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SERMON OUTLINE FOR PASTORS

WE STAY IN OUR LANE

Why Focus Keeps a Church on Mission

> A church that tries to do everything ends up doing nothing. We stay on mission by staying in our lane: the right lane, our lane and my lane, because God gives exceptional grace inside the lane He assigns.

MAIN TEXT

1 Kings 20:35-43

FIRST PREACHED

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SERIES

We're Relentlessly Driven by the Mission, Week 3 of 4

BY

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AT A GLANCE

THE MESSAGE

1. We stay in the right lane: there is a functionally right lane that grows a church, and you get where you are going by design rather than by default
2. We stay in our lane: God assigns a church its area of influence through prophetic vision, and the commendation of the Lord shows up in what actually works
3. I stay in my lane: kings and priests each carry an assigned role, and there is no favor outside the thing God anointed you to do

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jasonmayfield.com/messages/we-stay-in-our-lane

PREACHING NOTES

Before You Preach

This is the third message in a four-week series on the mission of the church. Week one was the Great Commission. Week two was a strategy for reaching the lost. This week turns from strategy to focus: what keeps a church from drifting off mission is not a lack of good ideas but too many of them.

The message was preached in a new pastor's first months, and it carries announcements about cutting and simplifying the weekly schedule. Those dates belong to one church in one season. Keep the shape (a pastor explaining why the church is doing less so it can do more) and put in your own church's changes.

Expect some people to hear "we are cutting things" as "my ministry does not matter." Say plainly that this is not about right and wrong or good and bad. It is about bandwidth, and about lanes. Say it with warmth: the goal is not control, it is a groove where everyone can thrive.

Introduction

> **1 KINGS 20:35-43** ESV
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> 35 And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his fellow at the command of the Lord, "Strike me, please." But the man refused to strike him. 36 Then he said to him, "Because you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, behold, as soon as you have gone from me, a lion shall strike you down." And as soon as he had departed from him, a lion met him and struck him down. 37 Then he found another man and said, "Strike me, please." And the man struck him—struck him and wounded him. 38 So the prophet departed and waited for the king by the way, disguising himself with a bandage over his eyes. 39 And as the king passed, he cried to the king and said, "Your servant went out into the midst of the battle, and behold, a soldier turned and brought a man to me and said, 'Guard this man; if by any means he is missing, your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.' 40 And as your servant was busy here and there, he was gone." The king of Israel said to him, "So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it." 41 Then he hurried to take the bandage away from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. 42 And he said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore your life shall be for his life, and your people for his people.'" 43 And the king of Israel went to his house vexed and sullen and came to Samaria.

The prophet's story is a parable aimed at the king. A soldier is given one job: guard this man. And his excuse is, "as your servant was busy here and there, he was gone" (1 Kings 20:40). Busy with a little bit of this and a little bit of that, and he lost the one thing he was told to keep.

We are in a series called We're Relentlessly Driven by the Mission. Week one: the Great Commission, to make disciples of all nations. Week two: a strategy for reaching people who are far from God.

The pattern. Years of coaching and consulting pastors around the country teach you to see patterns. Generally, the difference between a growing church and a dying church is the amount of good, well-intentioned distractions it allows to pull it away from the mission.

It is easy to let this happen, because there are a lot of good ideas. But you cannot do everything. If you want to do more, you have to focus.

THE LESSER IS BLESSED BY THE GREATER

> **HEBREWS 7:7** ESV
>
> [7] It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.

Another translation puts it this way: the lesser is blessed by the greater. Get the high-priority things handled, and everything else receives blessing from them.

The decision to start or host a ministry usually does not come down to good idea or bad idea, or even right or wrong. It comes down to bandwidth.

Illustration: the choir in Kansas. A close friend pastors a fast-growing church in rural Kansas. He recently disbanded his church choir. For a choir guy, that got my attention, so I asked him why. His answer: "I don't have enough people working in children's ministry." Operationally, kids ministry matters more to a Sunday morning than a choir does. A choir is a great idea, but it is the lesser, and the lesser is blessed by the greater.

Illustration: the word "priority." In *Essentialism*, Greg McKeown points out that the word priority came into English in the 1400s as a singular word: the very first thing. It stayed singular for about five hundred years. Only in the 1900s did we start talking about "priorities," as if renaming it could give us several first things at once. A company with priority one through priority five, he observes, really has no priority at all.

Churches that try to do everything end up doing nothing. Churches that spread themselves thin cannot accomplish anything.

I would hate for Jesus to walk through the back door of our church, get our attention and ask, "Why haven't you won the city?" and for our only answer to be, "Lord, your servant was busy here and there."

WRITE THE VISION

The Lord told Habakkuk, "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it" (Habakkuk 2:2). So here is ours.

Our guiding statement: We are building lives on Jesus: a church large enough to lead hundreds to believe the gospel every week, substantial enough to equip believers to build incredible lives, and

formidable enough to reshape the spiritual and social culture of our city.

We are doing that by focusing on four things, the four ministries that will get the pastor's attention for the foreseeable future:

- Preaching
- Worship
- Kids
- Hospitality

Those four are really one thing: **a powerful Sunday morning experience.**

So how do we keep ourselves from being busy here and there? How do we stay on mission, the Great Commission? **We stay in our lane.** Have the congregation say it together.

1. We Stay in the Right Lane

There is no doubt about it: there are right lanes and wrong lanes.

Illustration: Da and the turning lane. As a teenager, riding with my grandfather (I called him Da) to a music store, he pulled into what he thought was the turning lane. There was no turning lane. It was a two-lane road, that was the oncoming lane, and there was oncoming traffic. I was scared to death. Everyone knows there is a right lane and a wrong lane.

There are right lanes morally, ethically and theologically. But there is also a **functionally right lane**: a lane that accomplishes the mission of the church and grows the church.

Talk to the room like a group of pastors for a few minutes. There is more than one way to grow a church, but there are not a thousand. Maybe five. A leader has to pick one and go with it. You can have what you want, but you can't have it any way you want it.

We don't get where we're going by default. We get there by design.

> MATTHEW 7:15-16 ESV
>
> 15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.
> 16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

Grapes do not come from thornbushes. You cannot plant apple seeds and expect oranges. If you start with the destination in mind, the strategy has already been determined.

Illustration: the nineteen-pack. I'd like to be chiseled. But you cannot want a nineteen-pack and live on Doritos and Mountain Dew. That does not get you there.

Illustration: the road to Birmingham. From south Alabama, if I want to go to Birmingham, I cannot take I-10. The decision to go to Birmingham tells me I-10 is the wrong way and I-65 is the right way. Once you

know where you want to go, how to get there is decided.

If we want to reach our city and bring people to Jesus Christ, we have to do the things that move our church in that direction.

2. We Stay in Our Lane

> **2 CORINTHIANS 10:13-16 ESV**
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> 13 But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. 14 For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. 15 We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, 16 so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence.

Every church, every pastor and every person has a realm of influence, what Paul calls "the area of influence God assigned to us" (2 Corinthians 10:13).

It may sound self-serving, but Scripture shows that a church's realm of influence is typically set from the top down.

> **PROVERBS 29:18 ESV**
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> 18 Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.

Without prophetic vision, people run all over the place. That is how a church ends up busy here and busy there.

A church's realm of influence is determined by the pastor getting a word from God. Not by a pastor doing what he wants to do, and not by a pastor doing what he has always done. It has to come from heaven.

Most churches fail to reach their potential because the pastor is trying to be everything to everyone while allowing anything to happen at any time. Remember: a church that tries to do everything ends up doing nothing.

> **2 CORINTHIANS 10:17-18 ESV**
>
> 17 "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." 18 For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

It is the Lord who determines the prophetic vision, the realm of influence, the lane we stay in. And our lane becomes obvious through the commendation of the Lord.

That may sound spiritual and high-handed, so make it practical: **how do you find the commendation of the Lord? What works.** Jesus said we would know prophets by their fruit. Is it working? What does it produce? Get a word from God, and if it works, the commendation of the Lord is on it. That shows you your lane.

Illustration: groups in San Antonio. A friend in San Antonio, Texas took over a church of a little under two hundred. Five years later, they had more than thirteen hundred people on campus on a Sunday. He told me, "Every time I invest time, energy or money into groups, my church grows. Every time I put money into something else, the church stops growing." He experimented: take money from something he thought was important, put it into groups, and watch. Every time, the church grew. He found the commendation of the Lord by watching where the fruit was.

PROTECTING THE LANE: OUR SCHEDULE

Pastor Jason paused here to announce changes to the church calendar for the rest of 2025. Adapt this section to your own church's changes, or move it to the announcements.

These are changes to keep us from being busy here and there, so we can stay on mission.

- **Sunday Devos end (October 12).** Groups are coming, so we can meet in smaller settings and grow in grace (2 Peter 3:18). We are making this shift so we can focus on an incredible Sunday morning experience.
- **The Lord has need of you.** He does not need you off in a classroom when He sends the harvest into the church. He needs you ready to do the work of the ministry. Jesus did not say the harvest was the problem: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Matthew 9:37). Our field is Sunday morning. If you haven't joined the team, join the team.
- **Last Wednesday night of 2025 (October 29).** We are pausing for the last two months of the year to re-evaluate the weekly schedule and find the best place in the week for a powerful Pentecostal expression on an ongoing basis. We are believing for a powerful move of the Holy Spirit in this church. You can have it all, but you can't have it all at once.
- **Sabbath Sunday (December 28).** No service the Sunday between Christmas and New Year's. One of the pastor's leadership values is to take pressure off ministry leaders and volunteers around the holidays, not add to it. Let the church breathe.
- **Anointing service (January 4).** We will start 2026 by anointing everyone in the church with oil.

3. I Stay in My Lane

Chronicles retells the history of Judah for God's people after the exile, as a north star for how to live and worship the Lord.

Kings and priests in harmony. In Joash's day, Judah had drifted far from God. But King Joash and Jehoiada the priest, working together, led the nation back to the Lord and restored the house of God.

"And Joash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest" (2 Chronicles 24:2).

The kings and priests paradigm. This could be a five-week series, so give the high points only, and say that it is an oversimplification. In the old covenant, kings and priests picture how the kingdom of God operates. Kings are born-again believers in the marketplace. Priests are born-again believers in the ministry. Priests bring vision to the house of the Lord, and kings bring provision.

When kings and priests come together in partnership, it is almost always followed by a dynamic move of God. A whole city can be shaken. When everybody is in their lane, traffic moves smoothly. Nothing throws traffic off like one driver all over the road, texting.

But what happens when someone gets out of their lane?

> **2 CHRONICLES 26:16-19** ESV
>
> 16 But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the Lord his God and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. 17 But Azariah the priest went in after him, with eighty priests of the Lord who were men of valor, 18 and they withstood King Uzziah and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the Lord God." 19 Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to burn incense, and when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests in the house of the Lord, by the altar of incense.

Why was it wrong for a king to burn incense? Because in Israel the kingship and the priesthood were distinctly separate. Only two people in the Bible rightly held both offices:

- **Melchizedek**, king of Salem and priest of God Most High, who met Abraham (Genesis 14:18-20). Scripture presents him as "having neither beginning of days nor end of life" (Hebrews 7:3). You have a beginning and an end, so that rules you out.
- **Jesus Christ**, King of kings and "a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 5:6). You are not Jesus, so that rules you out too.

Two lessons from the kings and priests dynamic:

PRIESTS SHOULD NOT BE KINGS.

Illustration: ruined to the ministry. I have some business acumen. I once had one phone conversation with a business owner making two thousand dollars a month, and by the end of the month she was making twenty thousand. Meanwhile I am kicking against the goads (Acts 26:14). I am ruined to the ministry. I eat, breathe and sleep the local church. I can't do anything else.

People mean well when they say, "I know the church is a business." What they usually mean is, "Pastor, we know you have things to handle." But the church is not a business. The church does some business:

we pay staff, pay bills and keep up the building. **The church is the representation of Jesus Christ in the community.**

KINGS SHOULD NOT BE PRIESTS.

Sometimes people get involved in ministry, God uses them fruitfully, and then pride rises: "I know better than the pastor. I know how church works. I know the will of God better than he does." They grow proud, just like Uzziah, who was strong and then "grew proud, to his destruction" (2 Chronicles 26:16).

Azariah probably had little passion for burning incense. It was simply the priest's job, and nobody else could do it. This was not about passion, preference or authority. It was about lanes: the right people in the right lanes.

God will give you exceptional grace in your lane. There is no favor for me when I step out of the thing God has anointed me to do, and there is no favor for you when you step out of the thing God has anointed you to do.

We stay in the right lane. We stay in our lane. I stay in my lane.

Conclusion

Say plainly what this is and what it is not. It is not the pastor taking control. It is getting the whole church into a groove. In a groove, we will reach this city for Jesus Christ. Out of a groove, it is friction after friction and argument after argument.

Illustration: Steve Jobs and the power of focus. In the late 1970s and early 1980s Apple was thriving: the Apple II was a hit, and the Macintosh changed how people thought about computers. By 1997, Apple was losing money, market share and its identity. It was making printers, cameras, PDAs and educational tools: dozens of products, none of them great. When Steve Jobs returned, he asked one question: "What are we doing?" Nobody had a clear answer. So he drew a four-square grid on a whiteboard: a consumer laptop, a pro laptop, a consumer desktop and a pro desktop. That's it. He cut most of Apple's product line. Good ideas were thrown out, not because they were bad, but because they were not the main thing. That focus led to the iPod, the iPod to the iPhone, the iPhone to the iPad. It started with focus. They got back in their lane.

A word to those who feel the cutting. If you have been involved for a long time, a new pastor and a simplified schedule may feel uncomfortable. That is understandable. But we are not cutting just to cut, changing schedules just to change schedules, or simplifying just to simplify. This is addition by subtraction.

- Sometimes you have to do less so you can do more.
- Sometimes you have to go slow so you can go fast.
- Sometimes you have to simplify so you can achieve what God is calling you to do.

Distraction kills churches. Before long, an auxiliary ministry that meets on Tuesday nights controls every decision in the church, and the church cannot move forward. But if we pull back, get focused and get powerful, imagine what ministries could flow out of this church.

This is not an abstract principle. It is a promise from the Word: **the lesser is blessed by the greater.** When we get focused on the mission and see our city saved, we can reach people in the niches and the cracks and in the highways and hedges (Luke 14:23).

If you receive that, give God praise.

OPTIONAL: SALVATION PRAYER

This prayer is in the original notes. It is not in the recording of the message. Use it if you give an invitation.

Dear Jesus, I know that I'm a sinner, and I need a Savior. Today I put my faith in You. I believe You are the Son of God, God in the flesh. I believe You lived a sinless life, died for my sins, and rose again to give me new life. I receive Your forgiveness, and I confess right now: You are the Lord of my life. Thank You for saving me. In Jesus' name, Amen.



ABOUT

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