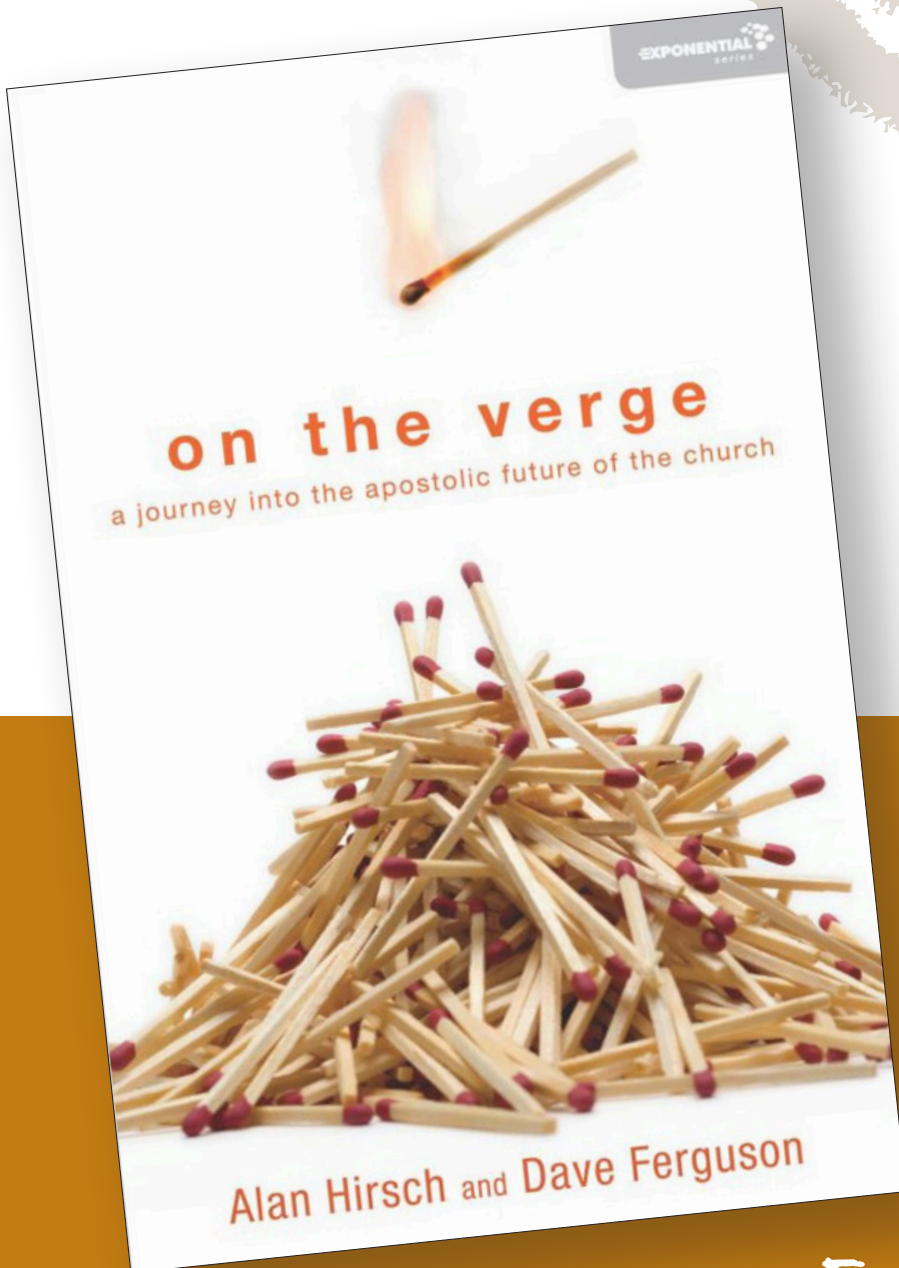


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On the Verge | *Alan Hirsch, Dave Ferguson*

On the Verge: A Journey Into the Apostolic Future of the Church
Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 2011. 348 pages.

The church in the U.S. is facing a twofold problem:

Strategic Problem—The majority of churches in the US are using a model of church designed to reach 40 percent (and declining) of the American population. This leaves around 60 percent (and climbing) of the American population outside the reach of the local church.

Missionary Problem—The church of Jesus in America has forgotten its call to be a “sent” people. Without a sending competency and capacity, the mission will never be accomplished. If we are to reach that 60 percent segment, it means that every Christ follower is a “sent” person with a missionary call on his or her life.

The reality is, if we expect more variations of the prevailing practices to reach into increasingly de-churched and unchurched populations, we are fooling ourselves.

We are all competing in the known church space for diminishing returns while the majority of the population remains largely unreached. It’s time for value innovation, the creation of innovative new expressions of ministry to reach the unreached and unchurched.

Adopting what authors Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson call a “Verge” paradigm requires learning what it means to become a more fluid, adaptive, reproducible, viral people-movement.

In other words, it means taking seriously the idea that the church Jesus built – and therefore what he intended – is meant to be more of a movement than a religious institution. The New Testament church is movemental to the core, and is inherently critical of highly institutionalized religion.

Most of us mistake the forms, theology, and models of church for the church itself.

We understand intellectually that the church isn’t a building but a people. Unfortunately, our language and actions betray what we really think. We understand the word church in the context of its formal structures and institutions, rather than as dynamically located in the people of God. God clearly permits – and society needs – structure and some form of institution, but it is definitely not what the Bible means when it talks about *ecclesia*, which is the main biblical term and dynamic of *church*.

In Verge church thinking, we must recognize it’s precisely this central paradigm of the institutional church that must be dislodged if we are going to become a viral movement in our day.

On the Verge | *Alan Hirsch, Dave Ferguson (cont'd)*

The new paradigm of apostolic movement as described by Hirsch and Ferguson is the “conVergence” of three distinct ways of thinking about church:

- **Church-growth theory** – maximizing traditional ecclesiology and organizing the church around its evangelistic function
- **Exponential thinking** – applying the emerging science of idea-viruses and tipping points to ecclesiology, stimulating church-planting efforts
- **Incarnational missiology**– requires reorienting the entire church around the primarily outward focus of mission, recontextualizing the church into different subcultures

On the Verge has four main sections:

- 1. Imagine** – rethinking what we mean by church
- 2. Shift** – activating apostolic movement, vision, and philosophy
- 3. Innovate** – practicing the dynamics of genuine innovation



Imagine *Marx was right: religion is the opiate of the masses. Religious institutions dull people to their responsibilities as disciples of Jesus. Wake up.*

Churches need to reframe their understandings through a different lens, an alternative story, if we want to move beyond the limitations of the prevailing paradigm that clearly dominates our current approach to leadership and church.

Telling a different story means reframing the central story that defines our understanding of church. It’s time for a paradigm shift of what it means to be a church.

The paradigm (systems story, ecclesial genetic code, organizational brain, etc.) is made up of the following:

1. Unspoken assumptions and beliefs that over time take on the power of controlling myths or codes.
2. Primary metaphors we use to describe ourselves (body of Christ, church as organism, family of God, local fellowship, and so on).
3. A working model: the protocols, policies, and templates that guide behavior and choices (clearly the most visible/explicit part of the paradigm).
4. Manifestations of the organizational culture, composed of rituals, symbols, language, power arrangements, and so on.

It’s important for the Verge process to note that it’s futile trying to change the church, or a denomination, without first changing the paradigm or genetic codes that guide it.

On the Verge | *Alan Hirsch, Dave Ferguson (cont'd)*

Verge church thinking therefore is first and foremost an exercise in a distinctively apostolic imagination – we have to (re)imagine the church in light of its apostolic design and imperative.

Paradigm shifting, which is what is required to become an authentic apostolic movement, involves the following stages:

- **Structure/normalcy.** We begin with a well-established paradigm, a captured or closed imagination that dominates the thinking/consciousness of the scientific philosophy of a period.
- **Anomalies.** An increasing sense of anomaly develops from within the paradigm, a feeling that something is wrong.
- **Crisis.** Slowly a growing recognition is made by more and more people that something is basically wrong in the prevailing conception of things. Eventually a tipping point is reached, and the trickle becomes a flood.
- **Transition/restructuring.** A new paradigm begins to emerge, most often with opposition by those who still hold strongly to the established paradigm.

The fundamental job of apostolic imagination is to produce out of the church we now experience a vision of the church Jesus wants us to experience.

Developing an authentic apostolic movement provides answers to the two problems listed above.

- Answering the Strategic Problem: The church needs ecclesial innovation inspired by King Jesus, incarnational mission, and living systems – all dedicated to creatively activating disciples. This is the answer to the infertile sameness of the prevailing forms.
- Answering the Missionary Problem: Reimagining church to unleash all of God’s people as missional agents of the King, commissioned to represent him in every sphere and domain of society.

Since we are all made in the image of God, we have the ability to be imaginatively creative and rediscover the alternative story that has the power to move us forward into God’s future.

2

Shift

Initiating and developing discipling movements – and even more so, reframing existing organizations as movements – is likely to require some serious change management.

Verge church thinking is inherently systemic in nature, and therefore it is critical that you keep your eye on the whole while focusing on any of the singular elements.

The process of becoming an apostolic movement ought to be holistic and should be applied system wide. Each of the following six elements, if successfully applied, will bring the church closer to the kind of church Jesus designed in the first place.

On the Verge | *Alan Hirsch, Dave Ferguson (cont'd)*

Six Elements of Apostolic Genius

Assuming God's presence and activity, where the six elements come together and begin to create and inform a Christian organization, apostolic movement appears to be inevitable.

- *Jesus is Lord* – the spiritual heart and theological soul of apostolic movements. It requires that we take Jesus with all seriousness in every possible way.
- *Disciple-making* – the way Jesus lives his life through us, and the way in which a missional ethos is embedded throughout the organization. Essentially, it is a process of being apprenticed to Jesus.
- *Apostolic environment* – how the church's ministry is expressed in at least five forms, allowing for growth and movement.
- *Missional-incarnational impulse* – the ways in which the church follows the missional God in its engagement with the world. The primary issue is how we engage culture and extend the mission of God through his people.
- *Organic systems* – the way decentralized movements are set in motion and then subsequently organized. Ministry is reconfigured to incorporate more reproductive, fluid, and adaptive forms of church and church organization.
- *Communitas* – the type of community that forms in the context of spiritual challenge, adventure, and risk. The primary issue is overcoming the risk averseness of prevailing forms of church.

The six elements listed above can be likened to the genetic code of the apostolic movement. In the same way that a body needs more than the genetic code to take shape, the apostolic movement needs an operating system to work.

This operating system is best expressed as an ethos, or culture, of a community and people. To develop ethos, you will need to consciously do the following:

1. Identify and Develop Beliefs – the process of learning to believe rightly isn't automatic; it needs to be a deliberate, in-depth engagement with God through the Bible and in relation to context.
2. Formulate Values – values should be made explicit and then sorted as to their relative weight and significance.
3. Develop a Verge Vocabulary – if you can shape the various conversations that go on in the community, you can shape the culture.
4. Identify Movemental Heroes/Exemplars – everyday heroes are the embodiment and carriers of change, especially when empowered by the esteem of leadership.
5. Reward Verge-Consistent Behavior – telling the stories of success of those who are living in a way that is consistent with the vision and ethos of the church.
6. BrandYour Movement – having to do with how you want to be known by those coming into contact with your church.
7. Set Measurement Criteria – what constitutes success or failure for your movement?

On the Verge | *Alan Hirsch, Dave Ferguson (cont'd)*

When you mix these beliefs, values, language, identity, heroes, symbols, ritual, and measurements together, you create a very distinct culture – and culture is what people interact with.

Any church engaging the Verge process needs to utilize tools that will ruthlessly evaluate where their current context is at, what are the current beliefs, values, vocabulary, and so on, and hold the results up against the model of the apostolic genius.

3

Innovate

If you really want to see innovation happen, find a crisis. It's in the middle of a crisis that we come to the realization that either the end is near or a new future is being born.

Nine Characteristics of Out-of-the-Box Cultures

1. **Beta, Not Better** – Verge churches aren't content with a better version of church; they want to see movement that continually engages new cultural contexts with the gospel and see new, innovative forms of mission emerge.
2. **Trusting and Trustworthy** – Verge churches are often composed of people who assume the best of one another and move forward with complete confidence in each other.
3. **Permission is Assumed and Forgiveness is Expected** – Verge churches have created cultures where the staff has permission to spend money, allocate resources, make decisions, and schedule their time – it never occurs to them that ministry or mission is something that needs to get approval.
4. **Hurry Up...Wait** – Verge churches place a high value on accomplishment through collaboration, but they also find ways to make time for solitude.
5. **Fail Forward Fast** – Verge churches create a culture with a new hero system that honors those who risk the most.
6. **Love the Edge** – Verge churches feel the most comfortable on the edge, at the point of the next and newest missional engagement.
7. **They Put Their Money Where Your Mouth Is!** – Verge churches apply stakeholding principles and invest their best people and resources in their greatest opportunities.
8. **Everyone Gets to Play** – Verge churches have cultures in which the next great idea can come from anyone, and believe that God has a great idea about how to use everyone.
9. **No R&D Department** – Verge churches consider everyone to be the research and development department for the Kingdom of God. Getting it wrong means they are one experiment closer to getting it right.

On the Verge | *Alan Hirsch, Dave Ferguson (cont'd)*

Turning Ideas into I.D.E.A.s	
Step 1: Investigate: "I" Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does your current context look like – what do you know, what don't you know? • What are the needs in this context? • What are the strengths of this context? • What does it look like to be good news in that setting?
Step 2: Design: "D" Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the future look like if the problems are solved or this strength is accentuated? • What other ideas like this exist that we can learn from? • What is the best way we can do this? • What can we pilot quickly, with little risk, to test our idea?
Step 3: Experiment: "E" Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you test the idea? • What do you expect will happen during the experiment? • What is the scope of the impact, and how will you measure it? • How will you know if your idea is successful?
Step 4: Adjust: "A" Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What worked and why? • What didn't work, and why? • What adjustments must be made? • What is the plan for redesigning?

The beauty of the I.D.E.A. loop is that it can apply to any context and any church, thus opening up everyday innovation to every person.



Move

The solution to the strategic and missionary problem is apostolic movement. It's going to take a missional church plus missional people to make a missional movement.

Using the Verge process as a guide for gaining missional movement, here is a three-move change process:

Imagine (See It)

The first priority in mobilizing for mission has to be the redemption of the imagination. We must help people think creatively about how to accomplish the mission of Jesus. There are many well-meaning followers who are stuck in existing paradigms and don't know what they don't know. If people can't see it, they can't believe it, and if they can't believe it, they will never do it. What they need is imagination.

On the Verge | *Alan Hirsch, Dave Ferguson (cont'd)*

4 Ways of Engaging Imagination

1. **Modeling** – the best way for people to see it is for leaders to be it
2. **Pilots** – bring together groups of people and encourage them to experiment with new missional endeavors
3. **Stories** – stories give people a picture of what could be
4. **Heroes** – point to Jesus first, then to folks who are willing to take risks and step out in missional engagement

Shift (Get It)

Once the people in a church are able to see it in their mind's eye, the need to get it in their head and heart. You know that people are starting to get it when they understand God has sent them. While making this shift, they will begin demonstrating they get it by living it out. They aren't yet integrating mission into everyday rhythms and routines of life, but it is showing up from time to time in their life.

3 Proven Approaches for Gaining Missional Momentum

1. Ordain every Christ follower – find creative ways to give your people biblical *language* that affirms their calling and license in the form of full permission from the leadership to whom they have submitted.
2. Utilize symbols – symbols and symbolic actions are powerful devices for keeping the culture of a movement strong.
3. Standing Ovations – if you want to know what a group values, notice what gets spontaneous applause. Intentionally recognize people who can tell their stories of how God had sent them and was using them to make an impact in their workplace, neighborhoods, etc.

Innovate (Do It)

This third phase moves a church beyond imagining or understanding toward every believer living out the dream that God has for his or her life. Each person is now, on a daily basis, thinking and behaving like one sent by God.

3 Key Descriptors of an Innovative Leader

1. A Verge leader leads from the front, not the back – when you lead from the front, every decision you make and every action you take is for the sake of the mission.
2. A Verge leader leads with curiosity, not with certainty – leading with the crystal-clear vision of a general while maintaining the curiosity of a child will foster innovation.
3. A Verge leader leads with a Yes and asks how later – yes is not a blank check but it simply means you really do believe that what is being described is needed, and that by using the giftedness of the people, with God's help it could be accomplished.

The three phases of the Verge process will be repeated over and over again. Like a flywheel, with every rotation of the See It, Get It, Do It process, believers see the mission of Jesus move forward with greater and greater force until the cumulative force of their momentum is an exponential apostolic movement.

On the Verge | *Alan Hirsch, Dave Ferguson (cont'd)*

On the Verge is an attempt to point toward a new, and yet remarkably ancient, vision of the church as apostolic movement. Unless the potency of this way of being “Jesus’ people” is accessed, the sad decline of Christianity will continue.

There is hope, though, because the apostolic genius is already latent in the people of God and ought not to be something so foreign to us that we can’t recover it. We as much have to **remember** it as activate it.

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Recommended Resources

1. **Read** a post by Auxano Founder and Team Leader Will Mancini on a conversation he had with *On the Verge* author Alan Hirsch on “movement making.”
2. **Watch** this brief video clip of *On the Verge* author Alan Hirsh on the topic “What is a missional church?”
3. **Read** highlights of a conversation between *On The Verge* author Alan Hirsch and Mike Breen, leader of the 3DM organization.
4. **Download** the introduction and Chapter One of *On the Verge* from the publisher.

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Go Ahead Actions for Vision Clarity

by Jim Randall

Vision Clarity Connection

I have found that there is a fine line between having clarity and acting with clarity, and very few church leaders achieve a level of clarity in action. The church world is full of well-intentioned thoughts and great ideas.

However, nothing is more motivating than seeing results, and you cannot get results without taking action. This is why so many of our churches are plateaued and dying. They are simply no longer missional, and their people are no longer acting on mission.

As the authors reveal, “the ‘Verge’ paradigm requires learning what it means to become a more fluid, adaptive, reproducible, viral people-movement.” The key to this people-movement is a leader’s ability to move people to action.

Go Ahead

So how do you become a more fluid, action-oriented leader? You must crystalize a change process for your church. Verge introduces a simple intuitive three-move change process that should become rhythmic in your leadership.

Here are three action-oriented questions for your next senior leadership meeting.

Imagine (See it) – *If people can’t see it, they can’t believe it, and if they can’t believe it, they will never do it.*

What if? Using sticky notes, ask the “what if?” question surrounding a single idea. For example: “What if” questions help articulate blue sky ideas that are thought provoking and ministry shaping. Place the ideas on a wall using sticky notes. While there will be many ideas on the wall, focus your attention on the one objective that you would most like to see accomplished.

Shift (Get it) – *Once the people in the church are able to see it in their mind’s eye, they need to get it in their head and heart.*

What now? Develop a simple process or image of involvement toward your objective. This ministry shaping design will help leadership get what you are trying to accomplish and how they are to respond. For example: “What now” instructs people to deploy and disciple through missional communities? Be creative with your own model.

Innovate (Do it) – *Move your church beyond imagining or understanding toward every believer living out the dream that God has for his or her life.*

What next? It is critical to show progress toward your desired objective. For example: “What next” reveals the empirical data of increased involvement in missional communities and elevated stories of life change from participants.

Even if it’s just the smallest move toward your ultimate goal, your ultimate challenge, your ultimate contribution, take immediate action now! Go ahead get moving!



More About Jim Randall

As Chief Management Officer and Lead Navigator for Auxano, Jim Randall has guided churches all over the country as a “vision strategist.” After serving as the primary developer of ministries at a 2000 attendee church, Jim became one of the founding officers of Auxano in 2004.

Jim’s expertise lies with developing ministries based upon clarified vision. He brings a breadth of leadership and church growth knowledge from his proficiency of coaching senior pastors and multiple church staffs in the vision arena, especially around organizational clarity, ministry alignment, and team synergy. Jim has demonstrated achievement as a strategic thinker with a unique ability to bring a group of people to a deep sense of personal ownership and passion.

His education includes a Master of Arts in Religious Education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a B.S. in Religion from Liberty University. Jim lives in Merritt Island, FL, with his wife, Jane, and son, Jared.

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