

It's a classic "riches-to-rags-to-riches" story: Steve Gottry was a successful entrepreneur who, by 1992, had expanded his advertising agency into a multimillion dollar company with 10 employees. He had an airplane, a boat and five cars — living the dream, as it were.

By 1994, the dream had become a nightmare. Gottry nearly lost it all due to a downturn in the economy, bad debts and personal missteps. On top of that, he lost much of his house in a fire and his wife and daughter both had serious health problems. While not quite the story of Job, Gottry's experience was definitely a wake-up call.

Having hit bottom, he decided to go back to basics and retool his life and business according to one simple principle — FANAFI — an acronym for "find a need and fill it." Using that principle as a guide, Gottry was able to build a new business and, as many in this situation are wont to do, write a book about his failure and resurgence: *Common Sense Business: Starting, Operating, and Growing Your Small Business in Any Economy*.

FANAFI is about as simple as it gets: Find a real need that no one else is meeting, meet it effectively, and your venture will grow. Gottry offers several helpful steps in finding and meeting needs — from dreaming to planning to growth and beyond.

FANAFI works for businesses, but as we look at this passage from Acts 1, we can see the principle at work on a global spiritual scale. As Jesus prepared to depart from his disciples, he gave them instruction on how to FANAFI as his representatives on earth. Using a couple of Gottry's common-sense steps, we can tap into Jesus' own strategy.

Begin with a dream. First, says Gottry, all successful ventures begin with a dream — a dream that is envisioned by a leader and shared with others. Dreaming big enables others to see a different future and alter their present to make it a reality.

Jesus had given his disciples a vision — a dream that he called the kingdom of God. The dream seemed to disappear when Jesus was crucified, but on the other side of the empty tomb they now saw what was possible: a people restored and brought to new life through the power of God's saving love.

Jesus had instructed them about the kingdom, and continued to do so in the 40 days after his resurrection (v. 3). This was the vision that had driven Jesus, the central theme of his preaching, the focus of his healing ministry, and the ultimate dream for which he had given his life. With his physical departure imminent, Jesus made sure that his disciples would be driven by the same dream.

But while Jesus saw the kingdom vision as a long-haul process, the disciples were looking for short-term success. "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" they asked him (1:6). God's people had been waiting for centuries for the Messiah, the one who would restore Israel to its former glory, fully return them from exile, and usher in a new age when God would again dwell with them. The disciples' question is one of timing — is it here? Is it now?

Jesus refocuses their vision, reminding them that their energy shouldn't be put into speculation, but into action. "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority" (v. 7). He had told them during of their three-year ministry together that the kingdom of God is "within you." That's why Jesus spent his time teaching the disciples how to live in the present — how to love, heal and change the lives of those around them through the power of his Spirit. That is how the "kingdom within" is shared with others.

But the kingdom, although a *present* reality, was also a *future*, coming experience. Perhaps this is the kingdom about which the disciples now inquired. What a disappointment to be told that the kingdom timetable was none of their business.

Ironically, many Christ followers have continued to expend their energy looking up to heaven, waiting for Christ's return rather than engaging the world around them. When Jesus ascended, the disciples themselves

were standing there staring at the sky until the angels appeared with instructions. The message was clear: They weren't to spend their time looking *up* into heaven, but rather looking *out* at the needs of the world. And like them, we must avoid being "So heavenly minded we're no earthly good."

What the world really needs is hope — a vision of a different present and, even better, an example to follow into a new future. Jesus provided that vision and example in his life and ministry, and continues to call us into that ministry it through the Holy Spirit. If we want to meet the needs of the world and be relevant, vibrant and transformational, then simply following him would be a good place to start. That's what we've been "left behind" to do!

Plan to achieve the dream. Once you've identified a need, says Gottry, planning is the way to fill it. In business, dreams usually don't become realities unless there is some good planning involved. Strategy, tactics and intentionality are not afterthoughts but are the primary structures upon which successful ventures are built.

After giving his disciples a vision and training them for it, Jesus proceeded to give them a plan for making it a reality. He told them to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come upon them, empowering them for the work ahead (1:4-5). That work would involve an outwardly focused strategy of taking the story of Jesus and the vision of the kingdom from a local to a global scale. The disciples themselves took on a new job description in this venture, moving from disciples (followers) to "witnesses" (which, in Greek, is connected to "martyrs"). The students were now becoming the teachers and their focus would begin with telling the story and sharing the vision with the very people who had seen Jesus crucified (Jerusalem), then move out to the surrounding areas (Judea), progressing to even the natural enemies of their people (Samaria) and, ultimately, to the "ends of the earth" (1:8).

The Roman Empire would keep the peace through military force, but ultimately it offered little hope to the conquered people it ruled. Into this vacuum came the church, witnessing to a Jesus who once was dead, but had been raised by the power of God and who now lived so that we, too, could live. It was a radical and subversive message, one that spread rapidly across the empire and, in less than three centuries, conquered the empire itself. Clearly, they had nailed the FANAFI principle, even though it would take a lot of blood, sweat and tears.

Implement the plan. Problem was that when Christianity went from a start-up entrepreneurial venture to the dominant corporate paradigm, the basic FANAFI principle went out the window on an even grander scale than it did for Steve Gottry. In many circles, Christianity still seems to be vying for the rule of the empire, seeking the worldly power of kings and presidents instead of the Holy Spirit power of witnesses and martyrs who give their lives in the troubled places of the world where the powerful don't go. Perhaps it's time we recaptured a simpler vision — a Jesus vision — for transforming the world.

Consider this: If the gospel means "good news," then why is much of the world's news so bad? What would it take to make more good news possible? Whatever it is in your town, your state, this country, in the world, that breaks your heart and the heart of God— that should be your FANAFI focus!

Gottry goes on to talk about the steps of implementation and growth which, for the disciples, become reality on the day of Pentecost as the Holy Spirit empowers them and they see 3,000 added to their number.

The bottom line of that early church entrepreneurial venture is that they had something that people really needed: a story of hope, a plan for loving everyone, and a compelling way of life. What they offered was less a product than a person: Jesus Christ. The world needed the good news about him then and we surely need it now.

So, how will you FANAFI with that good news?

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