

FOREWORD BY CHAP CLARK

DUFFY
ROBBINS
YOUTH
MINISTRY

NUTS &
BOLTS

ORGANIZING, LEADING AND MANAGING
YOUR YOUTH MINISTRY

REVISED &
UPDATED

MINISTRY BEHIND THE SCENES

Although the actual healing of kids may take place at a Sunday night youth meeting, during the fall retreat, or at a Friday night coffeehouse or mid-week club, much of youth ministry happens unnoticed and behind the scenes. The nuts and bolts of youth ministry are those Monday morning staff meetings, Tuesday afternoon planning sessions, and Thursday night team gatherings.

To help yourself think about this in a more concrete way, reread Mark's account (2:1-12) of this miraculous healing. Don't try to read *into* the lines, but use your imagination to read *between* the lines, and make a list of the logistics of the dramatic incident that occurred that day in Capernaum. Use the four categories in the diagram below to help you brainstorm:

<p>Planning</p> <p>What issues would have to be addressed to come up with a plan that would get the paralyzed man to the feet of Jesus?</p>	<p>Leadership</p> <p>What sorts of issues might arise in relation to leadership and interpersonal dynamics?</p>
<p>Team Ministry</p> <p>What questions would have been relevant in terms of how to get the necessary people working together to carry out the plan?</p>	<p>Equipment</p> <p>What considerations would come into play in terms of equipment needed to execute the plan?</p>

Working through the passage, it's pretty clear there were some very real nuts and bolts issues that had to be addressed behind the scenes so the paralyzed man could get to the feet of Jesus. Thinking through our four categories, let's do a simple inventory.

Planning

1. Evaluation. Surely they must have considered some other plans for getting this paralytic into the presence of Jesus. Mark 2:4 suggests they must have at least attempted a more conventional approach at first. Why was the rooftop plan chosen? Why were other plans rejected?

2. Strategizing. They had to think carefully through their strategy. For example, they needed proper information. It would have been really embarrassing if they'd broken through the roof of the wrong house! "Sorry about the ceiling, folks. We're looking for Jesus." Or what if they had broken through the right roof at the wrong spot, say, two feet further back. Jesus would have been right in the middle of his sermon, and a man on a pallet would have landed on his head. Not a pretty picture.

Leadership

1. Leadership Style. How does one motivate a group of people to undertake so bold a plan? And what about the person who hatched this crazy idea—what was it about that person that compelled a group of people to follow this plan? Where would such a plan come from? A dream? A vision? A nightmare? A youth group lock-in?

2. Authority. Someone had to be in charge. Someone had to call the shots. Someone had to organize and tell everyone when to lower and when to stop.

3. Mediation. Was there disagreement over the plan? How was that disagreement worked out? It's likely that a plan this wild met with some initial resistance. It's hard to imagine the friends saying, "Hey, what a great idea! We climb the roof with a paralyzed man, tie his bed to ropes, break through the roof, and drop him down in front of a carpenter!" I would suppose that plan came under a fair amount of criticism at first. Who made the final decision? Did they vote? Did it come down to one person's call? Did they pray about this?!

Team Ministry

1. Recruitment. Before any healing could take place, someone had to have a vision, a hope that this paralyzed man could—just maybe—get healed if he could somehow get close enough to Jesus. Someone had to believe that strongly enough to recruit people to help, and so motivate them with enough of that same vision that they were willing to take part in a pretty bizarre plan.

2. Screening. Obviously, thoughtful recruitment begins with a basic question: Who should be recruited? It wouldn't do to involve someone who approached the task with the wrong motivation. This would have been, for example, an excellent opportunity for someone harboring a grudge against the paralyzed man to make a nasty scene. Common sense mandates that all the people recruited would have had to be people who genuinely cared about the welfare of the paralyzed man. There was also the question, one supposes, of physical strength. I would hate to be on the pallet being lowered through the roof by four men whose strength only lasted for half the journey. And, how many would be needed to complete the task? Mark tells us there were four men involved. Perhaps they decided one man was needed for each corner of the pallet. Too few might have made the task too difficult; too many could have made the entire roof cave in. Then, Jesus would have had lots of people to heal!

3. Training. There had to be some effort taken to make sure everyone understood the plan and was prepared to do his part. This may not have taken more than a sentence or two, but it surely must have happened. If one team

member planned to lower the mat on the count of "three" and the other three began lowering the mat on "two," the result could be a very frightened paralyzed man doing a fly-by as Jesus was teaching in the room below.

4. Teamwork. Finally, it wouldn't be enough to recruit and train four individuals. They would have to work as a team. Just getting the paralyzed man up on the roof would require their strong arms working together. And then, perhaps, someone was responsible for making the opening in the roof while others prepared the man on the mat so he could be lowered safely. It was a small operation, but a challenging one. And the challenges could only be addressed if every member of the team were willing to play his part.

Equipment

1. Procurement. We can assume someone gave some thought to what equipment would be needed. Obviously, there had to be rope, and it had to be long enough. As confusing as the scene was, we can only imagine what it might have been like if there'd been only enough rope to lower the man partway to where Jesus was standing. There, above the crowd, would be a pallet, suspended in mid-air, with a deeply frustrated paralytic cursing his ex-friends on the rooftop. And, of course, they had to get something to pick through the roof. Mark says they "dug" (literally, "made an opening") through it. That suggests some kind of tool or implement with which they could break through the earth-and-tile roof.

2. Money. I don't know. Maybe they had all the rope they needed already. Maybe they didn't need to buy digging tools. Maybe there were no costs for roof repair. But if they didn't have everything they needed, they had to come up with some money to pay for this stuff. Where was the money going to come from? Who was going to keep it once it was collected, and how would they be sure that it was handled properly?

Of course, we don't know how any of these issues were handled because they were all handled behind the scenes. What we hear about and celebrate is that four men lowered a sick friend through the roof, and Jesus forgave his sins and healed his paralysis. But we can be sure of this: Either formally or informally these very questions were dealt with. It may have been done in haste, or they may have spent several days planning it. But none of this wonderful story would have happened if some compassionate people had not taken time to work through the nuts and bolts of their task.

WORD OF WARNING

Let's be clear: Fruitful, effective ministry is about a lot more than good planning and organization. It's true, these four men had to work through organizational and interpersonal details to get their friend to the feet of Jesus. But we wouldn't be reading about this episode if Jesus (and his feet) had not been

in that house below. Every new Sunday brings thousands of well-organized, carefully planned worship services around the globe where the music, the pageantry, and the announcements are all very nicely done. But the sad fact is that many of these services result in neither healing nor forgiveness of sin. It is Jesus alone who takes human effort and turns it into life-changing ministry. To paraphrase an essential truth: "Man does not live on administration alone..."

On the other hand we shouldn't be deceived into thinking good planning and organization will quench the work of God's Spirit. One of the first lessons of ministry administration is that the right kind of thorough planning can provide a platform for the right kind of God-inspired spontaneity. The Holy Spirit works when and how he chooses to work. Our intention in this book is simply to reflect on ways of fertilizing and utilizing our resources to set the stage for what God wants to do.

TO THE PROFESSIONAL ROOF WALKER

Some of you, like me, are paid to bring people to the feet of Jesus. When you dream about, strategize, and plan for ministry, you're also earning a living. You're a "professional" youth worker. And that's okay.

I mention this because you probably won't be fully comfortable with a book like this if you're troubled by that word, *professional*. And if we take professional to mean, "working without heart," "slick," "going through the motions," "mailing it in," or "driven by money," it is troubling. But one of the premises of this book is that there is nothing profane about the word professional. At its root, it means "promise"—a promise to be prepared, a promise to responsibly perform our work with excellence, a promise to God and to the people we serve. It's the kind of promise inherent in Paul's exhortation: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Colossians 3:23-24). There is nothing profane about a vow before God to do our work the best we can do it.

And yet, having said all that, we need to be on high alert for the temptation to over-professionalize youth ministry. After all, most of us are self-aware enough to recognize how easy it is to fall into the trap of an unholy professionalism—ministry done more out of habit than in response, ministry born less of compassion than of know-how, ministry based more on works of the flesh than fruit of the Spirit. Frankly, a book like this can lead us in that direction. We need to understand right at the beginning that tightening a few nuts and bolts can make us more efficient, but only the Spirit of God can ignite our ministries with that divine Master-work that yields changed lives.

Henri Nouwen does a good job of reminding us that professional training has its place, but that it also brings with it some very real dangers:

Everywhere Christian leaders...have become increasingly aware of the need for more specific training and formation. This need is realistic, and the desire for more professionalism in the ministry is understandable. But the danger is that instead of becoming free to let the spirit grow, the future minister may entangle himself in the complications of his own assumed competence and use his specialism as an excuse to avoid the much more difficult task of being compassionate...the danger is that his skillful diagnostic eye will become more like an eye for distant and detailed analysis than the eye of a compassionate partner...More training and structure are just as necessary as more bread for the hungry. But just as bread given without love can bring war instead of peace, professionalism without compassion will turn forgiveness into a gimmick, and the kingdom to come into a blindfold.¹

PROFESSIONALS AND PROFESSIONALISM

Why is this a big deal? Because youth ministry is not a career; it is a calling. The English word *career* comes from the French *carriere*, meaning "a road," or "a highway."² Think of someone setting out on a road—map in hand, goal in sight, with stops marked along the way for food, lodging, and fuel. No wonder we often hear the word *career* coupled with the word *track* or *ladder*. Both images suggest a well-marked course, a set itinerary, an expected schedule of travel. The traveler's choices are left solely to the dictates of the map.

A *vocation* or *calling* is different. (See chart on following page.) Derived from the Latin word *vocare*,³ it points neither to a map nor a guidebook—but to the Guide himself. The emphasis here is not on following a course, but on responding to a voice—no schedule, no itinerary, no well-laid plans. In fact, sometimes it's downright messy and, at least from a human perspective, not very well-ordered. But in the called life, God-ordained always trumps well-ordered. From beginning to end, the key is maintaining an open, intimate relationship with the One who speaks (John 6:28-29). Os Guinness defines *calling* as "the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response [emphasis added] to his summons and service."⁴