How strong is your commitment to the kingdom mission, to fulfilling the mission of Jesus Christ in your world? There are many things to which we can be committed, even as pastors and church leaders, that do not lead people to a personal relationship with God through faith in Christ or lead believers to maturity in Christ. What can motivate us in ministry? For some it is personal preferences and benefits. Some are motivated by personal comfort and ease. Others are unable to see beyond perceived resources. Listening to pastors’ stories of life in ministry, I find them saying it is easy to be moved more by self-interests or congregational demands than by a genuine God-inspired vision of life and ministry. While a pastor’s heart desire may be to fulfill the kingdom mission passionately, the expectations and demands of pastoral life often keep one from that desired focus. A passionate commitment to the kingdom mission turns into a passionate desire for survival more often than should be the case.

We are created to love God and love all that God loves. We are commissioned to help others discover their created identity and live out their divinely appointed purpose. We are called to serve our world in the inspiration and power of the Holy Spirit, but do we? How many sermons have been heard but not heeded? How many have heard the call to wholehearted discipleship but are not engaged wholeheartedly in the mission? How many have been gripped by a compelling vision of involvement in what God is doing in their world only to be thwarted by the expediency of the mundane? How many people have accepted Jesus Christ as the Savior but have not moved decisively into the “fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13), into a life of spiritual and emotional maturity and sacrificial service?

When we personally hunger and thirst for righteousness, when love for God is greater than all other loves of life, then our commitment to our created identity, our commissioned purpose, and our calling to serve the world in the power of God’s Holy Spirit will become much easier to affirm and fulfill. When we live life and do ministry. It will permeate every part of our life, to the glory of God.

Commitment. All who read this will testify to the desire to serve God wholeheartedly. Many of you will also testify to the challenges that stand in the way of that from time to time, even from day to day. As servants of the kingdom, we must each commit to a devotion to God that is greater than the pressures that come from within or from the world around us. We do that better together. I need you to help me keep that perspective! And
(continued from cover)
you need me! SHAPE is about more than getting together and having a good time. It is about journeying together with sisters and brothers who face the same challenges and need the same encouragement as servants of the kingdom. It is about growing together into the fullness of Christ. It is about mission and ministry fulfillment.

Commit that you will do all that is necessary to be the person God created you to be, in every relationship of your life—with God, yourself, and all others. It is the most important commitment you will ever make, and the most rewarding.

Two Heads Are Better Than One

By Ann Brandon

We all need somebody to lean on.
It is not good for man to be alone.
I love you, you love me, we’re a happy family.

From Scripture to popular songs, from theme songs to purple dinosaurs, the message seems clear: we need each other. In this culture of individualism and self-sufficiency, we find that scriptural truth to be more and more difficult. One of the core values—hallmarks—of the SHAPE ministry initiative is connectedness. Connectedness is defined as pastors striving to avoid isolation and being energized for ministry through regular contact with their peers. The pastor’s life touches people and brings them closer to God.

Recently, regional SHAPE cohort groups have been forming, and connectedness is one of the beautiful benefits of these groups. Pastors have come together and experienced safe vulnerability, peers who understand, and support and comfort for the ministry journey. Comments like “I’ve been needing this,” “I’ve never experienced anything like this,” and “I don’t feel as alone anymore” are common among these groups.

You may not be involved in SHAPE, but you can nurture connectedness in your own life. What might that look like? Connectedness begins with an understanding of ourselves and who God created us to be. That can be achieved through prayer, Bible study, assessment tools (DISC, Discovet Your Gifts, Myers-Briggs, and many others), and conversations with those around us. As we journey together in this learning process, we also need to build intentional relationships. Perhaps there are retired ministers in our communities and pastors of other churches who, like us, would welcome an opportunity to sit with peers, sharing, celebrating, and supporting. Does a spirit of competition make that difficult? Does it involve risk? Do we need to commit to confidentiality? Does it take effort? Yes, yes, yes, and YES! But the resounding YES! to the question Does it strengthen me and my ministry? makes it all worthwhile.

Dr. David Ferguson, of Intimate Life Ministries, states that “when a growing sense of aloneness is present, people are much more vulnerable to compromise.” Connectedness creates a strength and a hedge of protection around us in times of stress and temptation. Throughout Scripture, God reminds us that we need one another to accomplish God’s will, to nurture our faith, and to bring others into relationship with God.

When we are touched by others, we are better able to touch the people in our congregation and bring them closer to God. The church in Acts witnessed wonders and miraculous signs, people added to the faith daily, and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. That success hinges on what is recorded in Acts 2:42–47: the church fellowshipped, breaking bread together in the church and in their homes. They were together. Their connectedness brought others into life-changing knowledge of a God who so coveted relationship with them that he sent his one and only Son to dwell among them.

Be encouraged! You are not alone. God is with you, and there are also brothers and sisters around you, ready to be connected and to journey alongside you!

Some scriptures for reflection:


• May 22–24, Oklahoma Leader Training Update: Training began for the next SHAPE cohort to be launched later this year in Oklahoma. Meeting in Sapulpa were Tim Bush, Kevin Clouse, John Ewer, Joe Thompson, and Dan Workman. This group is a second-generation leader team, each having been part of a meaningful SHAPE cluster experience in the past. We are grateful for the impact that SHAPE has had on these pastors and for their willingness to pass on the blessing to other pastors as cluster leaders. Training will continue this summer and fall with an anticipated October cohort launch.

• May 28–30. The national SHAPE Steering Committee met in Nashville, Tennessee, to discuss vision and plan for the upcoming year for SHAPE and SHARE. Those in attendance were Paul Dreger, national SHAPE coordinator; Suzanne Kellam, SHAPE assistant; Tommy Dove, National SHAPE Training Team; Howard Megill, regional pastor for Missouri; Joe Thompson, regional pastor for Oklahoma; Rebecca New-Edson, National SHAPE Training Team; Randy Montgomery, National SHAPE Training Team; Larry Taylor, regional pastor for Colorado; Bill Jones, regional pastor for Michigan; Carl Addison, SHAPE coordinator for Indiana; David Shrout, regional pastor for Oregon; Dwayne Pierce, regional pastor for Tennessee; and Ray Jones, SHAPE coordinator for Louisiana. This annual meeting is a chance for the SHAPE Steering Committee to be together in person and for the regional directors to stay connected and to share ideas and stories of the impact of SHAPE among the pastors of their region, as well as to plan for future ministry. The agenda included a review of the ten-year master plan that was created in 2009, curriculum updates, updates for the 2014 manual, a national training strategy, sustainability and finally a discussion of SHARE and the plan for its launch.

• Conversations during the Global Gathering and General Assembly meeting, June 21–26, revealed a continuing interest in the ministry of SHAPE by persons who have not had the opportunity to participate in this life-changing ministry. Paul will be in conversation with persons in the weeks to come regarding the expansion of SHAPE into new regions of North America and beyond. We celebrate the continuing ministry of SHAPE in bringing pastors together in healthy community. Please pray regularly for this vital ministry.