



## Paradigm Thinking for 21st-Century Leaders\*

### Challenge All Assumptions

**Example:** A congregation may assume that visitation of the sick and shut-in is the role of the pastor and not a necessary or appropriate role for laypeople. A church may challenge this assumption by asking the pastor to think about ways in which laity could create a visitation ministry. From this could come a team of trained individuals to visit the sick and keep contact with those who are unable to be with the congregation on Sunday morning. The team might then consider ways to reach out to visitors or to people in crisis. Through challenging an assumption, the team could expand its ministry and better support the pastor.

### Explore Alternatives

**Example:** One local church became aware of a decline in Sunday school attendance. After exploring a variety of alternatives, church leaders decided to move their church school to Wednesday night. As a result, the church had a huge increase in attendance. This opened the door to offering classes for parents, childcare, and a family meal. The church has now become a major center for activity in the community.

### Adopt Other Points of View

**Example:** On noticing an increase in the number of youth in the neighborhood, one pastor encouraged the congregation to create a youth ministry program. They responded with great resistance. The pastor could not understand why, until he attempted to see the situation through the eyes of the congregation. He realized that they were afraid of the youth, and members were concerned for their personal safety and the well-being of the church building. Instead of initiating a youth program, the pastor began to find ways to help the congregation understand the youth and to build bridges among the generations. Eventually, a youth program developed out of the relationship that was built between the youth and the congregation.

### Read Extensively Outside Your Area of Expertise

**Example:** A pastor in a local church was concerned about the way members of the church treated one another, so she began to read about family systems and structures. She soon discovered new ways to help the congregation treat one another better. Another pastor wanted to help the church run more effective meetings and prepare better church leaders. After reading about how successful business leaders trained teams, she learned ways to help her church leaders perform their leadership roles more effectively.

### Find Success in Every Attempt

**Example:** A conference youth leader was responsible for a large youth event that unexpectedly lost several thousand dollars. The next day the youth leader, feeling like a failure, called the bishop and offered his resignation. After a long pause, the bishop responded, “Do you really think I’m going to let you quit after we just invested all this money in making you a better leader?”

\* The idea of paradigm thinking appears in Session 8 of the FaithQuest Bible Study.



## **Definitions & Illustrations of Paradigm Thinking**

### **Challenge All Assumptions**

- To assume something means to take it for granted.
- Assumptions are nonverified and are nonverifiable until after the fact.

### **Explore Alternatives**

- For every action/activity in our churches, we have a variety of alternatives.
- There is no guarantee that, because something was effective in one time or place, it will be effective again.
- In an age of constantly shifting paradigms, we can't afford not to explore options.

### **Adopt Other Points of View**

- Paradigm thinking requires the ability to see from various perspectives.
- It costs little to see things from other people's points of view, but the benefits can be priceless.

### **Read Extensively Outside Your Area of Expertise**

- When we enter unfamiliar territory, we see many new things, and we process them differently. Reading information that is outside our areas of expertise pushes us to see things in a new way.
- It is human nature to see the world through filters (mental maps).

### **Find Success in Every Attempt**

- To know the full beauty and value of the stone, one must view it from all sides.
- When we seek success in every attempt, and when we measure any learning as success, then we never fail.