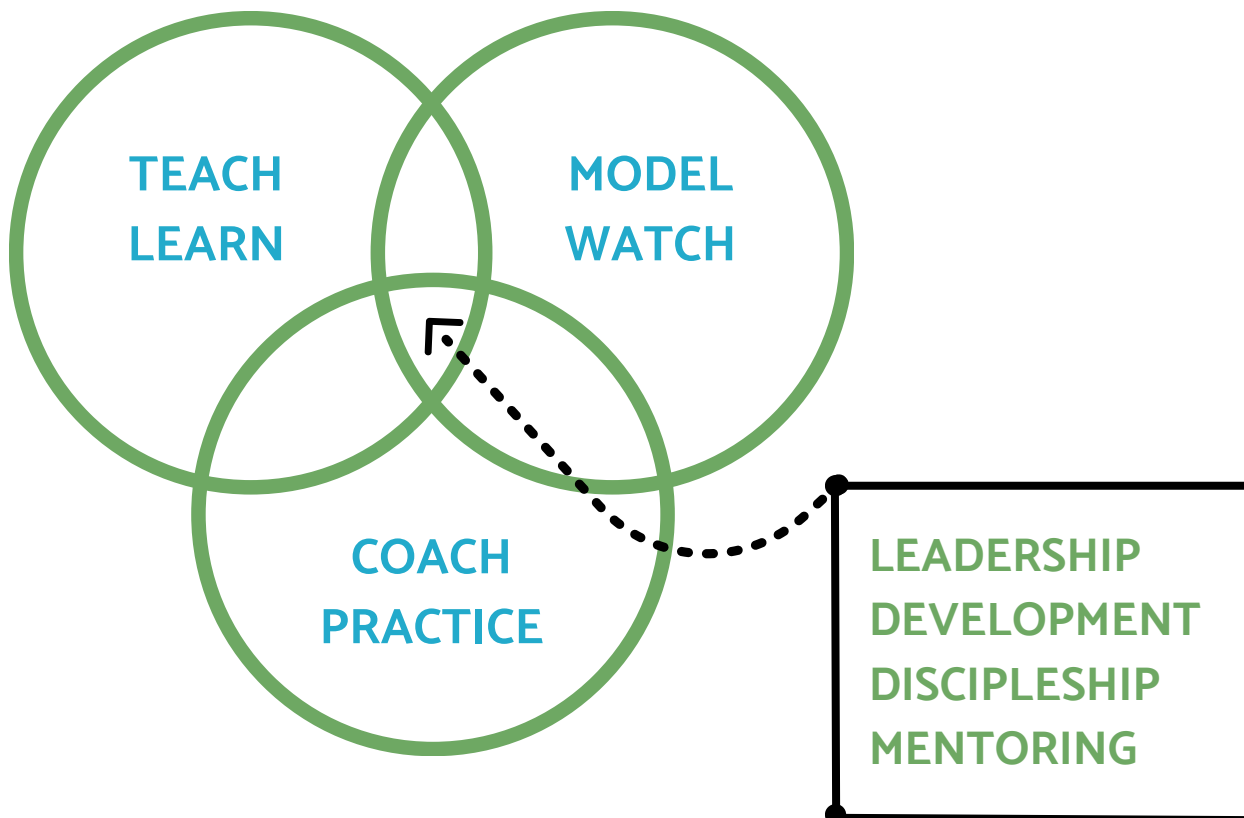
planning your leadership development calendar

exercise:

There are three key components to leadership development: **teaching, modeling, and practicing.**

Recreate this whiteboard image somewhere you'll see it each day this week. Think about your strategy for identifying, equipping and empowering leaders in your church. Then, make a plan for the first step you are going to take to simply start.

"Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—
everything you heard from me and saw me doing.
Then the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4:9, NLT)



planning your leadership development calendar

key takeaway:

Leaders are called to develop the leaders around them. Even if you have to start small, start.

more resources:

- [Building a Leadership Development Cycle](#)
- [The Thing You're Doing That Stops Leadership Development](#)
- [3 Questions to Improve Your Church Leadership Development](#)

tips for planning your ministry calendar

We've walked through lots of helpful ideas and insights for planning your teaching, events, and leadership development calendar. Before we send you out to get planning, here are a few of my final practical tips:

I like to build the ministry plan before I build the ministry budget.

Call me old school, but I think ministry should drive money rather than money driving ministry. If we prioritize what's most important first, then we can build the budget around those priorities. It's difficult to re-prioritize spending, though, if you wait to build the ministry plan in the middle of the budget year.

I prefer using an outside facilitator for the annual planning.

I include money in my budget every year to do this. Though I obviously facilitate planning retreats all the time, I've learned it's not possible for me to both facilitate the conversation and engage the process at the same time. As the leader, I need to be fully engaged and contributing my perspective rather than operating in the role of facilitator. ([My team at The Unstuck Group would love to help you facilitate this process](#)).

I don't like any more than 12 leaders engaged in the planning retreat.

Any more than that and the conversations tend to come to a grinding halt. It becomes challenging to engage everyone in the discussion. Side conversations start to happen that pull the group in different directions. The biggest challenge, though, is that large groups make it almost impossible to get consensus. Once the ministry plan is developed, there will be plenty of time to involve many more people in developing and executing priority initiatives.

tips for planning your ministry calendar

I think the ministry plans should inform individual employee wins.

That's why the annual planning retreat should happen before the annual employee reviews and development plans are established. With that, the results of the reviews shouldn't be a surprise to anyone. The reviews simply provide an opportunity to look back and answer the simple question: Did the wins get accomplished? If appropriate coaching took place throughout the year, there should be no surprises.

I've learned checkpoints are critical for accountability and follow through.

Sundays are always coming. Because of that, worship services will always be what's most urgent for the leadership team. With that in mind, it's important to get checkpoints on the calendar to remind everyone that **what's most urgent may not be what's most important** to the overall health of the ministry. These checkpoints don't have to last long, but they do have to allow time for the initiative champions to provide updates on progress toward completion.

Finally, let me throw out this final challenge as it relates to developing a new ministry planning calendar: someone **other than the senior pastor** should be the champion when it comes to driving this process. This champion isn't responsible for *developing* the ministry plan, they're just the person that makes sure the plan gets *developed*.

On the next page, you'll find a "cheat sheet" of my suggested rhythm for your ministry planning. And if you'd like some help from me and my team, [don't hesitate to reach out](#).

MINISTRY PLANNING CALENDAR

JANUARY

Annual Ministry
Planning Retreat

MARCH

Confirm New
Ministry Initiative
Priorities

APRIL

Complete Annual
Employee Reviews &
Development Plans

MAY & JUNE

Annual Budget
Planning

JULY

Fiscal & Ministry
Year Begins

OCTOBER

First Quarterly
Checkpoint

JANUARY

Second Quarterly
Checkpoint

APRIL

Final Quarterly
Checkpoint

**Assumes church budget year begins July 1. Adjust accordingly.*

Most organizations start, grow, thrive, lose momentum, decline, and eventually end. That doesn't have to be your church's story.

If you want to lead a healthy, growing church that continually reaches new people and helps them take steps towards Christ, you need **clear vision**, an effective **ministry strategy**, and a **high impact team**. That's where we can help. We help churches get *unstuck*.

ABOUT TONY MORGAN



Tony was the founder of The Unstuck Group. Started in 2009, The Unstuck Group has served hundreds and hundreds of churches throughout the United States and several countries around the world. Previously, Tony served on the senior leadership teams of three rapidly growing churches including NewSpring Church in South Carolina. He has five published books including, *The Unstuck Church*, and with Amy Anderson he hosted *The Unstuck Church Podcast* for 7 years, which has thousands of listeners each month. Tony passed away in 2024, leaving behind a legacy of thought leadership, innovation, and a deep commitment to helping churches thrive.

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