Twelve Vision Templates

Will Mancini's twelve starting points for picturing a church's future

> "*A template is something you can choose to use and then adapt or combine; it accelerates your start but doesn't limit your art.*"
>
> Will Mancini, *God Dreams*, chap. 6

Whose work this is

The twelve templates, their names, the four groups they fall into and the rating exercise all come from Will Mancini and Warren Bird, *God Dreams: 12 Vision Templates for Finding and Focusing Your Church's Future* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2016). We have summarized his chapters in our own words. The questions headed "For Pathway" and the team pages at the back are ours. For his full treatment, read the book.

What a template is for

Working with church leadership teams, Mancini noticed that their hopes for the future fall into patterns: four broad kinds of vision, with three variations of each. He calls the twelve patterns templates. A template is a starting outline, like the pencil sketch a watercolor class traces before each student paints something different. The templates help a church picture where it believes God is taking it over the next five to twenty years.

KIND OF VISION	SHAPE	MOTTO	ITS THREE TEMPLATES	PAGES
Vision that advances	An arrow	"Take it!"	Geographic Saturation, Targeted Transformation, People-Group Penetration	2–4
Vision that rescues	A medic's cross	"Save it!"	Institutional Renovation, Need Adoption, Crisis Mobilization	5–7
Vision that becomes	A circle	"Grow it!"	Spiritual Formation, Presence Manifestation, Obedient Anticipation	8–10
Vision that overflows	A wave	"Let it go!"	Leadership Multiplication, Cultural Replication, Anointing Amplification	11–13

How to use these pages

1. **Pray first.** Ask God to show you Pathway as He sees it. Then read one template at a time.
2. **Answer the three questions for Pathway,** then rate the template on four questions and add the scores.
3. **Copy your twelve totals to page 14** and circle your top two. Bring the packet to the vision session.

Reading with discernment

These are one consultant's observations and not a list Scripture gives us. The passages he attaches to each template illustrate it; they don't command it. Mancini himself resigned from his consulting firm in 2022 after confessing infidelity. We use his templates as a sorting tool and weigh every one of them by what Christ has already told His church to do.

Source for the whole packet: Will Mancini and Warren Bird, *God Dreams: 12 Vision Templates for Finding and Focusing Your Church's Future* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), chaps. 5–11. Copyright 2016 by Will Mancini.

Vision that advances · shape: an arrow · motto: "Take it!"

Geographic Saturation

The church marks out the area around it and takes responsibility for every person in that area hearing the gospel and seeing it lived. Mancini says this is the template he would recommend to a group of believers he knew nothing else about.

Scripture Mancini points to

- Acts 1:8: witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth
- Jesus going through the towns and villages of Galilee, rarely staying long in one place

Pictures he suggests

- A map with the church's footprint drawn on it
- Ink spreading across a page, a tide coming in, ivy filling a bed
- The old missions benchmark of one church for every thousand people

Where it has been seen

- **John Wesley** said "The world is my parish" and sent circuit riders wherever people were.
- **Clear Creek Community Church** near Houston, Mancini's own church, adopted an area of 500,000 people bounded by a beltway, a county, a bay and a beach.
- **McLean Bible Church** and **Eagle Brook Church** placed campuses in a ring around their cities so the gospel is within an easy drive of everyone.
- **The Dream Center** in Los Angeles began by adopting the two blocks in front of it. It now serves more than fifty.

FOR PATHWAY · OUR QUESTIONS

1. If we drew a line around the people Pathway is responsible for, where would it run?

2. About how many people live inside that line? How many has someone from Pathway talked with about Christ?

3. What would it take for every household in one of our five towns to hear and see the gospel?

Rate it · 1 is low, 10 is high

How closely does this match my own ten-year vision for Pathway?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
How much would our key leaders support it today?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
How much would the whole congregation support it today?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
How much progress have we already made in this direction?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Add the four scores. **Total** _____ **of 40**

Summarized from Will Mancini and Warren Bird, *God Dreams* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), chap. 7, "Vision That Advances." The template, Scripture, pictures, examples and rating exercise are his. The boxed questions are ours.

Vision that advances · shape: an arrow · motto: "Take it!"

Targeted Transformation

The church chooses one particular people, place or thing and gives itself to seeing the gospel change it thoroughly. What marks this template, Mancini says, is that the whole congregation has its eye fixed on one kind of change and wants to see it finished.

Scripture Mancini points to

- Jesus weeping over Jerusalem and returning to it again and again (Luke 19:41)
- Jonah sent to Nineveh, and the city's repentance (Jonah 3)
- The command to be transformed (Romans 12:2)

Pictures he suggests

- An arrow and a bull's-eye
- Scarlet made white as snow (Isaiah 1:18); a heart of stone exchanged for a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19)
- A renewed field that feeds the community around it

Where it has been seen

- **Lottie Moon**, a Southern Baptist missionary, gave her life to one unreached region of China and rallied hundreds of churches at home behind it.
- **Redeemer City to City** in New York aims at one thing: planting churches in the great global cities.
- **Cuyahoga Valley Church** near Cleveland chose a single neighborhood after one pastor admitted he longed to see one street block renewed spiritually and physically.
- **The Bridge Bible Church** in Bakersfield gives each small group money from the budget to spend on a need in the community.

FOR PATHWAY · OUR QUESTIONS

1. Is there one place, group or problem in our five towns that we keep coming back to in prayer?

2. What would "changed" look like there in ten years? How would we know?

3. What would we have to set aside in order to give ourselves to it?

Rate it · 1 is low, 10 is high

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People-Group Penetration

The church carries the gospel to a specific group of people who don't have it. The group is usually unlike the congregation, and the church reaches it both by serving and by speaking of Christ. Mancini grants that his word for this, and his picture of an army, may be too forceful for some churches.

Scripture Mancini points to

- Paul sent to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews (Galatians 2:7–8)
- "All things to all people" (1 Corinthians 9:22)
- Each Gospel written with particular readers in view
- The incarnation: God crossing over to us (Philippians 2:6–7)

Pictures he suggests

- Ambassadors working patiently in a foreign country
- Children hopping a fence to make new friends
- "How beautiful are the feet" (Romans 10:15)

Where it has been seen

- **Patrick** escaped slavery in Ireland and later went back to the people who had held him.
- **The Austin Stone** set out to send one hundred of its own people to unreached peoples for at least two years. Every member is asked to go, to send or to mobilize.
- **Northwest Bible Church** in Dallas turned toward refugees of more than fifty nationalities living in one square mile, three miles from its building.
- **Aviator Church** near Wichita was planted for people in the aviation industry, and a **cowboy church** in Texas for ropers and ranch hands.

FOR PATHWAY · OUR QUESTIONS

1. Which groups live near us that no church seems to be reaching? Think by age, work, language and need.

2. Who at Pathway already has a foot in one of those worlds?

3. Is there a people far from here that God has laid on us?

Rate it · 1 is low, 10 is high

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Vision that rescues · shape: a medic's cross · motto: "Save it!"

Institutional Renovation

The church gives itself to renewing something God established that has declined or been neglected. That may be a congregation and its building. It may be marriage, the family, or the standing of the local church in its community. Churches drawn to this template think of institutions as good gifts worth repairing.

Scripture Mancini points to

- Nehemiah rebuilding Jerusalem's wall in fifty-two days, and the people's hearts with it
- Gentiles grafted into Israel's blessing (Romans 11:17)

Pictures he suggests

- A wall with missing bricks, set on a new foundation
- Restoring a stained-glass window or an old, stately chair
- A classic car redesigned: new throughout, yet true to the original

Where it has been seen

- **The Sunday school movement** brought new life to established churches. In Brooklyn its rally day became a public holiday.
- **Harvest Church** in Billings, Montana, was planted after city planners limited new churches on the ground that churches add nothing to a community. It later gave its city a water park.
- **Calvary Baptist Church** in Clearwater, Florida, nearly 150 years old and in decline, was renewed through relocation, building and a recovered mission.
- **Antioch Church of the Y** in Ohio plants churches in YMCAs and hopes to recover that organization's first purpose.

FOR PATHWAY · OUR QUESTIONS

1. What in Pathway's own life needs rebuilding before we can go further?

2. Which God-given institution around us is in the worst repair: marriage, the family, the church's good name?

3. What did Pathway once do well that ought to be restored?

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Vision that rescues · shape: a medic's cross · motto: "Save it!"

Need Adoption

The church studies the needs around it, or far from it, chooses one and makes it its own. Mancini finds this template where gifts of mercy and helps are strong among the leaders. No church can meet every need in its city, he says, but a team can unite around one that God leads it toward.

Scripture Mancini points to

- God rising to act for the poor and needy (Psalm 12:5)
- Wisdom "full of mercy and good fruits" (James 3:17); compassionate hearts (Colossians 3:12–14)
- Tabitha, full of good works (Acts 9:36); Cornelius's gifts to the poor (Acts 10:4)

Pictures he suggests

- Two hands reaching, one strong enough to lift the other
- Washing another's feet; a towel over the arm
- A foster parent; a crew ready to build a house

Where it has been seen

- **Bethlehem Chapel** in Prague, where Jan Hus preached, had a well in the middle of its sanctuary so the town could draw clean water.
- **LakeRidge United Methodist Church** in Lubbock resolved that no middle-school child in its city would go hungry.
- **The Life Church** in Memphis bought an old bread truck and took weekend groceries to families in the hungriest zip code in the country.
- **LifeBridge Church** in Colorado set out to find a home for every child waiting for adoption in the state's system.

FOR PATHWAY · OUR QUESTIONS

1. What need in our five towns do we know better than anyone else?

2. Which need do our people already respond to without being asked?

3. If Pathway could see one need met for good in ten years, which would it be?

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Crisis Mobilization

The church is at its best in a crisis, and it plans to be. It prepares to rally its people and resources when trouble comes, for immediate relief and for the long work that follows. Mancini calls this an uncommon long-range vision but a real one.

Scripture Mancini points to

- The Antioch church sending famine relief, each according to ability (Acts 11:29)
- Peter and the lame man: "what I do have I give to you" (Acts 3:6)
- The God who comforts the afflicted (Isaiah 49:13; 2 Corinthians 1:3–4)
- Noah, Joseph and Moses, each prepared ahead of a crisis

Pictures he suggests

- An ambulance crew; a rescue ladder lowered from a helicopter
- A life preserver thrown to someone in the water

Where it has been seen

- **Plymouth Church** in Brooklyn outfitted regiments in the Civil War and turned its parlor into a workshop.
- **Central Presbyterian** in Summit, New Jersey, had members in the World Trade Center. After September 11 a busy, divided church united around the families affected.
- **After Hurricane Katrina** church teams made up the largest body of relief workers, and local church buildings became their bases.
- **Tearfund** works through local churches worldwide and lists the roles a church can play: quick response, supplies, care, peacemaking and speaking up for people who are overlooked.

FOR PATHWAY · OUR QUESTIONS

1. When has Pathway rallied best? What was the trouble?

2. What kinds of crisis are most likely to strike our towns or our own families?

3. What would being ready require of us: people, training, supplies, partners?

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Vision that becomes · shape: a circle · motto: "Grow it!"

Spiritual Formation

The church's long-range picture is of its own people grown up in Christ. It says plainly what maturity looks like and builds a path toward it. Mancini calls this template more about being than doing, and he is surprised how many churches have no working definition of a disciple.

Scripture Mancini points to

- Leaders given to build the body to maturity (Ephesians 4:11–16)
- A year of teaching at Antioch before believers were first called Christians (Acts 11:19–26)
- Ephesus, praised for its work and rebuked for losing its first love (Revelation 2:2–4)

Pictures he suggests

- A tree planted by streams of water (Psalm 1:3)
- A caterpillar becoming a butterfly
- A family at devotions; a gym; a quiet place for prayer

Where it has been seen

- **C. I. Scofield's** reference Bible of 1909 helped turn Sunday sermons toward teaching Scripture.
- **Robby Gallaty** at Brainerd Baptist in Chattanooga shaped every ministry toward disciples who make disciples.
- **Randy Frazee** defined a disciple by thirty core competencies and built a church's tools around them.
- **Grace Fellowship** in Katy, Texas, set out to be a house of prayer for all nations.

FOR PATHWAY · OUR QUESTIONS

1. Could we say in three sentences what a mature disciple at Pathway looks like?

2. Which of our four words is weakest among us today: Learn, Love, Live or Lead?

3. What would be different about our people in ten years if this were our whole aim?

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Vision that becomes · shape: a circle · motto: "Grow it!"

Presence Manifestation

The church's vision is to seek and welcome the presence of God and to let Him do what He will, expecting renewal that reaches beyond the congregation. Mancini first had charismatic churches in mind. He has since found the template in others, a Baptist church among them.

Scripture Mancini points to

- The pillar of cloud and fire: Israel moved when God moved and stayed when He stayed (Exodus 40:36–38)
- The people rising to worship at their tent doors (Exodus 33:10)
- God dwelling with His people (Revelation 21:3)

Pictures he suggests

- Smoke rising from a fire
- The first drops of rain; a waterfall
- Worshipers with lifted hands

Where it has been seen

- **Timothy Dwight** became president of Yale in 1795, when few students professed Christ. He gave himself to preaching, Scripture and prayer, and revival came three times.
- **Hope Church** in Las Vegas organizes its life around abiding in Christ: daily time with God, weekly worship, a group and a week each year in cross-cultural mission.
- **Bellevue Baptist Church** in Memphis set a ten-year vision to be a catalyst for spiritual awakening. It turned Sunday evening into a citywide service of preaching and prayer.

FOR PATHWAY · OUR QUESTIONS

1. When has Pathway most clearly sensed God at work among us?

2. How much of our life together is given to prayer and to waiting on God?

3. What would we do differently if we believed awakening could come to our towns?

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Obedient Anticipation

The church's present calling is to wait. God has not yet shown the next direction, and the congregation places itself to hear and to obey when He does. Mancini calls this a template of not knowing and says that not knowing is acceptable. A church in this place shouldn't force a vision process.

Scripture Mancini points to

- "They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:31)
- The vision that awaits its appointed time (Habakkuk 2:2–3)
- The disciples told to wait in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4–5); fasting and prayer before sending (Acts 13:2–3)
- Abraham, who waited more than once

Pictures he suggests

- A door beginning to open, with light coming through
- A still pond early in the morning
- Sails waiting for wind; a plane on the runway

Where it has been seen

- **Jack Hayford** came to The Church on the Way in 1969 for six months. Fewer than twenty people attended, and their average age was sixty-five or more. In prayer he sensed he was to stay, and he led the church to pray and wait in that place until God showed the next step.
- **Writers on revival** such as Leonard Ravenhill and Armin Gesswein treat a season of waiting in prayer as the foundation.
- **A Mississippi pastor** wanted a vision process but felt a check in his spirit. Mancini advised him not to begin.

FOR PATHWAY · OUR QUESTIONS

1. Is there anything God has already told Pathway to do that we haven't done?

2. Does anyone on this team sense a check about moving ahead now? What is it?

3. If we were called to wait, what would faithful waiting look like for the next year?

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Vision that overflows · shape: a wave · motto: "Let it go!"

Leadership Multiplication

The church's contribution is leaders. It raises them up and releases them for whatever God calls them to do, inside the congregation and beyond it. The aim is multiplication and not addition, and such a church is glad to send its people on.

Scripture Mancini points to

- Jethro's counsel to Moses: leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens (Exodus 18)
- Jesus calling the Twelve to be with Him and giving them authority (Mark 3:14–15)
- His closer work with Peter, James and John; the larger group sent out (Luke 10:1)
- Equipping the saints for ministry (Ephesians 4:11–12)

Pictures he suggests

- Doubling: 1, 2, 4, 8, 16
- An acorn with a forest inside it
- A river church and a lake church: one measures what flows through, the other what it holds

Where it has been seen

- **Bill Bright** began Cru with college students in 1951 on the conviction that one trained person multiplies.
- **Community Christian Church** near Chicago reproduces leaders at every level and began the NewThing network of church plants.
- **Kensington Church** in Troy, Michigan, has planted scores of churches.
- **Light & Life Christian Fellowship** in Long Beach chose to become a river church.

FOR PATHWAY · OUR QUESTIONS

1. Who is Pathway developing right now? Write their names.

2. Where have leaders we raised gone on to serve?

3. Would we be willing to send our best people somewhere else?

Rate it · 1 is low, 10 is high

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Cultural Replication

The church has a way of doing ministry that is worth reproducing, and it plants that way in new places. These may be campuses or new churches that share its philosophy, vision and name. Mancini observes that churches truly suited to this are rarely in a hurry.

Scripture Mancini points to

- The Thessalonians as imitators who became an example (1 Thessalonians 1:6–7; 2:14)
- Paul's one rule "in all the churches" (1 Corinthians 7:17)
- Elders appointed in every church and every town (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5)
- The Jerusalem Council setting common expectations (Acts 15)

Pictures he suggests

- A strand of DNA
- An apple whose seeds become an orchard
- A family of restaurants with the same kitchen

Where it has been seen

- **Calvary Chapel** of Costa Mesa, begun in 1965, grew into more than sixteen hundred churches with the same marks: verse-by-verse teaching and a strong emphasis on worship.
- **North Point**, **Life.Church** and **Hillsong** each share a model, a vocabulary and often the teaching itself across many congregations.
- **Faithbridge**, a United Methodist church in Houston, joins Wesleyan spirituality, fervent prayer and open leadership, and teaches that culture carefully to every new staff member.

FOR PATHWAY · OUR QUESTIONS

1. Is there a Pathway way of doing things? Could a visitor describe it?

2. Is our culture healthy enough that we'd want it copied?

3. Is there a nearby town that needs a church like ours?

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Anointing Amplification

The church's vision is to extend the reach of one person God has unusually gifted, most often a teacher of Scripture. Mancini says the template fits only where the congregation shares in the gift, so that something of it would remain in the body if the leader were gone.

Scripture Mancini points to

- Raised up "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14)
- Aaron and Hur holding up Moses's hands (Exodus 17:11–12)
- The apostles freed for prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:2–4)
- The Philippians' partnership with Paul (Philippians 1:5; 4:14–16)

Pictures he suggests

- A magnifying glass
- A megaphone
- A ship's rudder

Where it has been seen

- **Charles Spurgeon** pastored in London from 1854 to 1892. His church built a hall of five thousand seats and filled it many times a week.
- **First Baptist Dallas** has seen itself for over a century as a national pulpit for biblical truth.
- **Stonebriar Community Church** in Texas formed around Chuck Swindoll's expository preaching and his emphasis on joy.
- **Oak Hills Church** under Max Lucado built storytelling into the way the whole church makes disciples.

FOR PATHWAY · OUR QUESTIONS

1. Has God given someone at Pathway a gift meant for more people than Pathway?

2. Does the congregation share in that gift, or only watch it?

3. What safeguards would a vision like this need?

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My Twelve Totals

Copy your scores from each template page. Then look for the one or two that stand highest.

#	TEMPLATE	MY VISION	KEY LEADERS	CONGREGATION	PROGRESS	TOTAL
1	Geographic Saturation					
2	Targeted Transformation					
3	People-Group Penetration					
4	Institutional Renovation					
5	Need Adoption					
6	Crisis Mobilization					
7	Spiritual Formation					
8	Presence Manifestation					
9	Obedient Anticipation					
10	Leadership Multiplication					
11	Cultural Replication					
12	Anointing Amplification					

MY TOP TWO

First: _____ **Second:** _____

What I like best about these two

What they would mean for Pathway's future

A template I scored low that I think we should still talk about, and why

Scoring and comparison exercise summarized from Mancini and Bird, *God Dreams*, chaps. 7–11.

Our High Points, by Template

Mancini suggests a short review of a church's greatest achievements. A team lists five to fifteen high points, tells the stories and asks which template each one represents. He finds that the pattern often shows a church what its next years should look like. Our "Thus far" timeline is the place to start.

A HIGH POINT IN PATHWAY'S STORY	ABOUT WHEN	WHICH TEMPLATE DOES IT SHOW?

WHAT WE NOTICE

Which templates appear most often in our story?

Has our template changed over the years? When, and why?

Church achievements exercise summarized from Mancini and Bird, *God Dreams*, chap. 11, "Creating a Picture Idea of Your Vision."

Choosing Two and Joining Them

1. Tally the team's top twos

TEMPLATE	FIRST	SECOND
Geographic Saturation		
Targeted Transformation		
People-Group Penetration		
Institutional Renovation		
Need Adoption		
Crisis Mobilization		
Spiritual Formation		
Presence Manifestation		
Obedient Anticipation		
Leadership Multiplication		
Cultural Replication		
Anointing Amplification		

2. If the tally isn't clear

Mancini's deciding question, in our words: which template is both our leaders' deepest longing and the future our people would give themselves to most willingly? His rule for this step is "The goal is not to be right but to be clear."

3. Relate the two

He names five ways. Check the one that fits. One template alone is also acceptable.

- ☐ **Cause and effect.** One leads to the other.
- ☐ **Cycle.** Each keeps producing the other.
- ☐ **Combined.** The two are woven together.
- ☐ **Staging.** One prepares the way for the other.
- ☐ **By means of.** One is the way we do the other.

4. Choose the time frame

His guideline: the longer a church has lived and grown, the further it can look. An established church that is growing can look ten years or more ahead. One that has plateaued should look five or ten.

Our time frame: _____ years, to the year _____

5. OUR PICTURE IDEA · ONE SENTENCE

In the next _____ years we will

What has to be true of this sentence before we take it to the congregation?

Team process summarized from Mancini and Bird, *God Dreams*, chap. 11, "Creating a Picture Idea of Your Vision." In later chapters he turns the one sentence into a vivid description of up to twenty sentences.