

# BIG [VISION]

FOR



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# HAS GOD FORGOTTEN ABOUT THE SMALL PLACES?

Sitting in the Orlando mega-church auditorium that afternoon, Pastor Chris Driver wrestled with that thought. It felt like a legitimate question in context of his surroundings. After all, one year of attendance at his small West Texas Plains church would not even fill this room for one service. His question was not one of theology, but of methodology. **Should small churches merely try to stay alive, or is there something more significant for which to strive?**

The opening session of Exponential 2017 just leveled every leader in the room... in a good way. The challenge to assign a name to the vision for Fifth Street Church growing in his heart was resonating and producing a double-time cadence of hopes and fears all at once. Was it possible that God could have a big vision for his church of 80 attendees? Could it be possible that the gospel could have an epicenter of global impact from Levelland, Texas? Or was vision just for the big churches with huge buildings like this one?

Instead of being overwhelmed, and discouraged yet again, by thoughts of smallness and insignificance, Chris instead leaned into the workshop content. **He refused to accept that a vision for Biblical discipleship requires big numbers and bigger budgets.** Within six months, it became clear in the families of small “6-man” towns across West Texas, that God does have a big vision for small places.

## HAVING A “NEHEMIAH MOMENT”

Chris did not grow up in the church but learned the value of Christ-centered community and disciple-making relationships soon after his conversion at age 14. However, it would not be until a mentor asked Chris to step into a youth ministry position that he began to learn how to disciple another younger believer. Chris learned quickly that very few church leaders, including him, were adequately equipped to transfer a growing faith from generation to generation.

Chris, like other young seminarians his age, assumed that discipleship is a matter of making the programs work better, and the church grow bigger. The real problem was that he has seen churches grow numerically but remain shallow, bigoted and immature spiritually. **Chris had experienced lasting transformation, an ongoing renewal of the inner man, not in a program, but only through purposeful and biblical discipleship.** To him, it seemed that the most consistent examples of this one-on-one relationship-driven work always seemed to be happening on the mission field.

Chris and his family wrestled with a calling to the mission fields of Ecuador and soon learned that their resulting “all-in” commitment to follow God would not be to go to the fields of South America, but to the plains of West Texas. Chris obeyed God’s call to go back to his hometown of Levelland. The city’s name said it all. And, the congregation of 50 at Fifth Street Baptist Church would prove to be the setting for what Chris calls his “Nehemiah 1:4 Moment.”



## HOLY DISCONTENT FINDS A HOME

The moment happened just as Chris' son had started playing high school football in Levelland. The schools his son played each week contained student populations so small that their football teams could only field six players at a time. Many schools didn't even have more than a dozen players total. These "6-Man Football" towns proved to be small places with even smaller, aging churches. Few of the leaders in these towns, if any at all, had any vision beyond just keeping the lights on and the doors unlocked for one more Sunday. It seemed to Chris that doing any so-called "real" ministry, having any significant impact or influence outside the church walls, remained a commodity reserved only for the larger churches in bigger cities that were hundreds of miles away.

With each 6-Man game in the next town, Chris could not escape the comfort-robbing voice of God asking him, **"Who will reach these small places?"** To compound frustrations, every denominational revitalization effort Chris explored seemed to focus on starting or renewing churches in places that looked different from these wind-swept South Plains towns. There just didn't seem to be a plan or a model to reach the people in the small places where he watched football each week.

God showed Chris, in those first moments of Exponential 2017, that He had a big dream for those small places across West Texas. It was in that first workshop where Chris found a framework to illustrate and articulate this picture of gospel transformation in these 6-Man towns. **Auxano's visionary planning tool, the Horizon Storyline, finally gave his holy discontent a home. Here he found a model that allowed him to plan and dream but didn't require thousands of people or dollars.**



## THE POWER OF A PICTURE

Returning to Levelland, Chris worked with a few key leaders to develop a long-range vision for their church. The team named God's big vision for this small place as their **"100 by One Hundred"** calling. By the Fifth Street Baptist Church's 100th birthday they desire to see the families in 100 small 6-Man communities revitalized and transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Every time Chris would go on to share this 100 by One Hundred picture, he saw leaders grow in excitement, and even more important, take steps of personal engagement. In those moments he discovered a vital church leadership lesson applicable no matter a congregation's size: Transformation requires clear and compelling vision.

**Despite all of his sermon planning and program managing, Chris never realized that people were starving to be about something more significant than week-to-week ministry.** Until this 100 by One Hundred vision took shape, he never realized how important a clear picture of God's better future was to the daily obedience to every person in the pew. It was in this season of discovery that Chris became convinced that disciples could not be made in yet-another class, but only through visionary one-another moments.



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## BIG VISION FOR SMALL PLACES

Almost immediately God began opening doors and stories of life change started happening. A house church in a town of 100 people just north of Levelland quickly drew more than 40 people each week. Another farmer, who for more than four years had hosted teens – and eventually their parents – in a weekly Bible study found connection and resourcing beyond his town of 120 residents. It did not take long for small gatherings of people in nearby “6-Man” towns to catch the 100 by One Hundred vision and commit to partner in the 100 by One Hundred calling. All across the hot, dry South Plains of West Texas, God’s big vision sprung up green and lush in small places.

Fifth Street Church also now feels a fresh wind of purpose. People are not just looking to neighboring towns but to neighborhoods right next door to the church. A new burden to reach Levelland drives the engine of gospel passion in her people. Sunday morning worship now fuels disciple-making, sending people out into every-day difference making, rather than merely drawing them into a weekly moment. Fifth Street’s leadership are growing in their commitment to only do ministry that can be reproduced in small places without the need for big facilities or big finances.

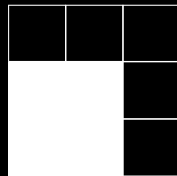
Pastor Chris knows that Fifth Street is not “there” yet, but remains confident that his church grows each day committed to head in the right direction. He knows, with unwavering confidence, that “small matters.” Chris is leading dozens of other leaders to see that seemingly insignificant 6-Man West Texas towns are capable of seeing a significant impact.

**God has not forgotten about the small church, He just desires big obedience more than big attendance. He waits for humble servant leaders like Pastor Chris Driver to submit their ways to the Lord. And God longs for more congregations like Fifth Street, willing to sacrifice personal comforts, in pursuit of His big vision for small places.**





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