

Celebrating My Greatest Mistakes Of 2011



by Steve Sjogren

Some Mistakes I Made In 2011

...Some Adjustments I'm Taking

At the end of the year some time ago I gave a message on a few year-end reflections I had cloaked around “My Biggest Mistakes of the Year.” To my surprise more listened to that message than any in the previous year. The following year I did the same with fresh, new mistakes. Again, there was an enthusiastic response. I continue to make this a year-end message, but I am now doing an enhanced version online for some of my sites – thus what you are now reading.

On the surface of things, it may seem a little dark to ponder one's mistakes, but I don't see it that way, and neither does God. In the Bible, God consistently choose people who were prone to make mistakes yet went on to be stellar examples of lives strongly lived.

Peter, for one, was a mistake maker who went on to great things. His mistakes didn't impair him from greatness. He took risks that often led to failure but always left a deposit of faith in him. He was able to walk on water when the others were afraid to step out of the security of the boat. He failed after a step or two, but he received an amazing installation of faith just the same.

What you read here are my confessions from this past year. Each of them is an area where I blew it but then made a mid-course correction along the way.

Observation

In all the years I've been putting these year-end lessons together (about 15) one thing stands out – I don't think I've made the same mistake twice. In the midst of my humanness, at least I've been creative!

We can complain all we want about the persnickety problems we face – about how we wish they'd all be gone – about how much easier life would be if they would all just evaporate, but the truth is God anoints our problems so they can shape us in profound ways. Out of his commitment to seeing us on to our greatest good, maybe it's through our problems that God does his most powerful shaping of us.

“It's never too late to be what you might have been.”

– George Eliot

1. I allowed the financial concerns of others to grow larger than those deserve.

In 2012 - I will ratchet down the fear of finances of those around me.

With the current worldwide financial craziness this concern is on the radar for all of us. Of course we need to be wise with our finances. Of course we need to be well trained in dealing with our financial lives, yet there is a big difference between being wisely equipped going beyond that into fixating on possible financial scenarios that might come our way. To over-focus will lead to great levels of fear.

For the past several years most of us have tended to talk too much about finances in general. The media inundates us with a continual stream of negative stories that only stir up greater levels of terror.

The net result of focusing on finances too much is what I call the “Fear of not enough money.” I see this fear manifesting itself in almost all ministries and virtually all local churches.

When we fear that we won't have enough money we predictably react by taking the money we do have then hoarding it. We grow dramatic and convince ourselves that the end is near – and our only hope for survival is to become misers. We begin to take the little we do have and hold onto it tightly.

It could be argued that perhaps, to a degree, the world economy is ailing due to the grip of the fear of not enough money. Those who have an abundance (companies and individuals) refuse to loosen their grip on their funds and spend for fear that they will lose. They are glomming onto their funds and refuse to invest for fear of a loss.

In all honesty, I feel I have made progress in this area and haven't been captivated by this in 2011, I've still been affected by the fears of others around me.

At other points this year, in working with others who were affected by the grip of these fears, their contagion came upon me. For a time, my blood pressure skyrocketed as high as 200 over 120! My doctor confirmed this was not a medically induced problem – it was caused external stress. The fear of not enough can take a toll on us!

Even though I feel personal freedom in from the fear of finances, I am still vulnerable to the influence of others around me who are fretting. Perhaps you too are prone to that sort of contagious influence.

Whether the fear of not enough finances is clinging to you personally, or to the group you lead, don't give up until you have eradicated its grip. No matter what happens, regardless of the appearance of things, dig in – refuse to allow it to grip you no matter how dire things may appear. Sometimes we sing it almost glibly, but it's true nonetheless – God is your provider.

Maybe the answer to your dilemma is to step out in faith and to rely on the intervening strength of God. There comes a time when we exert the raw faith God has provided you with. Do as Dorothy did – simply close your eyes, click your heels and affirm strong the truth until that truth becomes larger than the lie you are facing down falls apart – “There’s no place like home! There’s no place like home! There’s no place like home!” Things change as God shows up.

2. I’ve been tempted to grow cold in my love.

In 2012 - I will strongly reach out with God’s love no matter what obstacles I face.

It’s vital that we make commitments. I have had to move forward based on the power of commitments I’ve made to reach out more than in years gone by. I’ve also seen this in to be a true pattern in working with various groups I’ve coached this year. All of us have had to reach out in generosity in spite of our desires to draw inside ourselves.

It’s easy to speed read over the parts of the Bible that challenge us too much and that’s especially true with what God says about his love for the Lost and Suffering. We can self-justify the stance that outreach is not our gift or calling. To a degree, for most of us, that might at least a little bit true. Of all the ministry gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4, (think of those 5 gifts as APEST for short – apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, teacher) only about 1% are true Evangelists. Don’t be confused and say there are few that have the “gift of evangelism.” There’s nothing in Scripture that gives the hint there is such a thing

as a gift of evangelism. Why is there no gift of evangelism? Because if there was such a gift then some would have it and some would lack it. Some would have the responsibility for making Christ known and others would be off the hook in their sense of responsibility of bringing Jesus to others to those who live near us.

Clearly, there is an office of Evangelist listed in Ephesians 4, but what is the parameter of the duties of an Evangelist?

He gave...some as evangelists...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service...

Eph. 4:11,12, NIV

There's no indication there that Evangelists serve as hired hands to do all the work of evangelizing on behalf of the Church. What is clear is that Evangelists continually ***stir up or instigate*** evangelism around the larger Church – the 99%.

After many decades of fruitfulness, it's clear that the ministry success of Billy Graham comes in part from his ability to mobilize the Church in various locations to gain a heart for others who are Lost. Wherever Billy goes, the Church in that city grows a larger heart for not-yet Believers. Many are stirred to do works of evangelism. Billy is a true Ephesians 4 Evangelist.

As we walk in the Spirit we will do works of evangelism – all of us – at least to some measure. Before you sell yourself short remember the power of your personal Jesus story. You can convey the story of your life change – of how coming to Christ has made

all the difference in your life. That alone is a strong expression of evangelism! You can do this stuff!

We've all read the Scriptures. We're aware that it is God's will that we do works of evangelism. We hold this value in our hearts already. So why don't we obey the calling of God that rests upon our lives? Stephen Pressfield calls this move forward – push back fight tendency “Resistance” – it's the desire in all of us to make forward progress, yet facing the reality that there are very real forces, inside and out, that resist us doing the right thing. Though he doesn't identify himself as a Believer, Pressfield says in his books, we can assume there is actually a real spiritual being in the Universe that is bent on our destruction, who opposes you when you make strides toward any step of growth, any move toward discipline, positivity, sacrifice – in short, anything positive.

We've all been called to do some measure of outreach. That's reasonable. We aren't all going to do high levels of outreach. That's okay. It's not okay to tell God we aren't going to obey him even before we step out of the starting blocks.

To make progress, no matter where we stand, let's pray the prayer many prophets have uttered to God with when they first gained a vision bring God's Kingdom to earth by serving and making himself utterly available. They prayed the prayer so many have spoken to God – “Here I am!”

3. Sometimes I moved forward more out of rote behavior than love.

In 2012 - I will do outreach and I will reach out as well.

It's vital that we make commitments. I have had to move forward based on the power of commitments I've made to reach out more than in years gone by. I've also seen this in to be a true pattern in working with various groups I've coached this year. All of us have had to reach out in generosity in spite of our desires to draw inside ourselves.

You can do outreach without the love of God...but you cannot reach out to others without the presence of God's love.

We can go through the motions of outreach activity based on rote commitment. However, reaching out requires love that comes from the Father and the gift of compassion only he can provide for lost people.

“There's a lot more that we can do other than just pray for them!”

– Sister Mary Clarence, Sister Act

4. I've been tempted to stockpile knowledge apart from obedience to God.

In 2012 - I recommit to obeying what I know from Scripture.

I love to study. My idea of a great vacation is being about anywhere with my iPad loaded with new books and my MacBook Air and fast wifi access.

In another life, under the ideal circumstances, I would probably go to school indefinitely. I'd rack up one degree after another just for the love of knowledge. As it is, I find it necessary to read for an hour or so a day just to stay sane and balanced.

There is something in all of us – as Believers or not – that is attracted to a life of thinking instead of doing. The longer we put off walking out what we've learned, the more fearful we grow of ever actually walking out what we've learned.

A Delineation Coming

There is a remarkable delineation coming in 2012 – between those who want to “go deep” and those who want to “go out” – between those who are captivated by the fears that we all face at this time, and those who are actively battling against fears.

We are likely to see more books, teachings, conferences, etc. beginning this year that will focus on inward topics – and these are good in and of themselves – with a focus on

topics like worship, prayer, the inner life, the disciplines, hearing God's voice to name a few. These topics are going to be naturally attractive to us as our surroundings grow increasingly dark (as many believe they will).

At the same time, I suspect there will be at least a subtle criticism aimed at those who aim outwardly – believing that doing the will of God ought to be a mostly inward thing. There will be an appeal to take comfort in pursuing the mysterious aspects of the Christian life.

One expression that has been made much of recently is the “missional” church. For some years now there has been a growing fascination with the word “mission” and the adjective “missional” in church circles. Dozens of books have been penned touting the need for us to become this if we know what's good for us. My observation is this: For all the hoopla, for all the plethora of conferences and websites, blah blah blah, nearly nothing has changed since all of this attention has started. Many of the voices who have led the missional charge, when examined closely, have done little actual outreach. In our desperation we have built and celebrated straw men.

Let's drop the broken word “mission” and all its connected adjectives. It's empty of any meaning it ever had. Instead let's just do outreach without the need to name all that we do. Do we really need to theorize at this point? In hit book *Outliers* Malcom Gladwell makes a compelling point that until we have put in 10,000 hours of practice in a given discipline we have not mastered it. That's any discipline in life. 10,000 hours. That's a lot

of toilets to clean, and a lot of windshields to squeegee and a lot of cars to wash and give a dollar to for the honor of serving the owner...etc., etc., etc. As one friend of mine has put in his 10,000 hours. As he put in his time, his cell phone message was, "I'm not here right now because I'm out serving some, feeding others, and casting out the devil few more. Please leave a message." That guy did that consistently for 7 years as his church grew slowly, bit by bit, ever so slowly. On the seventh year it took off and grew to over 500 in a six month period. When I asked what happened he said, "I guess the asparagus finally took! The seeds were germinating and they popped up."

Here's our plan – let's write less (fewer books that are theoretical), talk less (fewer conferences with thinkers sharing their thoughts instead of veterans telling from the trenches what they've actually seen), do fewer conferences and when we do them let's make it mandatory that part of it that we actually do outreach. Go figure. What a radical idea!

"However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results."

- Winston Churchill

Obedience

The overriding calling of God to the Christian is obedience to God. Jesus battled with the Pharisees as we've already stated. They separated themselves from common Jews because they saw themselves as being superior – more committed, more mature, more a lot of things, but in the important things – in the practical application of obedience to

God, they were utterly lacking. They treated people poorly, and as Jesus saw it, that disqualified them from authentic relationship with the Father. They appeared to be ultra obedient to God but they missed real obedience in the things that mattered to the Father.

Part of our desire for more teaching on the deeper life amounts to our inclination to set ourselves apart from others we perceive as less than us. It's akin to the desire to haze those who are new in a sorority or fraternity. Newcomers need to ante up when they join us. We who have been here for a while are "More mature" – we have paid the price with our time and effort to get to where we are in the Christian life. That description may be an exaggeration but it is also true to a degree in all of us.

Do we seek to add more "interesting" topics to our library shelves on matters we are already not obeying, or are we telling God we are willing to readily put into action what we are learning? In particular, are we going to take most seriously the central mission of God for us in his word – to see others ushered into his family.

The Great Irony

I spent years on the quest for "the deeper life." I have read dozens of books that encouraged me to look within to find something mysterious that would lead to intimacy with Christ. If that is your story as well perhaps you have the same testimony as me. In spite of all of my diligence I never reached my goal of spiritual depth. I am convinced I could have spent a lifetime of reading and seeking after the depths of the deep life and would never arrived at the point of any sort of spiritual conclusion.

When I decided to aim outwardly – to dedicate my life to serving others in practical ways with Christ’s love and to bring others into Christ’s Kingdom – something surprising happened. Out of the blue, the depth I had sought – the worship I longed for – the vibrancy I sought from the Word – the community I had longed for sparked alive spontaneously.

Bogus goals may seem biblical on the surface but they will not accomplish the goals of God for our lives. If we pursue intimacy as a goal, or if we pursue worshipping God as our primary focus, we will never be satisfied. Those are not worthy of being our primary focus according to Scripture. Of course Jesus is our focal point in life. It is his will that we live lives of worship.

If we take Jesus as our model and we seek to serve the needs of others – we make the lifting of pain in other’s lives our aspiration – we will gain that and the deep things will come to us as bonuses as we live as pipelines of God’s Kingdom to others.

The phrase the “deep things of God” is often misunderstood. We toss those words about without considering their context. When Paul wrote “the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10) it is clear he was referring to the spiritual mysteries connected with walking intimately with God.

There is no clear inference to gaining greater head knowledge. The depth Paul points to is gotten by living in an intimate relationship with Christ, in the presence of the Holy

Spirit, for an extended time. Paul is making this point: *Spiritual maturity is based on the length of time we spend walking in the Spirit, not the amount of knowledge gained.* Tragically, it is possible, sometimes even common, to have a great amount of knowledge yet to remain spiritually immature. The cure for this sort of immaturity is an outward flow of love that reaches out to others who are lost or suffering.

I agree with the wisdom of Pastor Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California. He says, “Those who pursue the deeper things too much are likely to drown in those waters. The Kingdom Jesus ushered in is about obeying the main and the plain things of the Bible.”

5. At times I was spiritually dense and felt overwhelmed. *In 2012 - I determine to notice what God is doing around me.*

I have been tempted of become preoccupied with my itchy bitsy little life and to blow out of proportion what amounts to nothing more than personal drama the things I have faced.

In the scope of all things my life is small. Not that I’m not important to God – not that he doesn’t care about all the details of my life. He cares more deeply than I can grasp. He’s arguably obsessive in his concern about the details about my life. That being the truth, since he cares so much for you and me, maybe you and I can take a break from also

being obsessively worried about ourselves. Maybe his carefulness is adequate. Maybe we can begin to rest in that assurance.

No matter how much we worry, nothing is going to improve our state, and we are just going to absorb tremendous amounts of vital energy God has in mind to use elsewhere.

6. I was unreasonably burdened at times this year.

In 2012 - This year I will worry less.

Jesus stood against a few things strongly. At the top of his list were two matters – the Pharisees in general! They were a gift from the Father to Jesus' ministry in that they were examples of the polar opposite of the Kingdom Jesus came to usher in. Though they were a pain to Jesus and the Apostles, their lives and ministry stood out as a convenient teaching tool to illustrate how different the Kingdom of God is from human religion.

Beyond his disgust for the Pharisees, Jesus hated even more a lack of faith. As Jesus ushered in the Kingdom of God, one factor he insisted on for God's presence to come appear was the simple faith. On the other hand, he couldn't do his works in an atmosphere of lacking faith. In fact, sometimes he went so far as to send people away from his presence who didn't exert faith. Their lack was an obstacle to the Kingdom's appearing.

Do you lack faith? Don't get down on yourself too much! All of us lack faith. I have regularly lacked faith this past year. I lack faith on a regular basis! But what I said above is still true according to Scripture. The point is to walk in faith, not unbelief.

If you lack faith do what the Scripture says.

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Romans 10:17, NIV

Why do we lack faith? We have not adequately relished the “word about Jesus” as Paul says. To give away the Kingdom Jesus brought to earth we too need to walk in the simplicity he modeled in the Gospels.

This year let's depend on Jesus more. Let's tell more stories of what Jesus is doing right around us. Let's celebrate more of what Jesus is doing.

This might be my biggest lesson as I reflect on this past year.

7. I was too busy.

In 2012 - I will do less this year.

Want to live in a state of rest this year. For that matter I'd like to walk in a state of rest – of active, resting dependence – for all my remaining days. That is the state God calls us to.

You must go on growing in me and I will grow in you...It is the man who shares my life and whose life I share who proves fruitful. For the plain fact is that apart from me you can do nothing at all... But if you live your life in me, and my words live in your hearts, you can ask for whatever you like and it will come true for you. John 15:3-7, Phillips

That's not to say we are going to see less done. As I see it, when we lean into the strength of God he will take the burden from us and we are going to see a lot more accomplished.

Doing means drawing into dependence upon the Father in order to see more accomplished. Out of our dependence upon the Father he will accomplish much. As we live in that dependent relationship we can “ask for whatever” the need at hand and God will come through. Good stuff!

8. I did too much on my own.

In 2012 - I will live at the initiative of the Father.

But Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing alone. The Son does only what he sees the Father doing, because the Son does whatever the Father does.

- John 5:19, NCV

Jesus did what the Father did. He was dependent upon the move of the Father for his success in life and ministry. If the Father was up to something, Jesus joined him. If he wasn't up to something, Jesus didn't try to make something happen. He calls us to the same relationship with the Father.

How much more effective would we be in life if we only took initiative when the Father was also moving in that direction.

The idea of moving in response to the Father's leading is something many don't understand. Those who doubt the reality of the present day miracles sometimes quip that if such things were for today then why don't those who are gifted go to hospitals and simply go up and down the wards and heal the sick willy nilly. If they have the authentic gift of healing that shouldn't be too much to ask – right?

When people pose a scenario like that they make it clear they don't understand the notion of God's abiding presence versus his immediate presence. There are times when

the Spirit is present to heal and do works of power and clearly there are times when he is not present to do those things. When the Father is moving to heal healing will take place. If that's at the hospital, then willing channels of his power (those who pray) will see healings take place. Again, what is he initiating.

Jesus had an advantage over us in that he was more attuned to those moments than any of us will ever be. Plus he was committed to only moving in response to what the Father was doing. If the Father wasn't doing something he didn't try to fake a move of the Father. If the Father wasn't up to something he didn't move forward on his own. That policy didn't make for absolute predictability and ticked more than a few people off who were less than flexible! The same will hold true for you if you begin to walk as Jesus did. Some just will not understand when you beg off because what is being requested is not what the Father is doing.

Finis

“Maybe I need to get another duty” – **Nacho Libre**

That’s all I have to share for this year. Tomorrow’s the beginning of another year. With that I’ll start a new Word file with even newer mistakes that I’ll begin to add on and edit down until this time next year. Until then I encourage you to be bold yourself! Make creative mistakes in the power of the Spirit. Risk big! God will show up in the strength of God.

The new year hasn’t quite kicked in and I’m already dreaming of new ways of blowing it that we can relish in 12 months. Here’s to your courage.

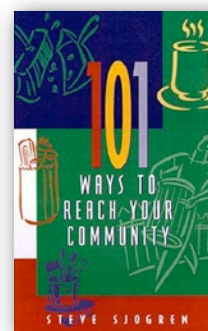
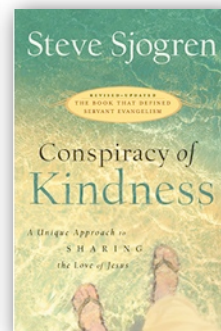
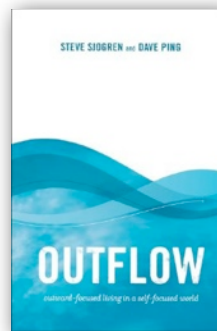
About the Author

Steve Sjogren is a veteran pastor and church starter who has helped start five churches in the course of his thirty year career in ministry. He has written over a dozen popular books on the power of generosity and kindness as it flows through the lives of those who follow after God. His first book, *Conspiracy of Kindness*, is considered a classic in the area of servant evangelism, and has sold a quarter million copies thus far. He leads ServeCoach.com, a coaching group that is dedicated to helping leaders and pastors develop into all they can be as they aim outwardly beyond their own sphere of life.

Steve is a regular contributor to a number of magazines and e-zines in the US. His best known publication is *Serve!* - an inspiring voice of outwardness to the church worldwide in the form of a monthly ezine. He has written more than a dozen books to date, and is working on several books presently. Steve's books and downloadable PDFs are available at reasonable prices at his resource site KindnessResources.com. Steve also regularly blogs at SteveSjogren.com.

Recommended Reading

Steve Sjogren's books *Outflow*, *Conspiracy of Kindness* and *101 Ways to Reach Your Community* are available [online here](#).



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