# ROBERT MORRIS

Author of The Blessed Life

The Simple Secret

to Growing

the Church You Love

# Blessed Church

#### Praise for The Blessed Church

"God has blessed Gateway Church with explosive growth. Pastor Robert Morris humbly unpacks many of the invaluable lessons he and his team have learned along the journey. His spiritual insight and practical instruction will help you build a stronger, deeper, and broader ministry."

—Craig Groeschel, senior pastor of LifeChurch.tv and author of *Soul Detox:*Clean Living in a Contaminated World

"I've had the privilege of seeing 'behind the curtain' at Gateway Church and can honestly say that this church is way more impressive from the inside than it is from simply looking at it on the outside. Pastor Robert Morris has done a tremendous service to God's kingdom by sharing the Gateway story in *The Blessed Church* and helping us understand that the real issue we should focus on is church health. What you will gain from reading this book is not only inspiration but also principles that will work in any church (or business) that wants to fully maximize its potential."

—Perry Noble, founding and senior pastor of NewSpring Church

"Our world desperately needs healthy, vibrant churches, so I'm thankful Robert Morris has written *The Blessed Church*—a book that draws on the Gateway backstory to describe the qualities of a healthy local church. More than anything, a heart for God and a love of people define the ministry of Pastor Morris and Gateway Church. If you want a growing vitality in your church, you will profit from every page of *The Blessed Church*."

—Chris Hodges, senior pastor of Church of the Highlands

"A healthy church grows—and so do its people! Gateway Church is such a place. In *The Blessed Church*, Pastor Robert Morris tells how any church, regardless of size, can become a thriving spiritual haven for both shepherd and sheep."

—John C. Maxwell, author and speaker

"The Blessed Church is a solidly practical, humbly presented, spiritually grounded handbook of insight into a mind-set that is a proven alternative to mere 'growth methods' so commonly pursued today by sincere church leaders. To any fellow believer in Christ or pastor to His flock, I happily confirm: The Blessed Church is an unpretentious, health-breathing invitation to the joy and blessing that distills when (and if) we who lead begin and seek to 'grow big people' rather than to 'grow a big church.' The outcome will inevitably be that you get both, regardless of size!"

—Jack Hayford, founder/chancellor of The King's University, Los Angeles, and founding pastor of The Church On The Way

"In *The Blessed Church*, Robert Morris reveals why Gateway Church in Dallas—Fort Worth has become not just one of the largest churches in America but also one of the most influential. Robert's devoted, attentive shepherding of this great flock is one reason why Gateway is so blessed. In *The Blessed Church*, the biblical principles that lead to true success in the body of Christ are carefully explained. If you love the local church, as both Robert and I do, you won't want to miss the insights found in this helpful and practical book."

—Dr. Tony Evans, senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship and president of The Urban Alternative

"When I refer to the blessed church, I am speaking from firsthand experience. My wife, Betty, and I are active members of Gateway Church, which Robert Morris pastors. We have witnessed and experienced the dynamic power and profound impact made on personal lives, families, the community, the church at large, and the nation. The blessed church members live a blessed life and continually seek to be a blessing to others. Through Pastor Morris's leadership, Gateway Church has become a model and inspiration to the whole church around the world. Your church can experience the bountiful blessings of our God and Father right here on earth right now!"

—James Robison, founder and president of LIFE Outreach International and co-host of *LIFE Today* 

"Robert has put together a master playbook for victory in the church. Every pastor can learn from the insight and wisdom God has given Robert and the Gateway team. In fact, I truly believe that practicing the biblical principles of health and growth outlined in *The Blessed Church* will help us all further the Great Commission and experience radical transformation and blessing in our communities."

—Tom Mullins, founding pastor of Christ Fellowship Church

"Every pastor, layman, leader, and churchgoer should read *The Blessed Church*. Morris has done it again. Readable and inspiring, *The Blessed Church* is a must-read for all who want their own church to walk in the blessings of God."

—Mark Rutland, PhD, president of Oral Roberts University and Global Servants

"The story of Gateway Church is one of radical trust, bold vision, and the faithfulness of God. Now my friend, Robert Morris, has written a book telling that extraordinary story. Read it! You will realize that God wants to bless your church more than you ever could have imagined."

—Greg Surratt, senior pastor of Seacoast Church

"I've been close friends with Robert Morris for more than twenty years, and when Gateway started, I mentored Robert closely and taught him what I knew about church government, leadership, and other relevant issues. Robert was and is humble, teachable, and uncompromising in doing things God's way. In my opinion, this is the main reason for God's blessing upon Gateway Church. *The Blessed Church* is a must-read for anyone wanting to know how to build a church that God will bless."

—JIMMY EVANS, senior elder of Trinity Fellowship Church and CEO and founder of MarriageToday

## Blessed Church

#### OTHER BOOKS BY ROBERT MORRIS

The God I Never Knew
The Blessed Life
From Dream to Destiny
The Power of Your Words

# Blessed Church

The Simple Secret to Growing the Church You Love

# ROBERT MORRIS



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This book is dedicated to Bill Hybels, who has exemplified to me a Blessed Leader and Blessed Church. He continues to walk in humility, transparency, integrity, and determination to turn irreligious people into wholly devoted followers of Christ!

Bill, I'm grateful for our friendship and the personal times you have spoken into my life. Even if we had never had a single face-to-face meeting, your life, example, teaching, and writing still would have inspired me to live my life a certain way and to stir others to do the same: to nurture a wholehearted passion for Jesus and people, and to keep His bride healthy so she can have the greatest impact!

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#### Introduction

To the Best of our ability, we have built Gateway Church on principles that have brought God's blessing on us so that we might reach and disciple more people—who in turn will reach others. I'm writing this book to share these principles, because I desire to do everything in my power to build God's kingdom through His local church.

What I have tried to clearly address in this book are the principles upon which healthy churches are built. I speak from the reference of Gateway Church because that's where I serve, not because I believe it is the only or the healthiest. We are continuing to learn from many others in the body of Christ. I'm so grateful we're laying down our swords and picking up our plowshares to work together!

A while back, Pastor Jack Hayford and I were speaking to some pastors when all of a sudden Jack said, "You guys are asking the wrong questions! You keep asking Robert *how* Gateway does this and that! You need to be asking him *why*. What's the principle behind the policy?"

That comment made me stop and think. Had I been guilty of telling young inquiring leaders of integrity *how* I do it but not *why* I do it? Had I focused more on the methods than the motives, the actions rather than the attitudes, and the head rather than the heart?

When I began writing this book, I gave it the title *Healthy Things Grow*, because I believe with all of my heart that spiritual health is the key to church growth (and when I say church growth, I mean reaching people who don't know

Christ and discipling them to do the same). God's blessing brings spiritual health, and spiritual health brings God's blessing. I believe we need to understand the *how-tos* of church growth, but more importantly, we must also understand the *whys*.

This book has been a collaborative project incorporating the insights of many on Team Gateway. Foremost among them is my dear friend and Gateway's executive senior pastor, Tom Lane. Tom has been searching God's Word, praying, and thinking deeply about biblical models of church governance and administration for most of his adult life. He is an amazing gift to the body of Christ, to our church, and to me personally. And he has graciously made the riches of his wisdom and insights fully available to this work.

One of our founding elders, Steve Dulin, has contributed his insights and anecdotes, as have many of Gateway's key staff pastors, including an associate senior pastor, Thomas Miller (Gateway's original and lead worship pastor), and another associate senior pastor, David Smith. Indeed, I got pretty much the entire staff involved in this project, asking them for their insights, perceptions, and stories.

Please read this book with an open heart and mind. You will undoubtedly find things you would say differently, outright disagree with, or don't wholly relate to you, but don't write off the rest. These principles are based on my understanding of Scripture and are being put to the test every day. It is my sincere desire that God will give you some insight—some revelation—that will take you much further than I have and that together we will plunder hell and populate heaven! May we pastor churches that God blesses to be a blessing!

To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to *bless* you, in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities. (Acts 3:26)

#### **⇔**§ PART ONE

### **The Gateway Story**

#### God's Story, Not Ours

SHORT OF BEING A PASSENGER ON A ROCKET SHIP TO MARS, I was about as far away from my North Texas home as a man could be. I had just finished speaking at a pastor's conference in Australia when a young minister from New Zealand approached me with a question. It was a familiar one: "What's the key?"

He didn't have to elaborate. I was pretty sure I knew what he meant. But I encouraged him anyway.

"The key to what?" I responded.

"Gateway's growth. I mean, what in heaven's name is going on up there? What are you guys doing?"

He was referring to Gateway Church, the fellowship that it's my privilege to pastor. The "what's going on" at the heart of his question has been an ongoing story of astonishing growth and rising influence.

How astonishing? Well, Gateway began with a handful of friends in a living room Bible study back in 2000. As I write today, the church sees more than twenty thousand people participate in live worship and teaching each weekend. The growth has been steady, dramatic, and shows no sign of slowing down. On the pages that follow, I hope to reveal why I think we've experienced the blessings we have.

Nevertheless, I confess that I've had to work through some feelings of reluctance and awkwardness about writing this book.

That's because the last thing we—myself or any of our team—would ever want to do is appear to be bragging or patting ourselves on the back. The very

thought of anyone saying "Who does that guy think he is?" makes me want to shrink back and count my blessings in grateful silence. But the Lord won't allow it.

The fact is, I don't think I'm anything special. And of all God's people, I'm the most aware that what we have experienced over the last twelve years has absolutely nothing to do with any smarts, special talents, or abilities I might possess.

On the contrary, I might be the most unlikely candidate you'll ever meet. But that's God's MO, isn't it? He chooses the rustic, barely educated fisherman Peter to carry the gospel to the cream of Jewish society. And He sends Paul, with his elite education and sterling religious pedigree, to pagan Gentiles who couldn't care less about his Jewish credentials.

Thus, I'm not a walking advertisement for the church-growing power of natural talent, clever strategy, and brilliant marketing. I'm a living, breathing testament to the power of God's unfathomable grace.

Nevertheless, it's impossible to deny that God has done something remarkable at Gateway Church. Wherever we go, I and members of our team are asked about it. Those questions take a variety of forms:

- "What's your secret?"
- "To what do you attribute your church's amazing rate of growth?"
- "How did you become one of the largest and fastest growing churches in America in just a few short years?"
- "How have you been able to remain balanced, healthy, and focused while riding a virtual rocket sled of increase?"
- "How do you identify, develop, and/or attract leaders to your cause?"

It is to bring clear answers to these questions in a spirit of transparency, humility, and gratitude that I have finally undertaken this book. Frankly, God will not let me off the hook.

In the end, the Lord has made it clear that He wants the Gateway story told

because it's *His* story—not because we've done everything right, but rather because He has accomplished something special *in spite of* our weaknesses and mistakes. He wants these principles shared because they're *His* principles. And the church bodies scattered across planet Earth by the tens of thousands are *His* too. He wants to see them healthy, growing, influencing, and overcoming.

So on the pages that follow, I'll share what we've learned and what I've seen in the Word. Not because I have all the answers, but because I have *some* answers. A few of them may surprise you. Thus, throughout this book you'll find little nuggets of truth and insight labeled "Keys to a Blessed Church."

To begin, I will share a brief overview of how I came to found Gateway Church and the amazing journey of grace and favor we have been on over the last dozen years. I'll follow that by sharing the spiritual principles, biblical precepts, school-of-hard-knocks lessons, and surprising insights that have made that journey so extraordinary.



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