



BREAKOUT CHURCHES

An Interview with Thom S. Rainer On His New Book *Breakout Churches*



Dr. Thom S. Rainer

Thom S. Rainer, Ph.D., is the Founding Dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism, and Church Growth at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He is also President of the Rainer Group, a church and denominational consulting company. The author of 14 books, his latest work has generated much interest around the world. Dr. Rainer spoke with us about his most recent project.

Developing Churches (DC): Dr. Rainer, what is the basic premise behind *Breakout Churches*?

Dr. Rainer: I have been involved in the research of local congregations for nearly 20 years. One of my passions has been discovering churches that had been struggling for years, only to break out into new and sustained growth.

I felt if I could find some clear examples of such churches, it could be a source of encouragement and instruction for church leaders today.

DC: Why is this subject a passionate concern of yours?

Dr. Rainer: Only 6% of churches in the United States are growing faster than the community in which they are located. The other 94% are either declining or losing ground in the community. The health of the American church is not good. I wanted to find some exceptions to this rule, learn from these churches, and share what I learned with church leaders across this nation.

DC: Did any particular person or study inspire you to do this study and write this book?

Dr. Rainer: I must give a great deal of credit to Jim Collins and his book *Good to Great*. When I first read his book in 2001, a mental bell began to ring. Mr. Collins studied Fortune 500 companies to see what companies had broken out of mediocrity into greatness.

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— Dr. Thom Rainer

I saw that many of those same principles of research could be applied to the church today. His idea was the missing piece of research I had been doing for nearly two decades.

DC: Has any similar research been done previously?

Dr. Rainer: Yes and no. There have been a few studies on the characteristics of churches that have demonstrated breakout growth. Unfortunately, most of these studies concluded that the number one correlative factor in the breakout growth is the church getting a new pastor. With 380,000 churches in a state of plateau or decline, I don't think we can find enough breakout pastors for even 10 percent of these churches. Our study took a different approach. We stated that one of the criteria to be a breakout church is that the decline, breakout, and sustained growth took place without a change of pastors.

DC: How many churches did you study?

Dr. Rainer: We started with at least basic data on 52,333 churches.

DC: How many of these churches qualified to be breakout churches?

Dr. Rainer: Thirteen.

DC: Only 13?

Dr. Rainer: Yes. I'm not suggesting that there are only 13 breakout churches in America today, but that is all we found in our pool of churches. Since there are some 400,000 churches in the United States, we obviously did not come close to examining all the churches in

our nation. And though we found only 13 churches, we learned some powerful lessons from these congregations.

DC: We won't ask you to reveal all of the findings from your study, but can you give us just a few insights on what you learned?

Dr. Rainer: Let me share two basic findings. First, breakout churches moved out of mediocrity when the leaders of the churches became different types of leaders. We categorized leadership into six groups based on the first seven chapters of the book of Acts: Acts 1 Leaders, Acts 2 Leaders, Acts 3 Leaders, Acts 4 Leaders, Acts 5 Leaders, and Acts 6/7 Leaders. All of the breakout churches had leaders who became Acts 6/7 Leaders.

DC: What are some of the characteristics of Acts 6/7 Leaders?

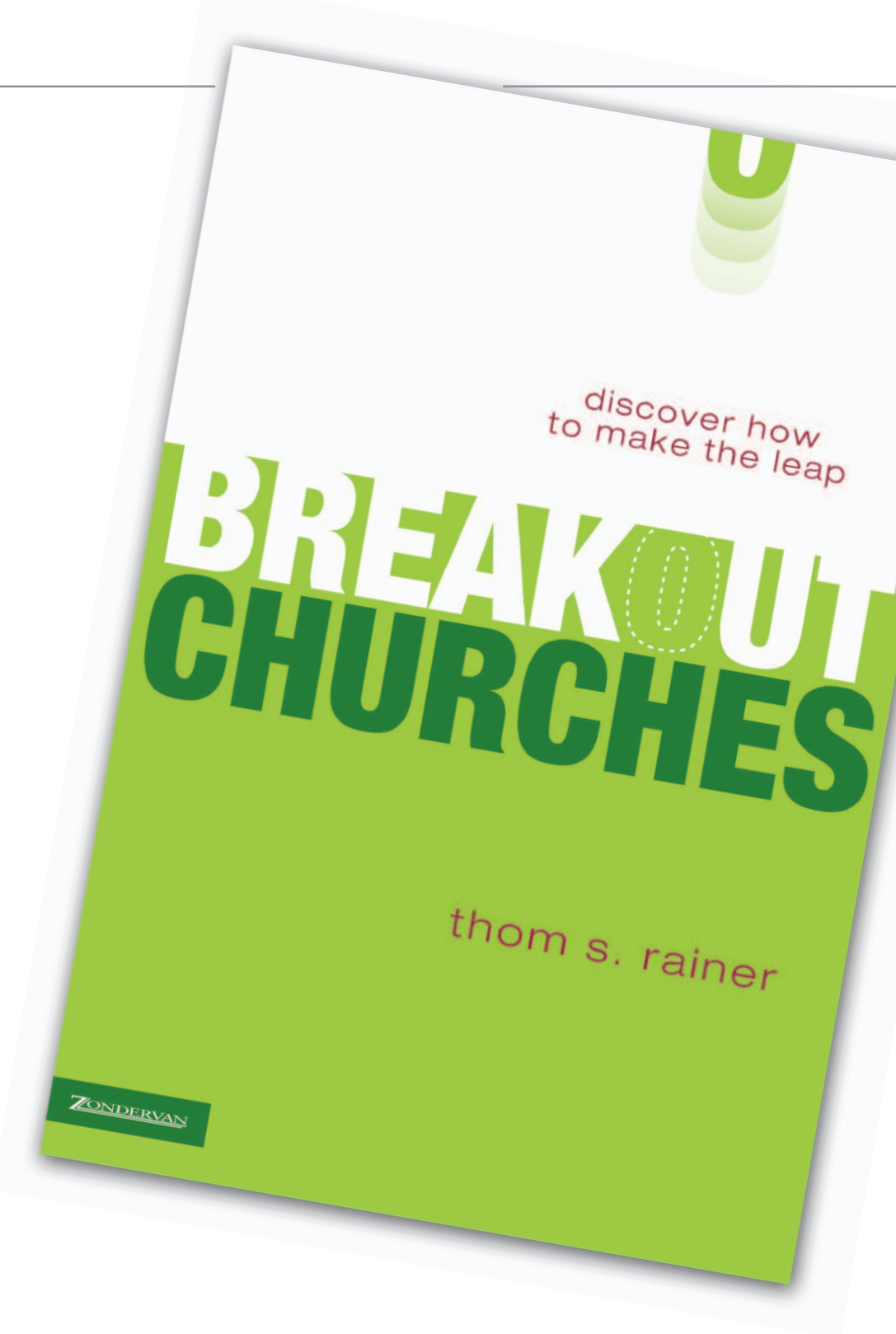
Dr. Rainer: They are humble. They seek to deflect accolades and praise others. They are outwardly focused and lead their churches to look outwardly. They have great faith and are willing to attempt great things for God, which may seem impossible from a human perspective. They look at their churches beyond their own ministries and even their own lifetimes, and they desire to leave a legacy for the glory of God.

DC: You mentioned a second finding.

Dr. Rainer: Yes. The leaders in these churches had a wake-up call, a point in their lives and ministries where they saw their congregations were just doing business as usual. This awareness created a "holy discontent," where the leaders could no longer be satisfied with this status quo or decline. We call this wake-up call "the ABC Moment," which means awareness, belief, and conflict.

DC: Conflict?

Dr. Rainer: Unfortunately, yes. Every one of these breakout churches experienced some level of conflict in moving from mediocrity to greatness.



DC: What single take-away do you hope church leaders get from this book?

Dr. Rainer: I hope the message[s] of encouragement and God's possibilities are resoundingly clear in this book. Many of the churches were in difficult, and seemingly impossible, situations before the breakout took place. I pray that readers will see that all things are really possible through God.

DC: Thank you for your time.

Dr. Rainer: Thank you. It has been my honor to share this information with *Developing Churches*. ■

Breakout Churches by Dr. Thom S. Rainer is a January 2005 publication of Zondervan (www.zondervan.com). Dr. Rainer can be reached at www.sbs.edu and www.RainerGroup.com.