

**Leading Gateway to be a Leading Edge Church**

**Don Brock, Speaker**

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Chris Reinolds:

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Chris Reinolds:

Hosts for this week's episode are George Bullard, strategic leadership coach and executive director with the Columbia Metro Baptist Association, and I'm Chris Reinolds, certified church consultant and lead pastor at Kilian Baptist Church. Joining us this week is Don Brock, pastor at Gateway Baptist Church in Irmo, South Carolina. Gateway began as a vision of Eau Claire Baptist Church to reach the fast-growing Irmo community. From 1975 to today, Gateway exists to reach the unreached that God has placed around them. Over four decades later, they've planted five churches, sent hundreds to national and international mission fields and become a leading edge church in reaching people for Jesus.

George Bullard:

Don, we're glad to have you today as a part of our podcast experience.

Don Brock:

Well, thank you George. I'm excited to be a part of this and I'm excited about the things that I see happening on our associational level, and I appreciate your leadership in doing that.

George Bullard:

Well, thank you very much. You have a great journey and a long-term journey with Gateway and we do put you in the category of a leading edge church in terms of the fact that to whom much is given, much is required in terms of expectations of how you will be impacting the kingdom. I know that it's so great how you impact the kingdom, not only in the Columbia metropolitan area but worldwide by some of your involvements. We'd like to get into that maybe a little bit later, but give us kind of the heritage of Gateway. How has Gateway gotten to be where it is a resourcing church and has so much of a good kingdom impact?

Don Brock:

I love the story of how Gateway started in that it wasn't a church split or a bunch of people got mad and left. It was an intentional church plant by Eau Claire Baptist. Here's a story I didn't know until we relocated and had a groundbreaking ceremony, and one of the Eau Claire people came who was an intricate part of the founding of Gateway. He told me the story, he said, "The day that we were going to vote to start Gateway, the pastor called us into the back room and said, "Y'all might want to delay this vote because I'm going to be resigning today." And those men told their pastor, "Well, we're sad to see you go, but this church plant is not about you."

Chris Reinolds:

Wow.

Don Brock:

And they voted overwhelmingly to do it.

George Bullard:

That's great.

Chris Reinolds:

That's good.

George Bullard:

If you can do it, that's great.

Don Brock:

And I admired that vision that it was beyond a single individual, and coming full circle, I'm actually now the field supervisor for the current pastor of Eau Claire Baptist while he's doing his DMin at one of our universities. So it's really exciting to be full circle with that.

George Bullard:

Yes. Well that's great.

Chris Reinolds:

That's incredible. So initially you got there in the early 90s?

Don Brock:

1992.

Chris Reinolds:

Right. So they had already, the church itself had experienced a lot up to that point. But what were some of the necessary steps that you had to take as I assume this wasn't your first church?

Don Brock:

No, I was a youth minister for 12 years and then I went to seminary so I could find out what I was doing. My wife and I had been praying that we would go to a church and spend our life there.

Chris Reinolds:

Right.

Don Brock:

This was God's answer to that.

Chris Reinolds:

That's incredible.

Don Brock:

When I arrived at Gateway, I'm the second pastor. The church was growing, they were reaching people. But then there was a moral meltdown in the life of the pastor. So the church was devastated and the church was hurting. When I got there, I knew I had two choices. I knew I could either immediately start growing the church or take the harder route and spend a couple of years examining the core foundation of the church, seeing what was fractured, what needed to be fixed, seeing what was wrong and needed to be replaced and shoring up what was already excellent.

That was like a two to three year process and it was a hard process and we had to dig down deep into the foundation of the church and there were some things that were not healthy and we dealt with it. Made a lot of difficult decisions. Sometimes I felt like I was absolutely alone, but God kept a core group of guys around me to encourage me. After that two to three year process, it's like a light switch came on and then the church just exploded in growth and we were growing exponentially at that point. Then our growth started slowing down a little bit and people started asking me, "Why are we slowing down in our growth?" And I just simply said, "Look around, people have discovered that this is a growing area and there are church plants everywhere, and that's a good thing."

Chris Reinolds:

Yeah, it is.

Don Brock:

So we're not going to grow as fast, but we're still growing. But we can be excited about these church planters all around us and we can pray for them. I encouraged our people, we started a pattern in the church. I said, "Every time you drive by a church that is a God-honoring, bible-believing church and is serving the Lord, you need to pray for that church and you need to pray for that pastor by name." I wanted to establish that mindset that we're all on the same team.

Chris Reinolds:

Right.

Don Brock:

So we're not in competition with these other churches. So I'm fine that the growth slowed down because I knew growth was happening in the kingdom in that community.

Chris Reinolds:

So where was Gateway at approximately, attendance wise, whenever you first got there?

Don Brock:

It was under 200.

Chris Reinolds:

The reason why I asked the question is intentional, because a lot of pastors, they come into a church, it's running underneath 200 and from a statistic standpoint, even in the early 90s early to mid-90s, you're looking at an average tenure in churches of those sizes of about five, seven years. Usually they start looking after year number three, because things are just going rough. It's difficult because they're trying to do that groundwork that's necessary. How did you find the endurance to continue that necessary groundwork when you did feel all alone and you just didn't want to throw up your hands and be done?

Don Brock:

Right. I tell you what, at some crucial moments, I don't know if it was God testing me and stretching me or Satan tempting me.

Chris Reinolds:

Right.

Don Brock:

But I had some extremely large churches encourage, wanting me to come and consider being their pastor. God just gave me a peace about that, that wasn't his will for my life. I truly believed and held to that God had called me to a lifetime ministry at Gateway. So I would not even entertain the idea. I would not even go meet with them. I would not send a resume because I didn't want to be tempted.

Chris Reinolds:

Right.

Don Brock:

I would rather, because reality is regardless of the size of the church, every church has their issues.

Chris Reinolds:

Oh yeah, absolutely.

Don Brock:

It's just different names, different people, same problems. I'm sitting there going, "Why just go exchange one set of problems for another? I'd rather stay here, invest and make this what it needs to be." That was a conscious decision not to allow myself to be tempted to go to another church.

Chris Reinolds:

That's good.

George Bullard:

How did you know that Gateway needed to relocate from where it was? What were the factors there?

Don Brock:

We were out of space. The land around us was not available. And through our study we became pretty convinced it would never be available anytime soon. The proof in the pudding is, we relocated 13 years ago and that land is still not available. So we were right in that we didn't need to wait it out. So we started looking and we spent two years looking for property and we put a bid on two different properties and the doors shut and we're thankful that they shut.

The property we wound up buying was not even available, and it was owned by SCANA. We contacted them and said, "Hey, you got 60 acres of land up their on Lake Murray, and we'd like to buy that." And they said, "It's not going to happen. It's not for sale." And we said, "Okay." We came back a month later and said, "We'll give you a million dollars for 60 acres." And they laughed. They said, "You got to be kidding. That's ridiculous."

George Bullard:

On the Lake.

Don Brock:

On the Lake. A month later we went back again and just said, "Hey, we'll still give you a million dollars." And they said, "Okay."

George Bullard:

Wow.

Chris Reinolds:

Wow.

Don Brock:

And we were like, "Wow, that's crazy." But because they were publicly held, they had to put it out for bids and they contacted one of the local builders, Stewart Mungo, who's a friend, and Stewart had wanted to build a bank next to our other church. He came to me and said, "Hey, you got a road down the side of this property, can I have right of way on that road?" And we said, "Absolutely, no problem." He said, "All right, well, how much do I have to pay you?" I said, "Well, we're not going to charge you anything." He said, "No, you should." Then we said, "No, we shouldn't. We want to be good neighbors and so you can have it." He was just blown away that we didn't try and get money out of him.

So SCANA called Stewart and he told me this, he called him and said, "Hey, we got this 60 acres of land you ought to build on it." He said, "Is that the property that Don and Gateway want?" They said, "Well, yeah." He said, "You had better sell it to him and not offer it to anybody else." And I thought, well praise God.

George Bullard:

It comes back.

Chris Reinolds:

That's great.

Don Brock:

Then we turned around and sold four acres for almost $400,000 so we got 56 acres of land for $600,000.

Chris Reinolds:

That's incredible.

Don Brock:

Crazy.

Chris Reinolds:

That's incredible.

George Bullard:

That's phenomenal.

Chris Reinolds:

How many years in before y'all started looking for property, how many years had you been there?

Don Brock:

Let's see. We relocated in 2007. I've been there since '92 we bought the property in 2004 I think. So it would have been about eight years that we finally got to the conclusion we were not going to be able to grow any more where we were.

Chris Reinolds:

Right. So you pretty much set up a culture of, "Hey, we need to do what's necessary in order to continue reaching people with the gospel."

Don Brock:

That's right, and what had happened is the growth had shifted. When I first arrived there, we were in the center of the growth and eight years later we were on the edge of the growth. By moving to this property, it put us back in the center of the growth. So that was the... Geographics had a lot to do with it.

Chris Reinolds:

Okay.

George Bullard:

Let me ask a strategic question because I think our audience would love to hear you speak into it. There are all kinds of choices at that point when you run out of room, one of them is to start another campus somewhere. Another one is maybe to plant a new church where the growth is occurring. Why did relocation become the one you felt like God was calling you all to do?

Don Brock:

Well, we had already planted two churches at that point. We planted an African American church and we planted another church. The plan was that the churches would locate near us. But what our process was, we would hire the church planter first before we would choose a location. Then we would let the church planter choose the location. Both of them wound up choosing to go to the Northeast side of town. My first gut reaction was, I don't really want that, but if I believe that they're called to be the church planter, I've got to trust them, and what God is saying to them. So we absolutely supported them in that.

Chris Reinolds:

That's good.

Don Brock:

So we did plant the churches but not around there. But we did intentionally start supporting church planters that were coming to the area. I was not onboard with the multi-site thing. I have nothing against it. I just knew it wasn't for me. I mean that's just that simple.

George Bullard:

Yeah.

Don Brock:

I just didn't think it was for me. I've got a lot of friends that do it and I love what they do and we looked at maybe doing a Saturday night or another night service. I didn't want to destroy our staff in the process.

Chris Reinolds:

Right.

Don Brock:

I cared about them. So I chose not to go in that direction.

George Bullard:

Okay. No, I think that's good to hear the insight because there's always a thought process and everybody sometimes just picks up on the newest thing that's happening or whatever, but there needs to be a strong sense of God's calling and fitting the gifts and skills of the staff leadership and the church.

Don Brock:

Right.

Chris Reinolds:

Right. So one of the biggest hurdles for a lot of the things you did and continue to do was your leadership structure. There may be pastors out there that are listening to this and saying, "Man, I would love to do some of these things, but I just don't know that my leadership structure is going to support it." How would you encourage those guys? What happened in your circumstance that really allowed the freedom to be in making these intentional and kingdom-building movements?

Don Brock:

That's a great question, and that's not an easy one to do and it's not an easy one to navigate through, because you only have so much blood to shed. I'm afraid too many guys shed blood on minor molehills rather than saving it for the big mountain. So if you cash in all your chips on the little stuff, you don't have anything left for the big stuff. So I'm very intentional about where I'm willing to shed blood.

Chris Reinolds:

Right.

Don Brock:

You know what I mean by that?

Chris Reinolds:

I do.

Don Brock:

But first thing I did, I talked to several guys who had relocated their churches. One of them was Dick Lincoln at Shandon Baptist. I still remember to this day exactly what he said, he said, "Don, people are going to vote in three ways. They're going to vote with their hands, they're going to vote with their checkbooks, but they're also going to vote with their feet." He was exactly right because we had a 97% vote to relocate, which that's massive.

Chris Reinolds:

Yeah. That's great.

Don Brock:

That's great. Financially we had great pledges and all the money came in. We were great about that. But when we actually relocated some voted with their feet and some did not stay with us in the journey. That surprised us, caught us off guard because the vote was so strong and I made a couple of strategic mistakes in that I probably made too many changes in some structure and some people just couldn't adjust to that.

Chris Reinolds:

Right.

Don Brock:

So we did lose a percentage. It didn't affect us financially and so I was thankful for that.

George Bullard:

Makes sense.

Don Brock:

But God replaced those leaders pretty quick. And that crowd that left, only maybe two were actual what I would call leaders that had key leadership role or had the influence of a leader in the church. But I'm still buddies with those people.

Chris Reinolds:

That's good.

Don Brock:

It wasn't a nasty, mean thing. I think that when people choose to walk out the door, I try to give them a blessing instead of a curse. I want them to be able to go and serve in the kingdom someplace else effectively and not go away with the guilt or whatever. I have to intentionally not hang on to the hurt. I want to tell you, any pastor says it doesn't hurt his feelings when people leave, they're lying.

George Bullard:

They're lying.

Don Brock:

Because-

George Bullard:

They lie about other things, too.

Don Brock:

Because as a pastor, you feel a personal rejection.

George Bullard:

Right.

Don Brock:

They've abandoned me, they've walked away from me and God had to help me with that and say, "Don, you just got to get over it because it's happened to me many times."

Chris Reinolds:

Yeah.

Don Brock:

It happened to Jesus.

George Bullard:

That's right.

Don Brock:

So that's what helped me was just understanding what our Lord went through.

Chris Reinolds:

That's good.

George Bullard:

So Don, describe Gateway today and the expanse and depth of its ministry.

Don Brock:

Well gateway is as healthy as it's ever been. Financially we're extremely strong. Leadership wise, we have amazing leaders. I'm amazed. One thing I appreciate about Gateway is that people can quickly come into the church and find a place of ministry and even shift into leadership roles. You don't have to be born in the church to have those roles. So I'm very thankful for that atmosphere. Some of our key leaders today are people that have come to the church since we relocated.

Don Brock:

Now I've got some amazing leaders that have been with us since I've been at Gateway and I love those people dearly. They have stuck with me and the church through thick and thin.

Chris Reinolds:

That's good.

Don Brock:

They have just been wonderful and I love those people, but I love the fact that they don't have this mentality of, "This is my church." You know? They welcome these new people in. So I'm very thankful for that. So we create a leadership pipeline that allows people to find their giftedness and experiment with that giftedness, try different ministries. If it doesn't work, quit it, go do something else. So there's a very freeing aspect of that.

Don Brock:

So we help people to find their spiritual gifts and we plug them in, they use their spiritual gifts and then people get excited. They feel fulfilled when they're using their spiritual gift.

Chris Reinolds:

Right.

Don Brock:

So that makes us very healthy.

Chris Reinolds:

That's good.

Don Brock:

We're very involved internationally. I'm out of the country twice a year. We send mission teams out. Judy is our missions director. She does a phenomenal job. When our people go on mission trips, she has them so prepared, so well-trained and they come back and the leaders say, "This was the best group we've ever had because they didn't come for an expanded vacation, they came to do stuff and they were ready."

Don Brock:

We're doing a lot of church planting overseas. I'm chairman of the board of Crossover Global and we are planting churches in Muslim countries. Right now as of the first of this year, we have planted over 2000 churches in Muslim countries and in some Hindu areas. Our goal over the next five years is to plant 4,000 more church.

George Bullard:

Wow.

Don Brock:

Now. These are home churches, understand. Our people get so excited about that. The Sunday before Christmas this last year, I got to be in Azerbaijan, which is a Muslim country, but it's not a radical country. We had the first in the history of the country, the first Christmas Christian worship service that was public.

George Bullard:

Wow, that's great.

Don Brock:

Over a thousand people came and half of them were Muslims.

Chris Reinolds:

Wow.

Don Brock:

Now, I wasn't going to miss that. I was going to be there for that. It doesn't get any better than that. We had four government officials there to be a part of it, and they were all Muslims. It was amazing to see what God is doing.

George Bullard:

That is wonderful.

Chris Reinolds:

Well, let me ask you this. In your little notepad that's in your office that you keep in a drawer that you have plans for the future where you want to see the church in the next five, 10 years, as Gateway being a leading edge church, where do you see Gateway going and what do you see it accomplishing?

Don Brock:

That's a very thought provoking question, and it's one that I think about 24/7, and it's always evolving. I would say I want us to always be more and more a kingdom-minded church. I mentor a lot of pastors and I'm helping our staff to do the same thing with their counterparts and other churches. I want us to be a part of helping other churches to be healthy.

Chris Reinolds:

Right.

Don Brock:

I want to just be more efficient in helping people to grow. You know the Rick Warren baseball diamond diagram that he does? I just want to continually get people around the bases.

Chris Reinolds:

Right.

Don Brock:

I want to be as efficient, as effective at that as possible. That is a constant... You've got to cast the vision constantly.

Chris Reinolds:

Oh yeah.

Don Brock:

That's the one vision I'm always casting is getting a person to the next base.

Chris Reinolds:

That's good.

Don Brock:

Getting them to where they are in God's kingdom work and fulfilling God's purpose for their life. I want the next pastor to be able to bless my name, not curse my name. I want to leave a very healthy church for the next guy. Because I tell the staff, "Every single one of us are temporary, right?" You're building a ministry that you're going to pass off to somebody else.

Chris Reinolds:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

George Bullard:

Well Don, we really appreciate you being here with us today and sharing about this and we're excited about what God is doing in and through Gateway and doing in and through your ministry. As one of the leading churches in the Columbia Metro Baptist Association, we praise God for all the things that are happening.

Chris Reinolds:

Absolutely.

Don Brock:

I mean, we baptized 45 people last year.

George Bullard:

That's great.

Don Brock:

That gets me more excited than almost anything else.

George Bullard:

Oh, I'm sure it does. That's the prime directive.

Don Brock:

Lives being changed.

Chris Reinolds:

Well, thank you so much for being with us today. We really do appreciate it.

Don Brock:

Thank you.

Chris Reinolds:

And to all of our listeners, thank you for joining with us, and please be sure to check out the show notes for more detailed information about today's show. Also, if you found this podcast helpful for you and your ministry, share it with others so we can get the word out about what God is doing.

Chris Reinolds:

Until time from all of us at the Columbia Metro Connection, we thank you for listening and urge you to share this podcast with everyone you know, it's the good news about the Good News in the Columbia Metro Baptist Association.