



Why churches don't disciple, and how yours can 48

enrichment

Enriching and equipping Spirit-filled ministers

Winter 2008



DISCIPLESHIP
The neglected mandate

Let's Talk About Discipleship . . . Again

Christians have already said everything that could possibly be said about discipleship. Yet, there is a significant gap between the number of people our churches report as being saved and the number that indicates increased attendance in these churches. We are winning people to Christ, but we are not teaching, training, and retaining them.

We are emphasizing discipleship because:

It Is a Mandate From Our Lord

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19,20). Times have changed, people have changed, cultures have changed, but this urgent mandate from Jesus has not changed.

We Must Maintain a Sense of Urgency

John Kotter, in his book *Leading Change*, says the first step in bringing about change is to create a sense of urgency. The church has an inherent sense of urgency: Jesus is coming, and many of our family and friends are not ready to meet Him. We must do something significantly different, or at least improve what we have been doing, to make committed followers of Jesus.

We Need a Continual Reminder of Our Purpose

Often the routine and mundane duties of ministry blur our missional focus. Our primary goal is to reach people for Christ and teach them how to live in Christ. Changing our purpose or focus, even a little, can mean major misalignment in the future. Dennis, an airline pilot, attended our church. I asked: "If you flew out of Chicago O'Hare toward Los Angeles International Airport and your compass was off one degree, how far would you miss LAX?"

He said, "Ninety miles."

We cannot afford a misalignment in our missional focus.

Some people claim that you can look at a church's bylaws and checkbook and tell a great

deal about the church. The bylaws describe how we command and control the church, but the bylaws give little information concerning how we are to release people to reach their neighbors. Often the checkbook reveals that we spend a great deal of money operating and maintaining the church, but spend little to reach our community. We would do well to spend more on materials and methods that reach *new* people.

We Need To Continually Improve Our Materials and Methods

The Word of God never changes. Our mission never changes. But the context and methods of our ministry may change. If we are presently using materials and methods that once reached a previous generation, we may need to evaluate what we are doing to ensure we are effectively reaching today's generation.

Which Comes First?

A strong discipleship program must precede a good evangelism program. A church that engages in extensive evangelism but has a poor discipleship plan will retain few converts. Evangelism and discipleship are inseparable. Jesus was clear that reaching people and teaching people are equally urgent.

Event or Process?

Evangelism is often event driven, and rightfully so. God has called the church to engage and confront this world with the gospel. Even relationship evangelism, while less confrontational, must be intentional in proclaiming the lostness of humanity, the need for a Savior, the cleansing blood of Jesus, and a transformed life of joy and peace.

Discipleship is a process. It is the intentional, methodical training of new believers. Discipleship can be fun and exciting while being highly effective. Sunday School, small groups, and adult Bible fellowships can benefit the church. We need to do our best with whatever method fits our environment.

Our hope is that this issue of *Enrichment* will rekindle your sense of the urgency of discipleship and the need to re-evaluate your discipleship ministry. Is it fresh? Is it exciting? And is it effectively retaining those you are leading to Christ? ☪



Changing our purpose or focus, even a little, can mean major misalignment in the future.



GARY R. ALLEN, D.Min., is executive editor of *Enrichment* journal and director of the Ministerial Enrichment Office, Springfield, Missouri.

Contents **enrichment**

Winter 2008/Volume 13/ Number 1

DISCIPLESHIP: The Neglected Mandate

- 12 **A Life of Service, A Message of Hope, A Season of Change**
INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS E. TRASK
In his final *EJ* interview, Thomas Trask reflects on the past, present, and future of the Assemblies of God.

- 16 **My Five Core Values**
GEORGE O. WOOD
These five core values will be the focus of the new general superintendent's vision for the Assemblies of God.

- 22 **The Crisis of Discipleship in the American Church**
CHARLES T. CRABTREE
Four important indicators must be carefully considered when assessing the state of discipleship in the church.

- 30 **The Cycle of Evangelism and Discipleship: An Unending Process**
RANDY HURST
The cycle of evangelism and discipleship is an unending process of reaching and retaining people who become citizens of Christ's eternal kingdom.

- 34 **The Role of Spiritual Leadership in Discipleship**
SHANE WARREN
A pastor's role as spiritual leader in the discipleship process is imperative if it is to be effective.

- 40 **Disciple Making for Changing Times and Changing Churches**
MICHAEL J. WILKINS
Consider these essential features of biblical discipleship that must characterize our attempts to develop a disciple-making ministry.

- 48 **Why Churches Don't Disciple, and How Yours Can**
STEPHEN LIM
Flawed ministry paradigms sabotage the church's efforts at disciple making. Consider this approach that is sure to improve the quality of disciple making in your church.

- 56 **Making Disciples Jesus' Way: A Few at a Time**
GREG OGDEN
Here is a simple, reproducible way to grow disciples that will forever change your practice of ministry and leave your church with self-initiating, reproducing disciples of Christ.

- 68 **Moving Target: Reframing Discipleship for Postmoderns**
EARL G. CREPS
Three shifts to reunderstand the challenge of discipling those who are navigating the postmodern turn.

- 74 **Sunday School: A Recipe for Discipleship**
WES BARTEL
What should an effective discipleship ministry look like in the 21st century? There are at least four necessary ingredients needed to create an effective Sunday School or Christian education ministry.

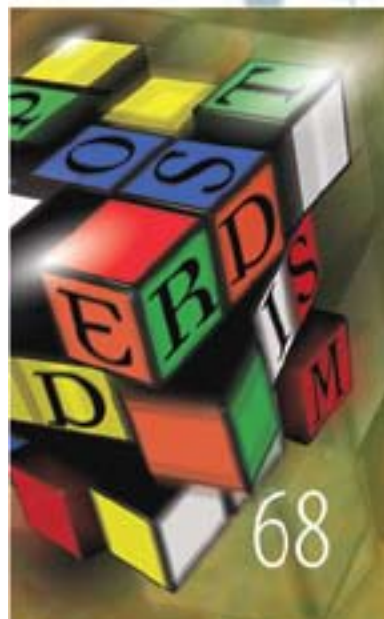
- 84 **Balancing Our Out-of-balance Structure**
DARREN DAUGHERTY
Churches can respond in many ways in today's culture to make disciples of Christ, but there is one change many are unwilling to make.

- 90 **The Power and Potential of Small Groups**
BRETT EASTMAN
Principles that have unlocked amazing growth and community outreach for church after church can happen in your church, too.

- 100 **Turning Decisions into Additions and Additions into Disciples**
(New Convert Care)
JIM HALL
New believer disciple making is indispensable if churches are to curb the alarming spiritual death rate among them. Consider these practical steps that will turn decisions into additions and additions into disciples.



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Contents

Winter 2008

DISCIPLESHIP: The Neglected Mandate

- 6  **shorts**
20 **ej News & Trends**
108 **ej Online**

EDITORIALS

- 1 **MINISTRY MATTERS**
Let's Talk About Discipleship ... Again
GARY R. ALLEN
- 160 **IN CLOSING**
Passionate About Discipleship
L. ALTON GARRISON

COLUMNS

- 110 **THEOLOGICAL ENRICHMENT**
**God Looks at All Sin the Same:
Sound Biblical Teaching or
Sloppy Bumper-Sticker Theology?**
W.E. NUNNALLY
- 116 **REAL LIFE PREACHING**
**Right-Brain Preaching: Capturing
the Imagination of Your Listeners**
DOUG OSS and MARK BATTERSON
- 122 **THE GREATEST CHALLENGES OF PASTORAL CARE**
Reaching the Homosexual
ALAN CHAMBERS
- 128 **MINISTRY & MEDICAL ETHICS**
**Valuing the Beginning of Life:
Bioethics and Premarital Counseling**
CHRISTINA M.H. POWELL
- 132 **HISTORY IS HIS STORY**
Anselm, Abelard, and the Atonement
WILLIAM P. FARLEY
- 136 **MANAGING YOUR MINISTRY**
Organizational Development and the Church
Part One: The Church — A Living System
JOHN MICHAEL DEMARCO

- 140 **Q&A FOR PASTORS' WIVES**
**Ministry Wives in the Workforce: Balancing
Job, Family, and Church Responsibilities**
GABRIELE RIENAS
- 142 **FROM MY PERSPECTIVE**
Lessons From the Bridge
CAROLYN TENNANT
- 144 **CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**
**Your Church Should Be Into
Sex Education**
RICHARD D. DOBBINS

DEPARTMENTS

- 18 **A Chat With Pastors**
- 148 **Sermon Seeds**
- 150 **Book Reviews**
- 154 **News & Resources**
- 157 **Marketplace**
- 158 **With Christ**
- 159 **Advertising Index**



Next time in **enrichment**

Renewing
Our Mission:
**REACHING OUR
COMMUNITY**

Jesus' words in Matthew 28:19, 20, "go and make disciples . . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" cannot be ignored. This is the purpose of His church. Unfortunately, the church can lose its outward focus and become captive by internal ministry structures that do little to reach the unbeliever for Christ. The call for the 21st-century church and leader is to embrace a missional mindset that moves beyond maintaining traditional systems to one that adapts emerging strategies for outreach in the community. Read thought-provoking articles by Charles Arn, Don Detrick, L. Alton Garrison, J. Don George, Dary Northrup, Alan Roxburgh, Ed Stetzer, and others.

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LEADERLIFE

Qualities of Innovative Leaders




First, innovative leaders heal the sick. Jesus sought out those in need and met their needs. Unfortunately, today, too many churches are inwardly focused and are not meeting the needs of unbelievers. To reach those whom no one is reaching, we must do things no one else is doing. Who is God calling you to reach that no one around you is reaching?

Second, innovative leaders break the rules. Jesus broke the Sabbath rules.

Innovative leaders do not take the common path. They turn right. Every great movement of God started with a leader making a right turn. What is God calling you to do that has never been done before?

Third, innovative leaders offend the Pharisees. When you do something new to reach people for Jesus, the Pharisees will attack with a vengeance. Do not worry when the Pharisees are attacking you; worry

when they are not. What new thing will God call you to create that will be hated today and embraced tomorrow?

Fourth, innovative leaders redefine success. Instead of bragging about how many people you are reaching, innovative leaders constantly talk about how many people remain unreached. You cannot be impressed with yourself. Stop building attendance and start building the Kingdom. 

CRAIG GROESCHEL is the founding and senior pastor of LifeChurch.tv, one of the country's first multisite churches serving nearly 20,000 people in 12 locations across the United States via satellite broadcasts. Groeschel lives in the Edmond, Oklahoma, area where LifeChurch.tv began in 1996. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



Photos.com


THINK ABOUT IT

EXQUISITELY MADE TO BE PLAYED

Fritz Kreisler (1875–1962), the world-famous violinist, earned a fortune with his concerts and compositions, but he gave most of his earnings away. So, when he discovered an exquisite violin on one of his trips, he was unable to buy it. Later, having raised enough money to meet the asking price, he returned to the seller, hoping to purchase the beautiful instrument. But the violin had been sold to a collector.

Kreisler made his way to the new owner's home and offered to buy the violin. The collector said it had become his prized possession and he would not sell it. Keenly disappointed, Kreisler was about to leave when he had an idea. "Could I play the instrument once more before it is consigned to silence?" he asked.

Permission was granted, and the great virtuoso filled the room with such heart-moving music that the collector's emotions were deeply stirred. "I have no right to keep the violin to myself," he exclaimed. "It's yours, Mr. Kreisler. Take it into the world, and let people hear it."

We have a message to share. Our Heavenly Father created us as exquisite instruments, and the beautiful music we are to make is the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. We were made to be played. 

SOURCE: *Turning Point Daily Devotional*, 26 July 2006

GEEKY STUFF

1

STUPID
TECHNOLOGY
MISTAKES
CHURCHES
MAKE

- 1 Letting technology drive the ministry rather than letting ministry drive the technology.
- 2 Assuming everyone thinks like a techie.
- 3 Using multiple databases.
- 4 Not building a team.
- 5 Not documenting processes.
- 6 Implementing technology solutions without considering the strategic systems.
- 7 Creating solutions to capture data, but neglecting the solutions to report data.
- 8 Focusing on development and implementation without creating systems for training and support.
- 9 Hiring the best geek rather than the best leader who knows geeky stuff.
- 10 Not making technology a priority to reach today's culture. e

TONY MORGAN (<http://tonymorganlive.com>) is the Chief Strategic Officer at NewSpring Church (newspring.cc) in Anderson, South Carolina. Visit <http://www.NewSpringOnline.com> for free resources to equip growing churches. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

BOOMERS TO ZOOMERS

Discipling Youth:
A Bicultural / Bilingual Mission

Imagine being in a culture where dress and hairstyles, dietary habits, musical tastes, and language are dramatically different from your own. God has sent you to win people to Christ and disciple them as missionaries to their culture. How will you disciple them?

Like other missionaries, you immerse yourself in their culture, seeking to understand the worldview elements that embed external trends into mainstream life. You familiarize yourself with their art and media forms,

using them to communicate the gospel. You learn to speak their language of daily interaction by which they construct and maintain relationships. You would learn these cultural traits even if this strange new culture was in your own backyard.

Guess what? It is. Welcome to the world of youth, a culture with values and traditions that often seem as strange as those in faraway lands. How will you disciple them? Here are a few tips:

1. Find a trustworthy teen to guide you. No one can help

you understand teen culture better than teens. Ask young people to explain their world. Remember, you will be *talking to a fish about water*, so be patient and quiet. Let them do most of the talking.

2. Learn to appreciate the cultural artifacts. Spend some time observing the things that matter to them. Find out what is hot and what is not. When you think you know enough to build a communication bridge, run it by your guides.

3. Use any means necessary to win, build, and send them. Forget any preconceived ideas about what worked to reach you. Work with your guides (and any other available teens) to design discipleship strategies.

There is one more compelling reason why you would do these things: It is the incarnational model Jesus used to reveal God's plan to the world. e

RANDY C. WALLS, D.Min., director of Continuing Education, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri

7 THE WORST COMMUNICATION HABITS FOR CHURCH STAFF

recently discovered a secular leadership article by Jamie Walters entitled "The Seven Worst Communication Habits." As I was reading, I realized that these are the same bad communication habits that creep into church staff life and relationships.

How would you characterize the quality of communication in your church?

1. Contacting Others Only When You Need Something

QUESTION: Do you contact people only when you need them to do something for you or the church? If so, you risk making people feel used.

FIX: If you feel guilty of this communication habit, list the people and contact them this week. Ask for nothing; just touch base. They will appreciate the contact.

2. Not Following Up, or Closing the Loop

QUESTION: Have you recently promised to get back with or follow up with anyone in your ministry but have not?

FIX: Contact that person this week and close the loop. They will appreciate the fact you did follow up.

3. Not Returning Telephone Calls or E-mail Messages

QUESTION: Do you still have a pink telephone message slip on your desk? Are e-mails sitting in your inbox waiting for a reply?

FIX: Take a few moments and clear your desk and your inbox. Your quick response will help you gain credibility in your communication.

4. Foregoing Basic Courtesies

QUESTION: Have you been discourteous to someone?

FIX: You know the fix. Make it right with that person. Apologize for your behavior. Do your best to get the relationship back on track.

5. Not Listening

QUESTION: Have you had a

conversation in which you do not remember what the other person said? Do you find yourself thinking of what you will say next rather than listening?

FIX: Work hard this week on listening and showing interest in what people say to you. Adjust your attitude so listening becomes a priority.

6. Telling Lies

QUESTION: Do you ever play with the truth? Do you withhold parts of the truth to sway people to your side?

FIX: Stop playing games with the truth. The Psalmist said, "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; Keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3).

7. Spewing Chronic Negativity

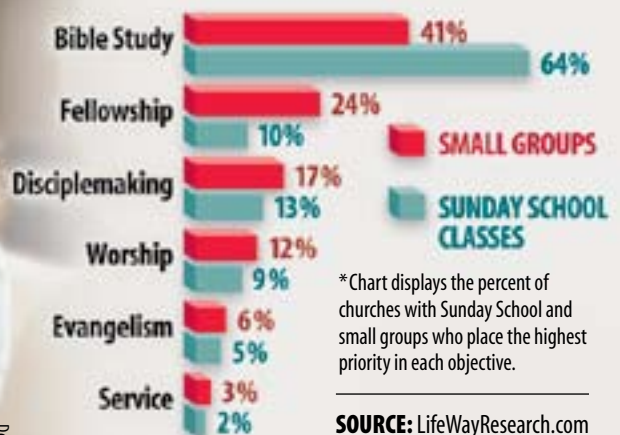
QUESTION: Are you constantly negative? Does your negativity affect others?

FIX: Refer again to Psalm 141:3. Rather than dwell (and comment) on the negative, find solutions or speak positively about the situation.

There you have it — seven of the worst communication habits that we go up against each day. Pick one or two areas of weakness this week and try to improve. 🔄

Adapted from Todd Rhoades, *Monday Morning Insight*

Small Groups and Sunday School: Top Ranking Objectives*



SOURCE: LifeWayResearch.com

EMERGING REALITIES

IRONY ALIVE

DesignPics

Barna Research Group has documented that twenty-somethings are less likely than any other age groups to:

- Attend church services.
- Donate to churches.
- Be committed to Christianity.
- Read the Bible.
- Serve as volunteers or lay leaders in churches.

Yet, ironically, ancient spiritual disciplines are experiencing growing resurgence in an era that had seemed to consider them outdated. For example, tithing is a spiritual discipline that costs something. Tithing is sacrificial and challenges young adults to prioritize their financial resources.

Another new attraction of ancient spiritualities that are centered in monastic communities is their observing fixed-hour prayer times. Recognizing

the significance of the Sabbath is another growing awareness, not for church attendance, but as a cessation of work and all other activity except prayer.

New realities are emerging, but not because we are returning to more traditionally accepted modes of spirituality. We must acknowledge that the ground has shifted. We are living in a completely new era that has seen seismic changes like those occurring during the time of Columbus and the publication of the Gutenberg Bible. Twenty-somethings have marginalized previously held assumptions and forged new pathways.

The Christianity that is emerging may recapture the central tenets of New Testament Christianity. This is not just a generational expression of Christianity. The potential now exists that new, global, cultural realities might be shaping a Christianity that is more accessible and faithful to Early Church practices than has existed in centuries. ☪

BYRON D. KLAUS, D.Min., president, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri

THE HIM BEHIND THE HYMN

An Ancient Modern Hymnist

Keith Getty was born and raised in Ireland. Coming to faith early in his life, he was nurtured in his local Presbyterian church where he sang time-honored hymns and metrical psalms. While his faith in Christ was a given, his love of music and ability at the



GETTY



TOWNEND

piano were also not to be overlooked. Following formal schooling, Getty made a name for himself in Great Britain by preparing choral arrangements for movie recordings and producing movies, shows, and albums.

Nevertheless, Keith could not escape his roots in church music. When his pastor in Belfast struggled to find hymns that expressed the theology of his sermons, the young Irish songwriter offered to help. When he observed his grandfather dying of dementia, Getty was amazed that the old man could still remember the tune and lyrics of a simple hymn. On reflection, Getty came to realize the power of hymns to communicate and sustain faith.

"There are two reasons we write modern hymns," explains Getty. "First, it's to help teach the faith. What we sing affects how we think, how we feel, and ultimately, how we live. So it's important that we sing the whole scope of truth the Bible has given us. The second reason is to create a more timeless musical style that every generation can sing, a style that relates to the past and the future."

In the fall of 2000, Getty met British worship leader Stuart Townend at a worship conference. He shared a melody with the lyric-prone Townend. They determined to collaborate on a song. Within a few weeks "In Christ Alone" was born.

The Getty/Townend song has been recorded more than 200 times. Much like "Be Thou My Vision," the most popular Irish hymn of all time, it has a strong, very Irish melody, and words that convey orthodox faith.

"In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm."

"I wanted the hymn to declare the whole life of Christ and what it meant," explains Getty. "Something that could teach people the foundations of what we believe in Christ, the God who changed all of history and who wants a relationship with each of us. It is a creed-based song, firing people with hope that here is the God who even death cannot hold."

"No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny." ☪

GREG ASIMAKOPOULOS, Mercer Island, Washington



UTHTRAX CONNECT THE DOTS: SERVICE AND MATURE FAITH

Finding great youth staff is a tricky endeavor. They

need to relate to teens, desire to impact teens' lives without trying to *fix* them, and be consistent. But do they have to be adults?

A recent study reports that *community service* relates to faith maturity and the faith practices of adolescents in churches. Researchers surveyed

631 youth from 35 Protestant churches in six states. Their findings show an undeniable link to community service and the development of mature faith. Volunteering in

faith-motivated ministries impacts how involved teenagers are in faith outside the pew — such as worship, Bible reading, and talking to God.¹

Sometimes we think of faith-based ministries such as building a house with Habitat for Humanity or feeding the hungry at a shelter. But faith-based ministries can also include leading a Bible study, praying with peers, welcoming visitors, planning an outreach, or outlining a sermon.

Jason Fullerton, an Assemblies of God youth pastor, says his staff is comprised of teens and adults. "Asking teens to serve keeps them connected to the ministry," he says, "but it also has become a profound sounding board for relevancy." Fullerton holds monthly staff meetings. In addition to youth ministry topics, they discuss other issues, such as how to avoid forming cliques or how to welcome teens using the Open Circle method (teens learn how to stand in such a way that it invites rather than excludes others from joining the conversation). Fullerton challenges his youth staff to invest in someone to eventually take their place.

It is working.

"We all feel closest to God when serving others," says this motivated youth pastor. "A big part of being on staff is serving. This has stirred up the gifts in our teens." 🌀

T. SUZANNE ELLER is an author and youth sponsor at First Assembly of God in Muskogee, Oklahoma. She can be reached at tseller@daretobelieve.org. See real teens sharing real life stories at <http://www.daretobelieve.org>.

NOTE

1. Ken Camp, "Study Says Teen Faith Shaped More by Hands-on Ministry Than Worship," Associated Baptist Press [Internet]; available from <http://www.abpnews.com/1685>. article; accessed 9 April 2007.

I have served on five church staffs over the past 25 years. That means I have said, "I am leaving," four times. Saying those words is never easy — at least it shouldn't be — but it may be easier depending on your situation. (Some staff members know what I mean.) Take these steps when leaving your church:

■ **Make sure your decision to leave is God directed, not based on feelings.** Do not make a rash decision in the heat of a disagreement or during a difficult season.

■ **Tell your pastor as soon as possible.** Some pastors make it easy to discuss leaving. With others, it is better not to discuss your leaving until you are sure God is directing you to leave. Unfortunately, some pastors

think when a staff member leaves the staff member is committing treason, and the pastor treats him likewise. (I have a difficult time with this thinking, and I have personally experienced such treatment.)

■ **Be honest as to why you are leaving.** Do not lie or stop from sharing your heart. Your words can comfort your pastor and help him understand why you are

leaving. Share the good and bad, but do it privately if it is bad.

■ **Work out an agreeable last day.** (One strong suggestion: Do not stay longer than 2 weeks after announcing that you are leaving.)

■ **Ask for opportunity to tell leaders within your particular ministry area** before informing the entire church. You have spent a great deal of time with these

people. They deserve to be informed before the decision is made public.

■ **Tell the church only after you have told your pastor.** (If you want to make a huge mistake, do not follow this step.)

■ **Expect people to react to your leaving** in these ways: anger, resentment, withdrawal, happiness, fear, excitement, and a combination of sadness and joy.

Be ready to feel like an outsider. As soon as you announce you are leaving, you will begin to feel disconnected and out of the loop. Some of that is normal and some is necessary. Just get ready for it. It will happen. 🌀

JEFF WILSON, spiritual growth pastor, Henderson Hills Baptist Church, Edmond, Oklahoma

MINISTRY TRANSITION

"I'm Leaving"

Steps To Take
When Leaving a Church



EVENT MANAGEMENT

7 Ways To Get People Involved in Your Church

Reach people and help them grow with online ministry tools



DesignPics, Photos.com

To reach people and help them grow, you need to involve them. But the more events you have, the more potential for confusion and frustration for your staff, members, and visitors. The right system and processes will significantly reduce the time it takes your staff to manage events, registrations, and volunteers. The result is more time spent in ministry instead of administration. Here are seven ways your church can help more people become involved:

1. Make your event calendar open to the community.

One survey found that 70 percent of church Web site visitors were seeking event information. Show the latest event information on your site, instantly and automatically updated to reflect any changes.

2. Use event tickets online and on site. People expect convenience everywhere they go. Offer the convenience of ordering tickets to concerts, Christmas programs, Easter services, and more by offering online tickets for church events on your Web site.

3. Reach them with e-mail.

Why make people come to your Web site for information? Send them an e-mail each week with the event information they are interested in. Give each subscriber a list of upcoming events that match their personal interests (youth, sports, music).

4. Register for your events

anytime, anywhere. Give people the convenience of anytime, anywhere event registration through your Web site for Bible studies, retreats, youth trips, or other events. You can even take registration fees online.

5. Customize your communications. Let visitors to your site subscribe to your e-newsletter, choosing to receive only information from ministries

that interest them. Automatically send a personalized e-newsletter to each subscriber every week that includes news for each selected department, plus a personalized list of events based on their interests.

6. Use reserved seat tickets

as an outreach tool. Tickets are powerful tools for outreach; a general admission ticket, however, is anonymous. A reserved seat creates a deeper commitment — the person knows the seat will be empty if he does not attend.

7. Make giving convenient.

Some people have jobs or other commitments that keep them from regularly attending church. Let contributors set up and manage their giving through your church Web site. 📧

TIM WHITEHORN is the founder and CEO of ServiceU Corporation. Serving churches since 1999, ServiceU (<http://www.serviceu.com>) is the leader in online event management software used by churches, schools, ministries, and nonprofit organizations. For more information, e-mail info@serviceu.com, or call 1-888-638-7439.



WHAT IN THE WORLD

Lessons From a Short, Yet Abundant, Life

At age 10, Seth Cook stood 3 feet tall and weighed 27 pounds.

He had the wrinkled skin, aching joints, and hardened arteries of an 80-year-old. But his unique physique did not stop him. He traveled to Mexico to visit the ruins and toured the sites of New York City. Seth loved to hunt and fish with his dad and garden with his mom. The bald boy with the robotic, high-pitched voice was a regular reader at the Darrington kindergarten where he once was a student. He knew he would not live as long as his peers, but he chose to fully embrace life.

Cook suffered from progeria, an incurable disease that causes its victims to age prematurely. He was 18 months old when diagnosed, only one of 14 known sufferers of the disease in the United States, and one of 42 worldwide.

Sadly, Cook died June 2007 at age 13. But before he died, Cook lived a full life. More than 500 people crammed into Glad Tidings Assembly of God in the small Western Washington community where his memorial service was held.

According to Pastor Les Hagen, "Seth packed about 90 years of life into the 13 he was granted. Although he was aware of his limitations, he knew he was a spiritual being having a human experience."

Jesus indicated that His purpose in coming to this world was to make it possible for people created in God's image to experience an abundant life. "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Those who knew Cook are quick to say that this pint-size follower of Jesus lived a short, but abundant, life before leaving earth for heaven. He was an example that a full life is not always a lengthy life. His life was also proof that difficult circumstances create opportunities that allow us to learn how to trust God.

When Hagen asked Cook what five words he would like to tell the world he said, "That's simple, 'Trust in God.'"

"But Seth," Hagen countered with a smile, "that's only three words."

"Okay," Seth replied. "'Trust in God; that's all.'" 📧

GREG ASIMAKOPOULOS, Mercer Island, Washington



A LIFE OF SERVICE A MESSAGE OF HOPE A SEASON OF CHANGE

INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS E. TRASK

Thomas E. Trask has lived his life hearing from God. During his 14 years as general superintendent of the Assemblies of God, he has heard the voice of God on many occasions. But at no other time in his more than 50 years of ministry has the voice of God been so lucid when he heard God say, "Step aside." In his final EJ interview as general superintendent of the Assemblies of God, you will hear his heart as he shares personal thoughts and reflections on the past, the present, and the future of the Assemblies of God.

Hearing from God has been a pattern in your life. Retell how hearing from God brought you to the position of general superintendent and to the decision to step down.

TRASK: I never make a ministry move until I have heard from God. The faith journey that brought me to the position of general superintendent began in May of 1988. Ivar Frick was re-elected superintendent of the Michigan District. At the time, I was pastoring in Michigan and also serving as assistant district superintendent. Previously I had served as the Michigan District superintendent but resigned from that office to return to the pastorate. In June, Superintendent Frick called me and said, "Brother Trask, I need to resign. My wife, Marian, is not well. Would you call a

special session of the district council?" I couldn't help but think: *Is it God's will for me to return to the district office?*

I prayed, "Lord, show me Your will." I went to Lansing, Michigan, to conduct the special district council session. Before going to the platform, Superintendent Frick asked me, "What are you going to do?"

I said, "If I'm elected on the nominating ballot, I will accept it as from the Lord. If not, I will withdraw my name."

"You can't do that," he said. "You know everyone puts his own name on the nominating ballot."

The vote was taken. I needed 300 votes to be elected; I received 287. So, I withdrew my name. I went home thrilled because I felt I had done the will of the Lord.

Two weeks later General Superintendent G. Raymond Carlson called me. He said, "Brother Trask, the Executive Presbytery is in session, and Ray Hudson, the general treasurer, has resigned. The Executive Presbytery has elected you to serve as general treasurer."

I said, "Brother Carlson, I need time to pray about this."

He said, "You have until 8 a.m. tomorrow. The Executive Presbytery needs an answer."

He called at 7:45 a.m. the next morning. But in those intervening hours, God spoke to me and said: "This is My will for your life."

We came to Springfield, Missouri, and served as general treasurer for 5 years. Brother Carlson retired from the office of general superintendent in 1993. I was elected general superintendent at the 1993 General Council in Minneapolis.

This was God's hand and God's direction.

I have made this current transition in leaving the superintendent's office a matter of prayer. Even though I had 2 years left in my term, I did not wish to presume or assume anything. Some people may wonder, *Why didn't he finish his term?* I have enjoyed being general superintendent. My reason is simple: I was praying and God spoke to me, and said, "Step aside."

I prayed and checked my spirit to make sure I was obeying God because this transition impacts the Fellowship, and there is a great deal at stake. I did not want to miss God's will. During this time of prayer and self-examination, God confirmed His will to me again and again. I have peace that I have done what the Lord wants.

For me, it is a matter of obedience, much like when God spoke to Abraham, and Abraham went out. This is a walk of faith. I have lived my life by hearing from God.

What have been some of your greatest joys as general superintendent?

TRASK: I have had several joys. Establishing the Office of Ministerial Enrichment and publishing *Enrichment* journal bring great joy to me because they have fulfilled my desire to minister to our

ministers. The journal does such an excellent job addressing the needs and challenges facing our ministers.

Our affiliation with Convoy of Hope has given the AG opportunity to move with compassion in our communities and touch people with the gospel. The relationship that has developed with

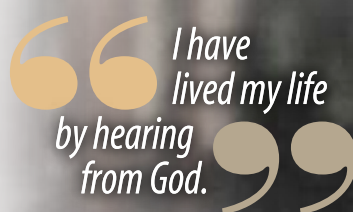
totaling approximately \$1.2 billion.

Another one of my great joys is the establishment of the National Prayer Center. We must be a people of prayer. Nothing will happen of any significance if we do not pray.

During your time in office, how have the secular and church environments changed? What do you see as some of the greatest cultural threats to the church?

TRASK: The Word of God shows that the church is to affect the culture; the culture is not to affect the church. Nevertheless, the godless influence of secular culture is having an impact on the church. This is a major concern I have.

Prosperity may be the greatest cultural threat facing the people of God today. Throughout church history, prosperity has always had a negative influence on the church. People turn to God in hard times, not in times of prosperity. With prosperity comes the pursuit of pleasure as well as carelessness and indifference that bring a destructive cynicism.

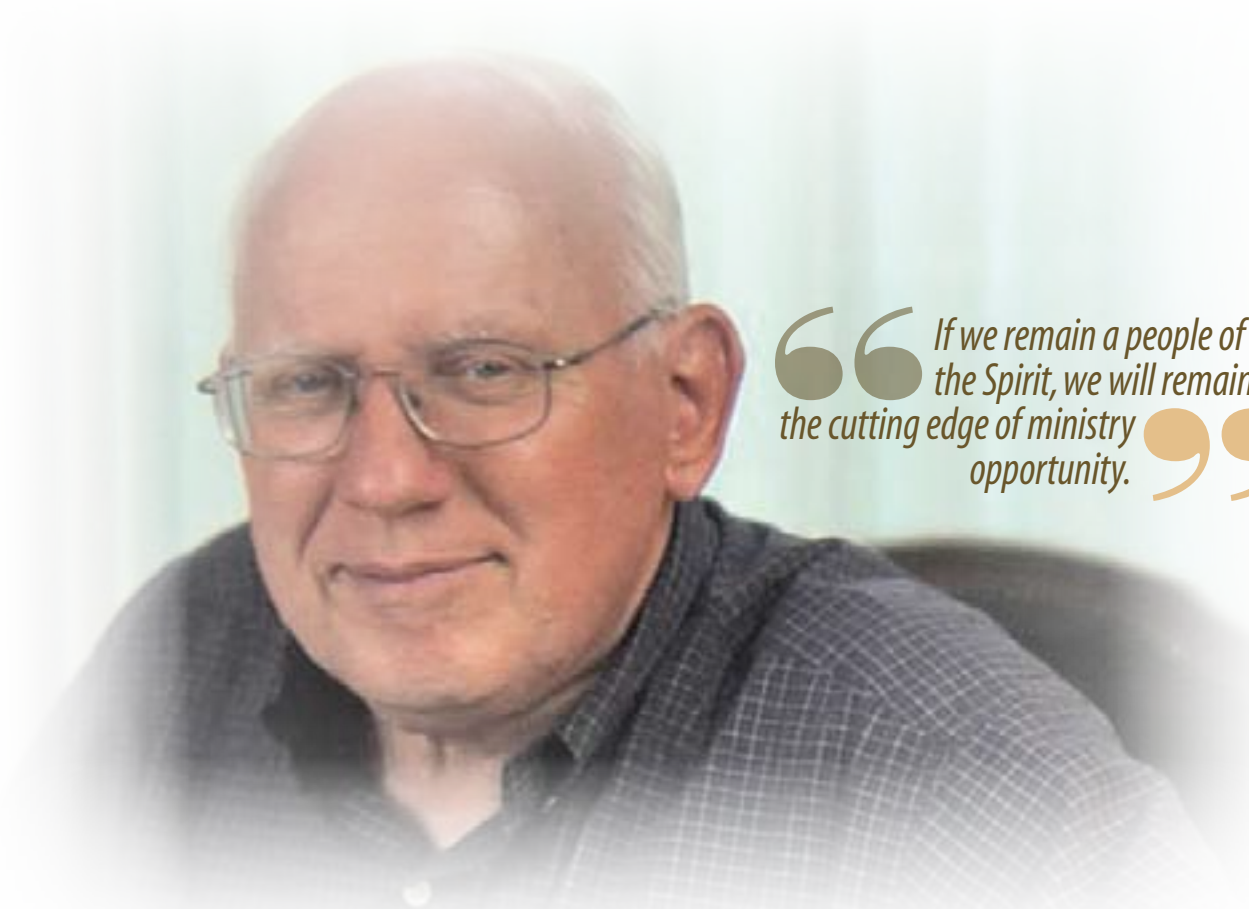


*I have
lived my life
by hearing
from God.*

Convoy of Hope has been most gratifying.

I have also had the joy of watching AG Financial Solutions develop into a solid financial institution. Today, AG Financial Solutions has \$2.4 billion in assets. What blesses me is that more than 23,000 churches and employees now have MBA retirement fund accounts

Another great challenge facing the Assemblies of God is whether we will remain steadfast in our distinctive doctrine on the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial physical evidence of speaking in other tongues. The Assemblies of God must not waiver on this crucial Pentecostal doctrine.

A portrait of an older man with glasses, wearing a dark shirt, looking directly at the camera. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue.

“If we remain a people of the Spirit, we will remain on the cutting edge of ministry opportunity.”

Do you see change on the horizon for the Kingdom?

TRASK: I believe the Church will experience a dramatic change soon. I believe there will be a separation of those who are godly — those who want the things of God, embrace the Spirit of God, and embrace the work of the Spirit — from those who simply want to go through the performance of conducting church. I believe the Assemblies of God will be challenged by these changes. But we need to remember the words of Zechariah 4:6: it is “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.”¹

What are some of the church’s greatest opportunities?

TRASK: As our culture deteriorates, Romans 5:20 says, “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” Scripture also says, “In the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh” (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17).

I believe the Church needs to prepare itself for two great world events. First, the Church must prepare for the great end-time harvest that will take place.

Second, the Church must prepare for the Rapture that will follow the harvest. The conditions of the world will drive people to look for reality. If the church will be the Church, the days and years ahead can be the finest in our history.

What are your plans now that you have left office?

TRASK: I have left the office of general superintendent, but I am not retiring. I will continue in ministry. I deeply love the ministry, the church, and working with the people of God.

I have not made any plans. I am waiting on the Lord. I want to be as deliberate about the next step as I was about this one.

What are your hopes, visions, and dreams for the Assemblies of God over the next decade?

TRASK: We must remain vibrant in the Spirit to have a place of leadership in the world. I wholeheartedly commit to our doctrine. It is the finest Christian doctrine you will find anywhere.

I believe in the polity of our church. We were not raised up to be a

denomination; we were raised up to be a fellowship. A fellowship is a releasing agency. A denomination can become restricted as an agency.

If we remain a people of the Spirit, we will remain on the cutting edge of ministry opportunity. We will not respond to the challenges we see with the naked eye, but to the challenges the Spirit helps us to see. We will respond to these challenges in the power of the Spirit.

We must be a church-planting fellowship. The way to reach America is to plant churches, to win people to Christ, and to disciple them.

We must remain a viable missions organization. That is the heart of Christ.

This is your last interview in EJ. Please share a final thought with our ministers.

TRASK: I pray that our pastors and ministers will never lose their passion for the Lord, for His Word, for His work, for the lost, and for people. That sums up what must drive this church. Passion comes from knowing and loving Jesus. ☺

NOTE

1. Scriptures are KJV.



MY 5 CORE VALUES

GEORGE O. WOOD,
GENERAL
SUPERINTENDENT

At this past General Council, you extended to me the grace of responsibility in serving as the next general superintendent of the Assemblies of God.

I am humbled by your confidence in me. I ask that you pray for me and the other leaders as we begin this journey of serving you.

People have been asking me, "George, what's your vision for the Assemblies of God? What will you focus on as general superintendent?"

First, I will do my best to fulfill our threefold mission — worship, evangelism, and discipleship; and second, to serve the entire Assemblies of God.

Five core values are on my heart as we seek to fulfill our mission. You will hear me repeat them often throughout the time the Lord gives me to serve you. As the country preacher said, "I'm going to tell you what I'm going to say, then I'm going to say it, and then I'm going to tell you what I said."

Passionately Proclaim

Acts 2:42–47 lists characteristics of the Early Church. Listed first is: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." My desire for the Assemblies of God is that we, as ministers and laypeople, by word and action, passionately proclaim Jesus as Savior, Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, Healer, and Soon Coming King.

Our message is not the Assemblies of God. Our focus must not be on fads and extremes. We must not be carried about by every wind of doctrine. Our message is Christ. If we exalt Him first, everything else will fall into its proper place.

The information age has created a new world. The result is an age in which people are skeptical of any claim to absolute truth. We must speak and demonstrate authentically and powerfully to our culture that Jesus Christ is The Truth, The Way, and The Life.

Our heartbeat has been and must always be missions, at home and abroad. We are debtors to our nation and the entire world in that we

owe all people the proclamation of all the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Strategically Invest

Both the Old and New Testaments reflect a deep concern for the transmission of the faith (Psalm 71:18; 2 Timothy 2:2). Thus, we must strategically invest in the next generation.

We have more than 1.1 million people under age 25 in our 12,333 churches. National studies indicate that between 50 to 70 percent of youth from evangelical homes will be lost to the faith by the time they are 4 years out of high school. We must not let this happen in the Assemblies of God. We must carefully watch over transition moments in our youth, while reaching millions of unsaved youth across the nation.

I am also asking that we put support for our endorsed postsecondary schools and Chi Alpha as a priority.

It is a blessing to have a new generation of men and women ministers. They are passionate for Christ but not so sure about ecclesiastical structures. They are looking for encouragement, nurturing relationships, and teamwork;

GEORGE O. WOOD, D.Th.P., is general superintendent of the General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri

not command and control. Let's listen to them, welcome their gifts, and help them reach their fullest potential.

Vigorously Plant

The most effective way to evangelize and disciple young converts is to plant new churches. Thousands of unreached communities in the United States need an Assemblies of God church, including many ethnic groups, divergent socioeconomic groups, suburbs, cities, towns, and rural places.

So, let's vigorously plant new churches. Every Assemblies of God church needs to parent or partner in planting new churches. Let's pray and work for a rapid increase of new churches in all our geographical and foreign language districts, as well as among our ethnic fellowships.

Skillfully Resource

The national office of the Assemblies

of God exists to serve you; therefore, we must skillfully resource the Fellowship. We will give priority to ensure that all ministries flowing from the national office meet the needs of our ministers and laypeople of all ages, churches and districts, and the broader Christian community.

We must provide resources that are both excellent and relevant so the Lord receives glory, lives are changed, and believers are built up in the faith. This is the information age, and we must ensure that the way we communicate is both missional and relational.

Fervently Pray

Without prayer our efforts to passionately proclaim, strategically invest, vigorously plant, and skillfully resource will be in vain. Therefore, we must fervently pray for God's favor and help as we serve Him with pure hearts and noble purposes.

Early Church father John Chrysostom said, "God can refuse nothing to a praying church."

One of my seminary professors said, "We cannot suppose that God will do for us without prayer what He has promised to do for us only through prayer." So, we must fervently "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" (Ephesians 6:18).

Allow me to share a closing thought. On the Friday afternoon of my election, the Lord dropped a verse in my heart: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). I know that many responsibilities await me — but I also believe the Lord intended all ministry to be a journey of joy. I pray that for you as well. The loads many of you carry are heavy, but I pray that the Lord will grant you refreshing and that the yokes we wear will fit well so labor for the Lord will not be just a duty, but a delight. ☺

I usually sign my name **George O. Wood**. It distinguishes me from my minister dad, George R. (Roy) Wood (deceased), and my pastor son, George P. (Paul) Wood.

But, I keep the "O" for a special, additional reason. My maternal grandfather was Oliver Weidman.

My grandfather grew up in the small town of Portland, Pennsylvania. He married Minnie and they had eight children. Each day he boarded a train and earned his living by selling candy and edibles to passengers. One day his boss announced that on the following Monday he was to start selling cigars and cigarettes. No one knew early in the 20th century that tobacco was a leading killer, but my grandfather knew his body was the temple of the Holy Spirit. He also did not want tobacco to defile other people. Without knowing what he would do for income, he quit. It was a step of obedience and faith.

He moved his family to Cleveland, Ohio, and spent the rest of his short life (dying in his mid-50s) selling pots and pans door to door. He never owned an automobile, so the streetcar was his means of transportation. In between streetcar transfers, he would lay aside his pots and pans and hold an impromptu street meeting. If his children were around, they would try to make themselves inconspicuous.

Although the large family had meager resources, my grandfather brought home people who were down on their luck to share the dinner meal. The homeless and needy knew him to be a man of compassion. When Pentecost came to Cleveland, he received the baptism in the Spirit, but his wife did not. She remained with their evangelical church along with some

What the "O" Stands For

of their children. Others in the family went with my grandfather to the Assemblies of God church, located on the opposite end of town. It was a great missionary giving and sending church. My mother recalls many evenings when they lingered at the altars, leaving just in time to catch the last streetcar that would transfer them to another streetcar, which would take them home.

Mother told me that my grandfather prayed loudly 2 hours a day. She said that when he died, she missed most his prayers.

My grandfather believed so deeply in the imminence of the Lord's return that he felt buying life insurance was an act of faithlessness. For 2 years, my mother postponed going as a missionary to China and Tibet to work as a bank clerk and pay off his funeral and other debts. Mom always wryly said, "After that, I believed in life insurance."

Out of my grandfather's home came three Assemblies of God missionaries: my mother, Elizabeth; my aunt Ruth, who married Victor Plymire and served in China and Tibet; and my uncle Paul Weidman, who with his wife, Virginia, served in West Africa and Japan.

We are now into the fourth generation from Oliver Weidman and throughout the generations there continues to be a flow of missionaries, pastors, and dedicated Christian laypeople.

Through his fervent prayers, dedicated personal evangelism, compassion for others, and deep Pentecostal piety he left an enduring legacy. I am humbled and honored that my middle name is a tribute to my grandfather: Oliver.

GEORGE O. WOOD, D.TH.P., Springfield, Missouri



"The Second Coming of Jesus Christ"
by Ron DiGianni

*Preach it,
teach it, and
live with
expectation.*

Defining Truths of the Assemblies of God: The Second Coming of Christ

The next great event for our planet will be the rapture of the Church — when Jesus comes again. At His ascension, the angel said to Jesus' disciples, "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).¹ What a marvelous promise.

Scripture is filled with admonitions and instructions concerning Christ's return. Jesus said, "When these things begin to come to pass." What things was He talking about? Wars and rumors of wars, pestilences, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, famines, and natural tragedies. Jesus continued, "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28). The Bible tells us that He is coming for those that look for His appearing.

Matthew 25:1-13 tells the story of the five wise and the five foolish virgins. The five wise virgins had oil in their lamps. To what is that referring? It refers to preparedness, being ready. The five foolish virgins did not take oil in their lamps. When the bridegroom came and the 10 virgins arose, only the five who had oil in their lamps were ready to meet the Lord. The five foolish tried to buy oil from those who had oil. This tells us that we must be ready.

How is one made ready? First, he must know Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Second, he must be living an overcoming, holy life, expecting Him to come. Is anyone perfect? No. But there is a difference between willful disobedience and serving the Lord to the best of one's ability.

I believe Israel is God's time clock. Keep your eye on Israel. The church of Jesus Christ has a front-row seat. The world is frightened and paralyzed, but the Church is mobilized. Men's hearts may fail them for fear, but the church of Jesus Christ has a Blessed Hope. "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3).

I encourage pastors to preach on the Second Coming; help people know that Jesus is coming "at an hour when ye think not" (Luke 12:40),

"in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:52). There will not be opportunity for people to get ready when Jesus returns. It will happen suddenly. Scripture says that "there shall be two ... in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other left.... Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left" (Luke 17:34-36). We need to prepare, and we need to prepare the church.

We need to be preachers of the Second Coming because it brings hope, not the hopelessness the world has. The world throws up its hands when it looks at the problems and cares of society. They have no hope. But the Church knows these things must happen, and then we will "see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30). "Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). What a glorious promise.

Pastor, emphasize the day and hour in which we live, the signs that point to the soon return of Jesus Christ, and that He could return today.

"When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound,
and time shall be no more,
And the morning breaks eternal, bright
and fair;

When the saved of earth shall gather over
on the other shore,
And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there."

As a boy I remember coming home from school and going into the house. I would holler, "Mother, are you there?"

Dad was usually doing church visitation, but if mother was not there or was not answering, it scared me. Has the Rapture taken place? Have I missed it? When I heard her voice, "Yes, I'm here," then I knew the Rapture had not taken place. I had a consciousness and an awareness that the Rapture could happen at any moment.

Preach the Second Coming, teach it, and live with expectation, for Jesus is coming soon. 🙏

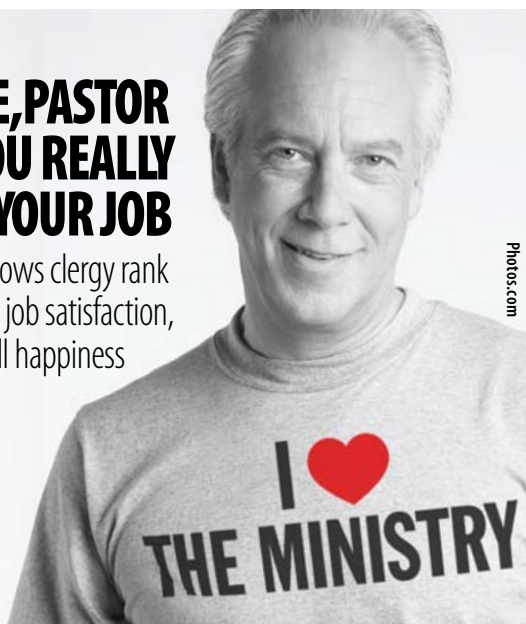
NOTE

1. Scriptures are KJV.



SMILE, PASTOR ... YOU REALLY LOVE YOUR JOB

Survey shows clergy rank highest in job satisfaction, overall happiness



Photos.com

Despite the threat of burnout, church splits, and financial pressures, a nationwide survey has found that no job is as satisfying as pastoring. In addition, clergy also are atop the poll's list of happiest people.

The National Opinion Research Center examined 300 occupations in its General Social Survey. The most satisfying jobs are mostly well-educated,

prestigious professions, especially ones that involve caring for, teaching, and helping others.

Tom W. Smith, director of NORC at the University of Chicago, says those factors make pastoring a natural fit on the list.

"But we didn't anticipate clergy to be the clear leader by such a significant margin of being happy with their job and with their life in general," Smith told *Enrichment*. "Clearly there is an added spiritual dimension of doing God's work."

In the survey, 87 percent of pastors reported being very satisfied with their work, outdistancing second-place physical therapists, who had a 78 percent very satisfied rating. Firefighters were third, education administrators fourth, and sculptors fifth on the job satisfaction survey. The least satisfying occupations are roofers (only 25 percent satisfied), followed by waiters, bartenders, and hand packagers.

Overall, 47 percent of Americans reported being very satisfied with their work.

Clergy, at 67 percent, also topped NORC's list of being very happy in life beyond work, which includes family, health, and other factors. Firefighters came in second at 57 percent, followed by ticket reservation agents, architects, and special education teachers. The least happy workers in life are generally unskilled manual and service positions: service station attendants (only 13 percent), roofers, molding and casting machine operators, and construction laborers. In all, only 1 out of 3 people reported being very happy in life.

Ministers, firefighters, and special education teachers are the only careers to make the top dozen spots of both lists. A number of high social standing occupations, including physician and lawyer, are not in the highest 12 on either list. 🌀

Laity certainly do not exhibit the loyalty they once did, either to a local congregation or to a particular denomination. But a new study suggests that the chief reason for switching churches is not immaturity but a desire for a deeper spiritual relationship. Slightly more than 3 out of 4 people who change churches call themselves devout Christians with a strong faith in God, according to a study conducted by LifeWay Research.

Brad Waggoner, LifeWay's vice president of research and ministry development, says pastors need to view those switching to their congregation with optimism. Most become solid and active members, although a minority attends regularly with little involvement. Others continue a pattern of leaving in pursuit of a perfect church. And a few bring toxic attitudes with them, creating problems in the new church.

Church Switching Not Necessarily Negative

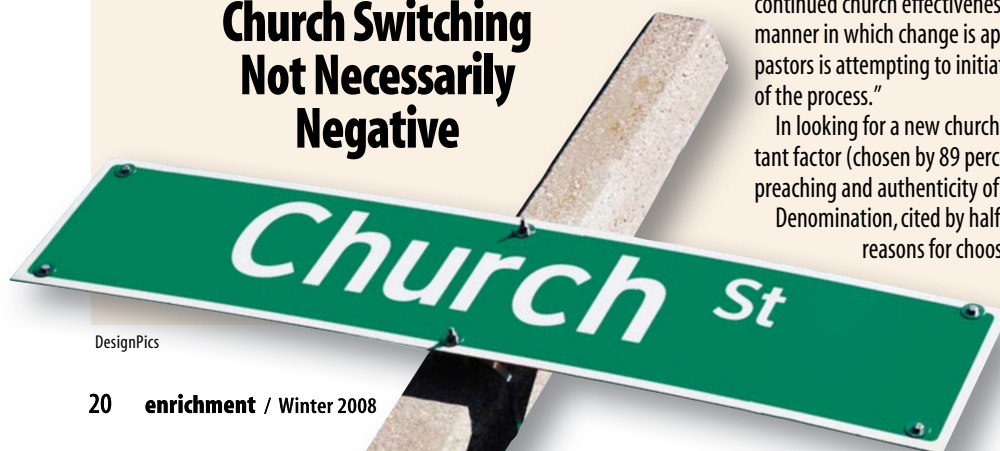
Yet Waggoner says pastors need to be encouraged for the top reasons cited by congregants for leaving: they do not believe they are growing enough spiritually and they are not engaged in meaningful work in the church. "While preaching is the most important calling of any pastor, the ministry of equipping the saints extends beyond the pulpit," Waggoner says. "The often untapped power in the church is the army of believers who never have been properly viewed as ministers."

Waggoner says too many churches require no more from new members than walking down an aisle or signing a card. People are more likely to stay if they have to complete a class for new members or doctrinal beliefs. "It is essential to design a substantive process of orienting and disciplining new members," Waggoner says.

Another key factor in why people leave is because of too many changes in the church. "Change is unavoidable and even necessary for continued church effectiveness," Waggoner says. "However, the manner in which change is approached is crucial. A common mistake of pastors is attempting to initiate change without a clear understanding of the process."

In looking for a new church home, church doctrine is the most important factor (chosen by 89 percent), followed closely by the quality of preaching and authenticity of the people, according to the report.

Denomination, cited by half the respondents, is not even in the top 10 reasons for choosing a new church. Church size (31 percent) also is way down on the list. 🌀



DesignPics

Spiritual Growth, Inspiration Top Reasons for Church Attendance

Just why do 4 out of 10 Americans continue to go to church every week in this post-Christian society?

Nearly 1 out of 4 attendees (23 percent) goes “for spiritual growth and guidance” while 1 out of 5 churchgoers says the experience provides inspiration and grounding, according to a recent Gallup poll. The open-ended question marked the first time that the Princeton, New Jersey, organization had sought specific reasons for church attendance.

“It’s my faith” and “to worship God” tied for the third ranked response, at 15 percent. Another 13 percent indicated fellowship as the primary reason. The last replies to have significant measurement, both at 12 percent: “belief in God” and “tradition.”

The survey found that women are more likely to attend to worship God, to be inspired, and for fellowship. Meanwhile, men more frequently answered

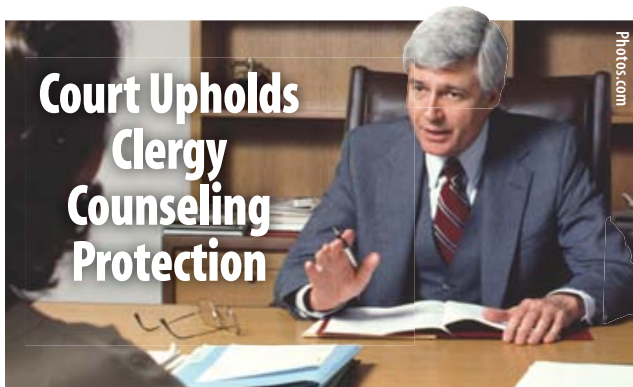
that they go to church because they were brought up that way, it is their faith, or simply because they believe in God.

The biggest difference between Protestants and Catholics involved a sense of community at church. While 17 percent of Protestants said fellowshiping with other members is the primary reason to be in church, only 3 percent of Catholics did so.

Gallup found that those most likely to attend church are the elderly, women, Southerners, blacks, and evangelicals.

“Pentecostals have one of the highest frequencies of attendance while Episcopalians show the lowest yields of attendance,” Gallup researcher Frank Newport told *Enrichment*.

In surveying those who never attend church, Gallup found almost 1 out of 4 (24 percent) says they stay away because they do not agree with organized religion or what is preached. Another 21 percent gave the excuse that they do not have time. The third reason, “don’t believe in going to church,” garnered 16 percent. One in 10 claims to be an atheist. In fifth place, 9 percent reported they did not have a church with which to connect. ☺



In a unanimous ruling, the Texas Supreme Court dismissed a lawsuit against a pastor who had followed church discipline in revealing a woman’s adulterous relationship and dismissing her from church membership.

The 9-0 June 29 decision protects ministers from First Amendment intrusion by civil courts in internal congregational matters.

Peggy Lee Penley had sued C.L. “Buddy” Westbrook, Jr., pastor of

the nondenominational CrossLand Community Bible Church in Fort Worth, claiming he acted negligently in providing marital counseling.

The ruling, written by Justice Harriet O’Neill, says it was impossible for Westbrook to segregate the roles of counselor, which required confidentiality, and pastor, where he had an obligation to the entire congregation.

The church constitution called for discipline of church members

who violate biblical standards regarding marriage. Upon becoming a member, Penley had signed a statement that she agreed with the church’s beliefs. In counseling, Penley divulged a sexual relationship with a man other than her husband. Westbrook and the church board, noting that Penley refused to repent, informed the congregation in a letter of her decision to divorce her husband without scriptural grounds. The letter explained the disciplinary process outlined in Matthew 18 and the need for members to disassociate with Penley and pray for her restoration.

Kelly Shackelford, chief counsel for Liberty Legal Institute, which represented Westbrook, says the unanimous decision has national significance because of its First Amendment foundation.

“This ruling dismantled arguments generally made to sue churches and pastors,” Shackelford told *Enrichment*.

“It makes it likely that other courts will follow this approach.”

If the court had allowed obstruction of church discipline, it would have been a dangerous precedent, Shackelford says.

“For more than 200 years churches have had the right to manage their own internal affairs, including what their doctrines will be and picking who their leaders are,” Shackelford says. “If churches have to follow secular sexual orientation laws on discipline and membership issues, there will be interference in internal meetings and sermons.”

Penley’s claim “unconstitutionally impinges upon internal matters of church governance in violation of the First Amendment,” O’Neill wrote in the ruling. “Clearly Westbrook’s actions were grounded in religious doctrine.”

The National Association of Evangelicals filed a court brief in support of Westbrook. ☺

The Crisis of Discipleship in the American Church



By Charles T. Crabtree

The number of committed believers in contrast to the number of recorded decisions for Christ is both alarming and disappointing.

Some years ago, my wife and I decided to buy an older house we felt had great potential. We hired a well-qualified contractor to examine the house. When he was done, we faced a *good news, bad news* situation. We decided to hear the bad news first. Among other things, some expensive structural repairs were needed. He found mold on the first level and some flooring needed a new base. Finally, he was done with the bad news. The good news was that for a price and with some patience, he could repair the house, and we would have a beautiful place to live.

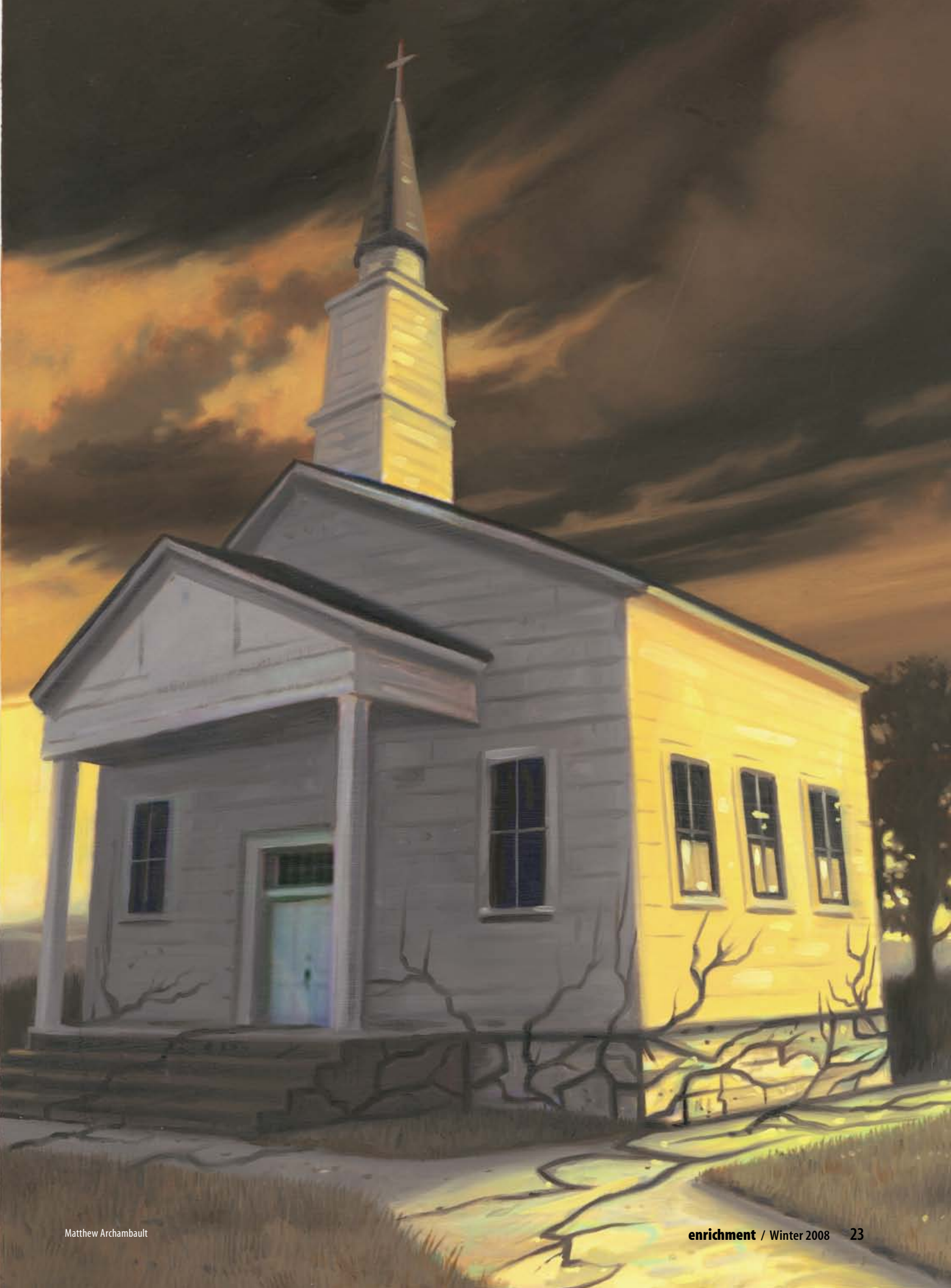
In many ways, this article is a reality check on the state of discipleship in the Assemblies of God. Like the contractor who examined our house, I set before the church *good news* and *bad news*.

I have chosen to give the *bad news* first. The bottom line, however, is good news. At a price and with some patience, we can repair discipleship in the local church. Discipleship can become the means by which millions of people are saved and trained by a healthy church in the coming years, if Jesus tarries.

In recent months many Assemblies of God leaders have experienced a *great awakening* in discipleship. This is a bold statement because there has always been an awareness concerning the importance of discipleship beyond pulpit ministry. There are many good books on discipleship. Terms, such as *closing the back door*, are common. But awareness is not enough. Our Fellowship must first have a great awakening to the crisis in discipleship. Then we can motivate the collective will and passion to pay the price and persist until every church has a powerful, transforming discipleship ministry.

Most church leaders would agree that many American Christians are weak in their commitment to spiritual disciplines, lack boldness in their witness of Christ, and have lifestyles almost undistinguishable from unbelievers. The result is a weak and ineffective church. The quality of a church's disciples determines the health and effectiveness of the church. Scripture tells us to study the fruit of one's Christian life to know the truth and integrity of his profession of faith. Evidence suggests that the state of discipleship in the American church is grievous to our Lord.

Many consider the Assemblies of God to be a great Pentecostal church. Worldwide, its growth is stunning. If any church in America should be producing strong, healthy, effective disciples, it should be the Assemblies of God; and, it does. But the number of committed believers in contrast to the number of recorded decisions for Christ is both alarming and disappointing. This is systemic of the state of discipleship in the entire evangelical/Pentecostal church in America.



From 1995 to 2005, the Assemblies of God in the United States reported 5,339,144 decisions for Christ while Sunday morning attendance¹ for the same period grew by only 221,790. The ratio of Sunday morning attendance gain to reported

connect to another church and are lost to the Kingdom. Others remain in the Kingdom because they connect to another evangelical or Pentecostal/charismatic church. There are also incidents of church trouble and serious division that cause dwindling

merely address the effects rather than the causes.

Conversion and Water Baptism

The first thing we need to determine when looking at the number of decisions for Christ is how many decisions for Christ were true conversions. In the wisdom of God, the Lord commanded water baptism for people who repented of sin and were converted. It is clear in Scripture that a person cannot earn his salvation. Ephesians 2 tells us that salvation is a gift of God, and it is not possible through works to perfect it. Salvation is the result of a perfect sacrifice. When some in the Early Church considered circumcision an element of salvation, Paul — through the guidance of the Holy Spirit — rejected circumcision as a means of grace. In doing so, he slammed the door on adding anything that could be construed as requiring human effort to perfect the gift of God, and clarified the means and requirements of salvation for the Church forever.

Throughout church history, some have sought to add human works and ordinances as requirements for salvation. One Pentecostal group holds the false doctrine of baptismal regeneration and requires speaking in other tongues for one to go up in the Rapture. Such teaching is destructive to the doctrine of salvation.

Some have gone to the other extreme. Their fear of falling into the error of baptismal regeneration has clouded the importance of water baptism. Avoiding doctrinal error is commendable, but it must never dampen our passion for and declaration of truth, and our fulfillment of scriptural obligations.

We must not insist that water baptism is a requirement for salvation. We do insist, however, in water

Church leaders make a critical mistake when they do not insist that new believers show proof (that is, water baptism) of their commitment.

conversions is 4 percent. Obviously, this percentage needs an upward adjustment for several reasons:

1. As a church gets older, there is a natural attrition in numbers because of the death rate. The death rate, however, is somewhat balanced by the natural birthrate.

2. Most churches experience a significant number of losses through members or adherents moving from one community to another. Anecdotal evidence suggests that when people move to a different city, some never

attendance. The reverse, however, is true. Those leaving the church are somewhat ameliorated by people who come into the church from other cities and churches.

3. In statistics in which large numbers are involved, there can be misreporting or exaggeration of numbers, especially in salvation decisions. In some cases, pastors estimate instead of insisting on good, objective data.

After considering all factors, we cannot say with integrity that the Assemblies of God retained more than

10 percent of those who made a decision for Christ as Savior. Using this as an example, the lack of retention of new converts in the Assemblies of God is a spiritual tragedy.

To fix this problem, we need to know its cause. We must rely on the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit, or we could become sidetracked and



baptism for new believers because Christ commanded it.

When the Lord of the Church gave the ordinance of water baptism to the Church, He was providing a continual, powerful evidence of true conversion. Jesus knew what was in human nature. He knew a person's decision to follow Him was meaningless if the person's life did not change. How many of us smile when we hear someone say, "I am going to diet and lose 30 pounds"? However, if the person changes her lifestyle with observable results, we begin to take her seriously.

Water baptism is not a means of salvation, but it is a serious first step in discipleship. Church leaders make a critical mistake when they do not insist that new believers show proof (that is, water baptism) of their commitment.

Water baptism is an example of obedience. The Lord wants to see obedience in every new believer. Obedience is the beginning of true discipleship. Water baptism does not prove lordship, but it does prove that the new believer is not ashamed to tell the world that Christ is his Savior.

In some countries and cultures, water baptism merits the death penalty. In such cases, a new believer's family will disown and ostracize him after he follows the Lord in water baptism. It is common for such families to hold a funeral service and declare the new believer dead to the family. It is ironic when people in an unbelieving, heathen culture seem to have a better understanding of a biblical ordinance than the church.

Romans 10:9,10 reveals the fact salvation consists of more than an oral confession; it is also a matter of the heart: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and

Online Discipleship Resources

The new Commission on Discipleship Web site (<http://discipleship.ag.org/index.cfm>) has helpful tools, resources, downloadables, and articles to assist the church in discipleship, small groups, personal Bible studies, and new convert care. Pastors and church leaders can resource this site to help strengthen their discipleship efforts.

Churches interested in starting or strengthening their small group ministry will find the small group section of the Web site an exceptional tool. Several articles and resources are available, including a new training opportunity called the AG Small Group Model Church in which pastors and church leaders can visit, study, and be involved in small group ministries already established throughout the nation.

The Assemblies of God also has an online Discipleship Forum (<http://forums.ag.org/discipleship/index.php>). Participating in this forum enables pastors to dialog on key discipleship issues, and connect with other pastors and church leaders for online discussions to build and strengthen discipleship and smallgroup ministry across the nation. The forum is easy to access. A valid e-mail address is all you need to register and contribute.



REBECCA GUILLION, Commission on Discipleship, Springfield, Missouri

are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."

This passage is critical to understanding why so many decisions for Christ are in word only and comparatively few disciples are living out what they say they believe. It is the difference between mental assent and conviction of the heart, between talking and doing, and between Jesus being added to the board of directors and Jesus being CEO and president of a life.

I belabor this point because merely counting decisions for Christ must not satisfy us. We must seriously question the validity of an oral confession without the attending act of obedience — water baptism.

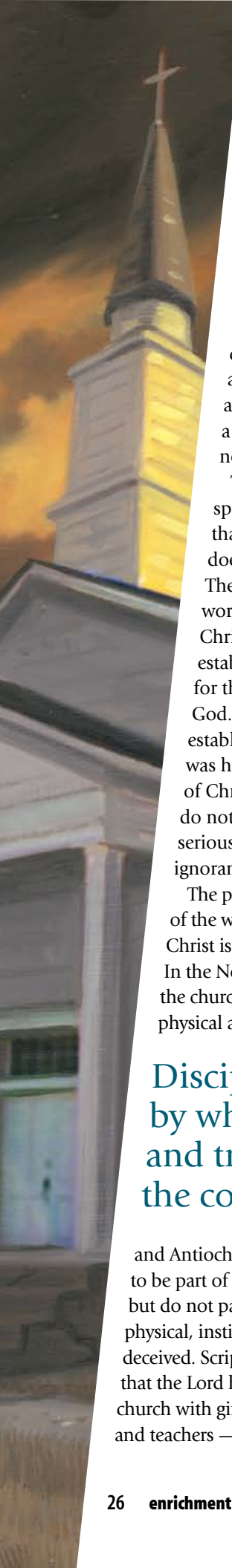
While I do not advocate ceasing to count decisions for Christ in church statistics (since they indicate potential disciples), I do believe that the number of water baptisms gives a

clearer picture of true conversions.

Using statistics from the Assemblies of God, we note that during the previously mentioned period, the Assemblies of God reported 1,329,364 water baptisms. The ratio of Sunday morning attendance gain to water baptisms was 17 percent. While it is difficult to factor in the death rate within any denomination and the net effect of demographic and population shifts, it is obvious that the average church loses well over half of the people who have been baptized in water. The state of discipleship among those baptized in water is, at best, in serious trouble.

Church Attendance

Church attendance is another critical factor in analyzing the state of discipleship. Going to church will not make you a Christian any more



than going into a garage will make you a car. But the church should not count a person who makes a decision for Christ and chooses not to attend church. Such a person is usually not a serious convert.

The Church is a spiritual creation that the carnal mind does not understand. The Church is the worldwide body of Christ; an institution established by God for the purposes of God. The price paid to establish the Church was high — the death of Christ. People who do not take the Church seriously are willfully ignorant of divine truth.

The physical expression of the worldwide body of Christ is the local church. In the New Testament, the church was always at a physical address: Jerusalem

maturing (discipling) of the saints. The church is God's divine provision for serious converts. Christians who claim they do not need the church are questioning the wisdom of God. Without faithfulness to the church a believer cannot attain perfection in Christ. Furthermore, Scripture commands us to meet as the body of Christ more and more in light of the coming of the Lord.

To continue our analysis, the average Assemblies of God Sunday morning worship attendance net gain was 221,790 (from 1,531,003 to 1,752,793). This is a growth of 14 percent. Again, when looking at these data, the numbers do not give a full picture. The Fellowship had to grow more than 14 percent in average Sunday morning attendance to make up for factors such as the death rate and the possible net loss incurred by those entering and those leaving the Assemblies of God. As in the comparison of the numbers between water baptisms and decisions for Christ, the growth of the average Sunday morning attendance (221,790) when compared with the number of recorded decisions (5,339,144) should disturb any responsible church leader.

Church attendance is an option that must bow to work schedules, extracurricular school activities, and opportunities to get away. People take Sundays off to use a second home or their boat.

Some Christians believe that reading devotions or watching Christian television can replace church attendance. Others are excited about attending revivals, seminars, and conferences but are less enthused about being faithful to the church.

For too long Pentecostal churches have been reluctant to preach, teach, and promote the importance of being faithful to church. Even though church attendance is not a component of salvation, it is, nevertheless, a major factor — the primary factor — in discipleship.

For a believer to make it spiritually in our 21st-century American culture, he must become a faithful attendee of a church. Church attendance must be one of the highest priorities in his life. Why? The church is not only God's provision and resource for every believer, but it is also the only safe place for the family to be nurtured in the things of God. Those who complain that the church is imperfect or does not satisfy their expectations are forgetting two fundamental facts: The church is the believer's spiritual home, and to neglect church life is to diminish the quality of one's spiritual life.

There is a great difference between being legalistic and being responsible. To say that a person is not saved if he does not attend church is legalistic. To say that faithful church attendance is a must for spiritual growth and safety is responsible. To say going to the lake or a sports event on Sunday is sin is legalistic. Teaching people the importance of faithfulness to the church, however, is responsible.

Each believer has a responsibility

Discipleship can become the means by which millions of people are saved and trained by a healthy church in the coming years, if Jesus tarries.

and Antioch. Those who claim to be part of the body of Christ but do not participate in the physical, institutional church are deceived. Scripture makes it clear that the Lord has provided the church with gifts — such as pastors and teachers — for the perfecting/

Every person responsible for discipleship must have deep conviction concerning the importance of consistent church attendance. The enemy has sold many people on the idea that we cannot expect people with complex lifestyles and time demands to be faithful to church.

to the church. On the other hand, church leaders have a responsibility to every believer. Pastors must do everything possible to make the church experience rich and fulfilling. The Lord is worthy of our best in every aspect of our service to Him — in preaching, teaching, music, facilities, pastoral care, and administration. Church leaders are not only proclaimers of truth but are also primary role models of truth. Everyone in the kingdom of God needs to pray as never before that the Church will always be at her best.

Church Membership

Church membership is an important factor in the state of discipleship. Statistics reveal that from 1995 to 2005, church membership in the Assemblies of God grew by 235,016 — from 1,377,320 to 1,612,336 (17 percent). In the same period, however, church membership grew about 3 percent more than Sunday morning attendance.

These figures tell us that church membership is being better promoted than it has been in the past. Church leaders realize that in our culture it is important for people to make a commitment to the church.

In the past, many pastors were hesitant to insist that people become church members in a formal sense. The main reason for this, in my mind, was the fear that people would begin to see church membership as a means to increase attendance numbers rather than as a means to encourage discipleship. Many denominations feel that church membership has no correlation to church attendance. While we do not want to use church membership as a reason to boast, we do want to make church membership an important tool for discipleship.

It is important that people make formal commitments to Christ and His church. That is the reason for water baptism and church membership. One could argue that signing a card does not make a person a disciple. Signing a membership card, however, is similar to signing a marriage license. It is an outward expression of an inward commitment and important to the future of a marital relationship. It makes a statement to the world that the couple is no longer available for courting, and holds the couple accountable to one another in times of temptation and difficulties. At a wedding, the pastor says, "Marriage is an honorable estate." We need to make a similar declaration when the church family recognizes new members.

Church membership, like marriage, does not determine the quality of a relationship. It does, however, underscore God's plan for believers to have a rich and rewarding relationship with all the rights, privileges, and obligations inherent in and to the body of Christ. The institution of marriage is under attack. A marriage becomes meaningless when there is a lack of love, purity, and responsibility. Even though some do not choose to make marriage what God intended, it does not lessen its importance or its contribution to the greater integrity and strength of society. In a

day when lip service is being paid to marriage as an institution and church membership as an obligation, it is incumbent on all Christians to honor God by going beyond lip service to demonstrating a continued faithfulness to His will and commitment to His plan.

Adherents

Another indicator we need to consider when analyzing the state of discipleship is the number of adherents. To continue our statistical study, adherents grew from 2,387,982 to 2,830,861 — a 19 percent increase. In light of the fact the Assemblies of God's average Sunday morning worship attendance was 1,752,793 on any given Sunday, more than a million people claimed by Assemblies of God churches were not in attendance.

It would be impossible to determine the quality of discipleship of Assemblies of God adherents as a group for obvious reasons. Often, their only attachment to the church, in a formal sense, is by their word. Anecdotal evidence and testimonies

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"Because you pastors can't get along, the board has decided to tether you together until you decide to get along."

of pastors tell us that there are many committed, faithful believers within the Assemblies of God. A realistic look at the same evidence, however, tells us that a large majority of adherents are, at best, Christians in name only.

Conclusion

The Assemblies of God needs to gather the best and most reliable statistics to realize the tremendous potential for spiritual growth and development among those who claim the Assemblies of God as their church home. The greatest indicator of the state of discipleship, however, is in Sunday morning average attendance. This is the only indicator that shows the number of people who continue to stay attached to the body of Christ. Decisions for Christ, water baptism, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit are instantaneous experiences that are necessary in the Christian life. Unless new believers follow through in a continued walk with Christ, these experiences do not indicate a progressive commitment or interest in the things of God.

It is difficult to measure a believer's involvement or faithfulness. In a practical sense, Sunday morning attendance is a demonstration, not of quality but of continued interest and connection to the church. Pastors must focus on these people as candidates for transformational discipleship.

Because the state of discipleship is determined by the quality of disciples who make up the church, we need an occasional reality check to make repairs, adjustments, and room for those who want to live in the community of the church and for others who will consider the church as God's provision for them in the future.

Let us call back our friendly contractor — the Holy Spirit — to

The Next Level

Based on the facts, prepare a *good news, bad news* report on the present state of discipleship in your church.

Study Questions

1. Of the conversions reported in your church in the last year, what percentage attends Sunday morning worship service?
2. Of the people converted in your church in the last year, what percentage received water baptism?
3. How would you biblically define the worldwide church and the local church? Why do they have an inextricable link?
4. Discuss ways church leadership can promote church attendance.
5. How does your church membership compare with average attendance in your Sunday morning worship service?
6. If you factor in even occasional attendance, how many people have affiliation with your church? What steps can you take to integrate them more fully into your congregation?

CHARLEST. CRABTREE, Springfield, Missouri

give an assessment of the state of discipleship. Based on statistics, a building expert inspecting the Assemblies of God might say:

"When assessed as spiritual housing, the Assemblies of God is still viable. It has great curb appeal and is functional. It is a large house and has room for a growing family. Presently, the foundation is in good shape. However, some structural problems, if not addressed, could cause the house to incur major damage in a storm or earthquake. I am not prepared to give the cost or a timeframe to bring the house up to divine specifications, but it will be expensive in time and labor.

"In looking at the potential of this aging structure, the good news is that with a willingness to face facts, pay the price, and seek the right help, the Assemblies of God can become the most sound, attractive, and best suited

church for 21st-century spiritual life in America. If you want, I will serve as general contractor."

It would please God if every person connected to the Assemblies of God would say, "Welcome, Holy Spirit. We invite You to examine every part of the church. We pledge to God that we will not run from the truth but respond to it, finding new faith and freedom to make the church everything You want it to become." 🌱



CHARLEST. CRABTREE is former assistant general superintendent of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri. Adapted from chapter one of his book, *Transformational Discipleship*. ©2007 by Gospel Publishing House, 1445 N. Boonville Ave., Springfield, Missouri 65802.

NOTE

1. References to Sunday morning attendance refer to the church's major worship service and can include Friday or Saturday evening services or multiple services on Sunday.



of Evangelism and Discipleship:

When Jesus gave the Great Commission to His disciples, it was not a new idea to them. Through His teaching and example, Jesus had been preparing His disciples for their task.

The mission before them was not merely to assemble another religious social movement. They were to participate in the divine activity of God in the world, redeeming lost humanity to himself. Just as the disciples had seen the loaves and fish multiply, they would now participate in perpetuating and multiplying the message Jesus had committed to them.

Each of the four Gospels concludes with an emphasis on the mission to which Jesus committed His disciples at the end of His earthly ministry. The Great Commission passages in all three Synoptic Gospels, as well as in John, clearly present a comprehensive mission that includes evangelism and discipleship.

An accurate and comprehensive definition of evangelism was given by William Temple, the 98th archbishop of Canterbury (1942–44): “Evangelism is to so present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit that men might come to trust Him as Savior and serve Him as Lord in the fellowship of His church.”

Treating evangelism and discipleship separately is an artificial distinction. As a line cannot be drawn between the colors of a rainbow, so evangelism cannot be separated from discipleship in Scripture. Evangelism and discipleship are not two parts of a progression that begins with evangelism and culminates in discipleship. Instead, they compose a cycle. Evangelism should be undertaken with the objective of discipleship, and discipleship should prepare believers for evangelism.

Prediscipleship Evangelism

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus taught that the seed — the Word of God, or the message — will fall on different kinds of ground. Some people who hear the message will not respond, and some who respond will not remain.

Some approach the Parable of the Sower from a negative perspective because three of the four types of soil failed to produce lasting life. But the parable looks beyond those hindrances to the triumph of God’s Word in producing the kingdom of God. Even though much space in the parable is devoted to listing the three kinds of ground that are unproductive, only a small part of the seed would land on



Greg Schneider

An Unending Process >>> By Randy Hurst

those places in an actual field. The parable does not imply that most of the sower's work is wasted.

Most expositions treat the Parable of the Sower as having four kinds of soil: hard ground, shallow ground, thorny ground, and good ground. But the parable also can be viewed as presenting two kinds of soil: productive and unproductive. Three examples are given for each of the two kinds of soil. Every person faces one of only two destinies. The result of evangelism is about the good ground — those in whom life not only begins but also grows and multiplies.

Some people approach evangelism with the sole objective of seeing a nonbeliever pray a sinner's prayer. But the goal of evangelism is more than a salvation decision. The goal of evangelism is a change in lifestyle — a person following Christ in obedience to His teaching and commands. The end objective is a *disciple* — a committed and faithful follower of Christ.

Unfortunately, if a person arrives at a salvation decision without understanding the cost of following Christ, he can begin well but fail to continue following and serving Him. This situation is illustrated by the first three kinds of soil mentioned in the Parable of the Sower. People receive the

message, but birds take the seed away, the sun scorches it, or thorns choke it. Jesus explained that the birds, sun, and thorns represented hindrances in people's spiritual lives. These include persecution or the desire for riches. These prevent the message from having a long-term effect.

As passionately as we want to see people make decisions for Christ, it is possible to push them to premature decisions rather than cooperating with the Holy Spirit as He leads them, first to a decision, and then into discipleship.

Understanding that discipleship needs to be the objective of evangelism will affect how we share the message. Jesus taught that His followers must understand the cost of being His disciples: "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?" (Luke 14:27,28).¹

A nonbeliever must understand the significance of the decision to receive Christ's forgiveness and follow Him. Believers must be careful not to emotionally manipulate people into decisions they neither understand nor are

ready to make. When praying with a person to receive Christ, we must ensure that he understands what he is doing. This requires wisdom and sometimes even restraint.

We are not responsible for convincing people to commit their lives to Christ. Evangelism is not merely human persuasion; it is a work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would convince the world concerning “sin, and righteousness, and judgment” (John 16:8). We are

for this explosive, exponential growth is that in most Third World countries believers are taught and expected to evangelize. Many believers in America expect paid, professional church staff to do evangelism. In countries that do not have significant numbers of paid church staff, congregations are much more active in evangelism.

Being an effective witness does not necessarily depend on how long a person has followed Christ or even how spiritually mature he is. Extensive

may present every man *complete in Christ*” (Colossians 1:28, emphasis added). Notice that the goal is for each disciple to be presented before the Lord holy, blameless, and beyond reproach — complete in Christ — at the end of life on earth.

As they lead local churches in evangelism, pastors will often need to make decisions concerning how time and resources will be spent. We, like Paul, need to be committed to evangelizing “by *all means*” (1 Corinthians 9:22, emphasis added). But we must prioritize those means that result in the end objective defined by God’s Word — disciples who are “complete in Christ” (Colossians 1:28). Sometimes this will mean opting for methods that might not produce as many initial decisions, but that result in more disciples.

Jesus’ concern is focused on the eternal consequences of sin and the eternal destiny of each person. The gospel calls each hearer to decide and respond to the proclamation of God’s Word. The focus of the gospel is on the salvation of individuals who will comprise the bride of Christ. The mission of the church is to participate in Christ’s mission of “bringing many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10).

The cycle of evangelism and discipleship is an unending process of reaching and retaining people who become citizens of Christ’s eternal kingdom. 🌱



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NOTE

1. Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission (www.Lockman.org).

Just as the disciples had seen the loaves and fishes multiply, they would now participate in perpetuating and multiplying the message Jesus had committed to them.

responsible to share the message clearly. But the Holy Spirit convinces and persuades the heart of the listener. When we understand that God takes the initiative and remains active in the evangelism process, it enables us to be bold, depending on His persuasive work. We can also be patient, trusting His timing rather than trying to push people to a premature decision. This allows us to be neither hesitant nor hasty in our witness.

Pre-evangelism Discipleship

The cycle of evangelism and discipleship is completed when disciples become messengers who evangelize and make more disciples.

The church in America and other places in the West can learn from the church in other parts of the world in this respect. In the last 50 years, church growth in Assemblies of God fellowships in many countries has far surpassed that in the West. This is especially true in Latin America, Africa, and parts of Asia. One reason

research in thousands of churches shows that most of the personal evangelism in any congregation is done by those who have been Christians less than a year.

Personal evangelism is an essential part of following Christ. It needs to be part of every believer’s lifestyle to make an impact on the nonbelievers around him.

The Objective

The objective of evangelism and discipleship is clearly described in Paul’s letter to the Colossians: “He has now reconciled you in his fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach — if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel” (Colossians 1:22,23). Paul goes on to describe the objective of proclaiming the gospel: “And we proclaim him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we

Profile: of a Disciple-Making Church

► Paola Assembly of God: On the Starting Line

Roy and Leighanne Rhodes' three children range in age from their 20-year-old daughter attending junior college in nearby Kansas City, Kansas, to their 17-year-old daughter in high school, to their 3-year-old son.

"The Lord surprised us late in life," Rhodes says with a smile.

The Lord has also surprised Rhodes lately in his ministry.

Rhodes' pastorate at Paola Assembly of God among the community's 5,500 people is effective. During his 7 years there, the semi-rural Kansas church has nearly tripled in size from about 125 to more than 300.

But Rhodes believes he is only on the edge of where he and the church need to go.

"The Lord has brought a tremendous number of people through our doors," he says, "but because in the past we had no understanding of what to do other than just hold services, we haven't held on to a lot of people and we've missed others."

Paola Assembly commissioned demographic studies as the church evaluated its impact on the community. While 300 people out of 5,500 would point to a sizeable evangelistic footprint, Rhodes and his board want to reach the 97,000 people living within a 20-mile radius of the Kansas City community.

"I'm excited about what 7 more years will bring," Rhodes says.

The key to growing his church in those next 7 years, Rhodes believes, is discipleship.

In 2005, Rhodes attended a seminar led by Mark Rutland, president of Southeastern University, in Lakeland, Florida.

"I had been in Paola 5 years," he says, "and like a lot of pastors, I felt a real frustration — not with the ministry itself, but with how to do the ministry. I was searching."

As an outgrowth of the seminar and a personal meeting with Rutland, Rhodes signed on to Southeastern's distance-education master's program in ministerial leadership. Between his graduate studies and additional consultation with Wayne Lee, a church-growth specialist, Rhodes believes he has identified the weakest links in Paola Assembly's ministry chain.

"One of Lee's assessment tools is a four-quadrant circle," Rhodes explains. "The first quadrant has to do with spiritual life, church services, things of that nature. We're great there. The fourth quadrant is outreach/evangelism/missions. We're great there. But the other two quadrants are spiritual

community and discipleship. We're terrible when it comes to what we do with people once we get them."

That is going to change, if Rhodes and his team receive the answers to their prayers. Prayer, Rhodes believes, is the foundation of any church's discipleship ministry.

"It begins in prayer," he says. "That sounds cliché, but it's true. Any revitalization of a desire to see growth in others must begin in a hot, Pentecostal-style prayer meeting. I don't say that for rhetoric."

The prayer group of about 20 meets every Sunday from 8 to 9 a.m. Rhodes encourages them not to sit. He urges them to pray aloud as they pace the room.

"Out of that has come a sense of the prophetic, of the presence of God directing us," he says.

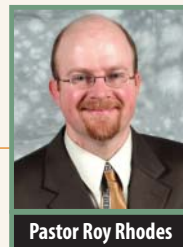
By some measures, Paola Assembly would appear to have a long-term discipleship program in place. The church's Connecting Points groups are long established and build community through a variety of special interests.

"But in a group," Rhodes says, "you won't see people being open and transparent enough to be discipled. One-on-one discipleship has to be in place."

To that end, this year the church invited members to take part in an intensive training program. Jim Hall, a discipleship specialist, offered a 2-day initial seminar to the 36 people who responded. Out of that group, 16 have continued with the full course under Rhodes. Those 16 are paired, and partners meet each week to work through 15 lessons in Hall's curriculum. They meet with Rhodes every Sunday.

Prayer is the foundation for Paola Assembly's renewed commitment to discipleship. Rhodes identifies three other components.

"You need a process or tool to use," he says. "For us, that has been Jim Hall's materials. Next, you must determine that starting small is not a bad thing. If you can get even 5 percent participation, that is great. Start there and commit to the long haul. Finally, recognize discipleship cannot be an addendum to what you do. Discipleship is what the church exists to do."



Pastor Roy Rhodes



SCOTT HARRUP, associate editor, *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*

The Role of **Spiritual Leadership** in Discipleship

By Shane Warren

A pastor's role as spiritual leader in the discipleship process is imperative if it is to be effective.

Biblical discipleship has become a catchphrase in the modern evangelical movement. Unfortunately, in most instances a catchphrase is all it has become. Amid our varied definitions and newly discovered methods of discipleship, statistical studies show an alarming decline in the modern church's effectiveness in reaching and transforming lost humanity.

A study released March 19, 2007, by the Barna Research Group states: "Life in America has changed greatly since 1994, with massive changes in technology, global politics, lifestyle choices, and family dynamics. But one constant has been the proportion of adults in the population who are unchurched ... 1 of every 3 adults (33 percent) is classified as unchurched — meaning they have not attended a religious service of any type during the past 6 months."

Without real discipleship there is trust in God, but there is not a genuine following of Christ. Cheap grace is a deadly enemy of the church.

Tragically, this study reports that more than 100 million Americans do not attend church. America's unchurched are the equivalent of the population of the 11th largest nation in the world. What an indictment against the church.

The lack of revelation in true biblical discipleship is devastating to the body of Christ. We have focused so much on winning converts that we have not done a good job of making disciples. Multitudes of people flood our

church altars with the mindset of praying a magic prayer that will lead to dramatic life change. We rejoice over their response; and, somehow, they are convinced by the voice of religion that true salvation has occurred.

Jesus' altar calls were different. His view of what it meant to be saved was different from the modern church's feeble definition. Jesus qualified the true heart of repentance by the test of discipleship.

The rich, young ruler ran and stopped Jesus in the street. He inquired, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

The Lord responded by sharing one of His favorite sermons written by Moses.

The young man replied, "All these I have kept since I was a boy."

Jesus then raised the bar of discipleship: "Sell everything you have and give to the poor" (Mark 10:17–22). Scripture is clear; this young man walked away sad.

The rich, young ruler was willing to be a convert, but he was not willing to pay the cost of discipleship. He wanted a religion that was convenient for his lifestyle apart from the lordship of Christ. His desire for convenient religion left him where it leaves every insincere person — sad and despondent.

Christianity without discipleship is Christianity without Christ. This kind of discipleship becomes nothing more than an abstract idea, a myth that has a place for the Fatherhood of God, but omits Christ as a living Lord and



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Master. Without real discipleship there is trust in God, but there is not a genuine following of Christ. Cheap grace is a deadly enemy of the church.

Jesus understood the power and cost of discipleship. Real Christian discipleship began the day after John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the

— were chosen for the church's model. It is in this model, the biblical model, that we find the true method for making disciples.

There is only one approach to making real disciples — the Jesus way. Jesus did not use a conventional program to influence extraordinary

that the best mathematics for the church is discipleship. Was His view of discipleship effective? Yes. In the first week of the New Testament Church, approximately 8,000 people were added to the company of believers.

Throughout Scripture we see church growth qualified by terms such as *added* (Acts 2:47; 11:24, KJV) and *multiplied* (9:31; 12:24, KJV). Why is our modern church math not adding up? Could it be that even with our new, modern methods of church growth we still do not understand biblical discipleship? What is required to effectively change the lives of hurting humanity? The Word of God is clear in its teaching of the characteristics of effective discipleship.

Discipleship Has a Person

Without the person of the Holy Spirit, all methodology of discipleship is in vain. Jesus instructed His disciples to “stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49, KJV). When He gave this important instruction, as many as 500 people may have been present (1 Corinthians 15:6). Sadly, only 120 obeyed Him and went to the Upper Room. The ones who followed the Lord's instruction received a supernatural empowerment to *be* witnesses (Acts 1:8). This small group of believers turned cities upside down, endured the fires of persecution, and silenced the cynics of their day. We never read about the ones who chose not to go to the place of empowerment.

Many Pentecostal churches are now minimizing the importance of the Pentecostal distinctive in discipleship. For fear of losing members or of confusing the unchurched, they ban the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in public worship services. They dare not pray for people to receive the

We have focused so much on winning converts that we have not done a good job of making disciples.

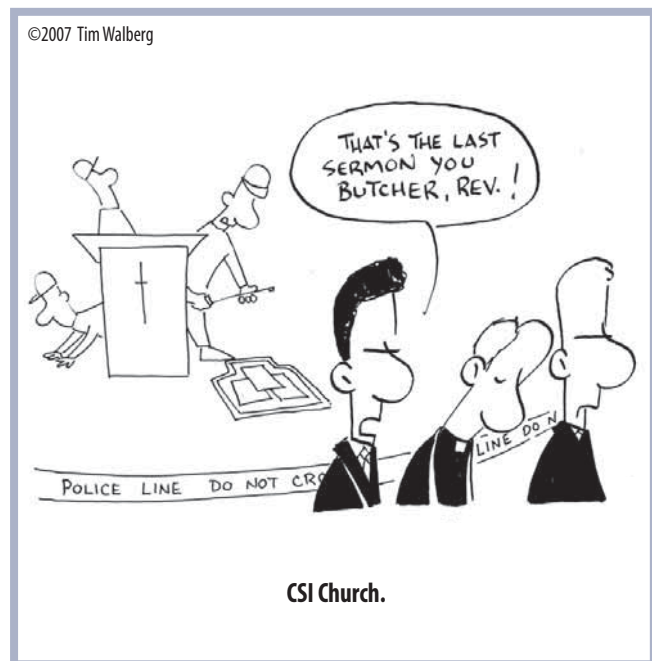
Jordan River (John 1:35–39). One by one Jesus selected 12 men for whom He would daily model the character of the Father. By every religious definition of success, Jesus was a miserable failure. He held no credentials with the spiritual organization of His day. He never started a Bible school, nor did He establish a denomination. Multitudes attended His meetings only to reject Him rather than pay the price of commitment to faith. Only 12 men — the most common and humble of first-century society

life change in His ordinary followers. He simply modeled to them — by the leading of the Holy Spirit — the heart of the Father each day. As He faced the daily affairs of life, He used every detail to teach and train 12 men to become the disciples God created them to be. He so modeled the Father before them that He could say: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9, KJV).¹

Herein lies the acid test for discipleship. Can you, as a spiritual leader, make that statement about your Christian walk? Can you say, “When

you see me, you have seen the Father”? Are you a daily reflection of the Father's heart? All programs and methodology aside, do people see the character of God working in your daily walk?

The word *disciple* in the Bible comes from the Greek root word *matheo*. From this root we get our English word *math* or *mathematics*. The Lord understood



Discipleship: The Answer to the Leadership Crisis

Everywhere we look, we find a crisis in leadership.

Warren Bennis, founder of the Leadership Institute at the University of Southern California, points out how serious this crisis is.

"Humanity currently faces three extraordinary threats: the threat of annihilation from nuclear accident or war, the threat of a worldwide plague or ecological catastrophe, and a deepening leadership crisis in most of our institutions. Unlike a plague or nuclear holocaust, the leadership crisis will probably not become the basis for a best-selling book or a blockbuster movie, but in many ways it is the most urgent and dangerous of the threats we face because it is insufficiently recognized and little understood."

Where are the Churchills and the Spurgeons of the 21st century?

Instead of Whitefields and Wesleys, we find 1,500 pastors leaving the ministry each month because of moral failure, spiritual burnout, or conflict in their churches. The divorce rate among clergy hovers around 50 percent, one of the highest of any profession.

Four thousand new churches will be planted this year in America, but 7,000 will close — largely because of a lack of leadership. What is going on?

The answer is simple: We have short-circuited the process God ordained to create leaders — discipleship.

Jesus came not only to die for the sins of the world, but also to win, train, and love a family of individuals drawn from every nation and tongue under heaven. What is His strategy to accomplish the second part of His divine plan? He chose 12 disciples, trained them to be His apostles, and sent them out to do the same.

This is the apostolic mandate, as well as the master plan of evangelism. There is no plan B, no shortcut or better idea waiting to be discovered. He will have a Bride, a glorious Church without spot or wrinkle, and it will be built one disciple at a time.

Laboring for years, pouring your life into people who may or may not prove to be great leaders, requires a great deal of commitment and persistence. You not only need to trust God to raise up leaders, but you also need to have faith in the process of discipleship, as well.

Making discipleship and leadership training a top priority is a long-term investment strategy that can at times seem boring compared with the large crowds and revival meetings that many believe are the mark of a successful ministry. But ministries that attempt to add to the church only by big events find themselves constantly looking for leaders, advertising for leaders, going out to recruit leaders — because rarely do events raise up leaders.

In the end, a quick inheritance rarely prospers. Investing your time, money, and effort in the apostolic mandate, however, yields compound returns that continue to increase indefinitely.

Those who commit themselves to the Lord's strategy will win the world, not by addition, but by multiplication.



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baptism in the Holy Spirit. Vexing the Holy Spirit, they unknowingly replace the power of discipleship with the programs of man. But the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer can never be overstated. The empowerment that comes through the Holy Spirit and His baptism is paramount in making potent disciples.

If you remove the Holy Spirit from the discipleship process, you lose the power of that process. Peter walked with

Jesus for 3 years. He lived, ate, slept, and ministered with the Master. What Jesus did not do for Peter in 3 years, however, the Holy Spirit did in a moment. The coward who denied the Son of God before a little girl stood on the Day of Pentecost and boldly declared his faith. Nothing empowers disciples as the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Discipleship Has a Plan

"According as He hath chosen us in him

before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4, KJV, emphasis added), God had a plan for making disciples. If discipleship in the local church is to be successful, it must have a plan, a process. Methods are not bad as long as they are submissive to the Master. Pastor, what is your plan for making disciples?

Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him. Peter replied affirmatively. Jesus, in essence, told Peter to prove it by taking care of His lambs (John 21:15–17).

The heart of the Father is revealed to the believer through the process of discipleship.

Neglecting the newborns of the Kingdom is spiritual fratricide. They must be nurtured, and their spiritual maturity must be facilitated. Every church's personality and size varies, but in each situation the church must do everything in its power to capitalize on a young believer's decision to follow Christ. Isaiah 26:18 declares, "We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were *brought forth wind*" (KJV, emphasis added).

The church is pregnant with destiny, but are we bringing forth wind? We go through the effort of service preparation and planning only to find our hands empty at the close of the day. If we do not facilitate spiritual growth for the babies of the Kingdom, we will find our labor has been vain and useless. The desire of God for each of us is that we bring forth much fruit (John 15:8). Where is the fruit of our labor in the Lord? For many of us, our fruitlessness is the result of our lack of planning in our discipleship process.

Discipleship Has a People

As good as our methodology is, it cannot replace the human touch. For discipleship to occur, your laypeople must have a vision for it. Pastors do not have the ambidexterity of an octopus; therefore, their people must have a heart for the spiritual growth process. Until the body of Christ understands their interconnectedness, real spiritual formation or reformation will not transpire.

Accountability within the body of Christ is a powerful tool against the spirit of this generation. In fact, there is an explosive power in unity. When the local church unifies with the heart of evangelism and discipleship,

dynamic growth is present. We are our brother's keeper, and to shirk our responsibility to one another in the body of Christ is a mortal sin against our *own* body.

When you create a community in which the expectations of discipleship are believed and practiced by the entire congregation, it will successfully impact new converts as they come into the church.

Discipleship means following the discipline of another. Part of biblical discipleship is biblical discipline. This is a topic not discussed much in the church. Nevertheless, the church must have clearly defined boundaries within the structure of its organization and within the intangible fabric of the community of believers.

People long for relationships that require accountability; they desire to belong to a community. When you create a community in which the expectations of discipleship are believed and practiced by the entire congregation, it will successfully impact new converts as they come into the church.

Your people are the net that helps you retain the new fish you catch. From time to time, use or misuse will create holes in the net. A good fisherman regularly mends his nets. Psalm 133 states clearly that there is anointing in our unity, and it is in the coparticipation of the body of Christ that God commands the blessing.

Discipleship Has a Price

Make no mistake: Effective discipleship has a price because there is no such thing as a *crossless* discipleship. One of the great tragedies of our time is the watering down of the gospel to make it more palatable to hearers.

In doing so we do not preach the gospel at all; we preach "another gospel" (2 Corinthians 11:4, KJV). If we are not careful, our attempts to make the gospel more relevant to our

culture will render it and us powerless to change our culture. Contrary to some teaching, Jesus had and has no problem being relevant in every generation. He is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8, KJV).

Do not be afraid to communicate the price of discipleship and to require it. People desire to be challenged. Some may write it off as religious; but you will find that when the cross of discipleship is borne, it adds value and validity to the believer's life.

At times, being a disciple can be painful; however, to endure the Cross is not a tragedy. The suffering of the Cross is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ. If our Christianity has ceased to be serious about discipleship, if we have watered down the gospel into emotional uplifts that make no costly demands, we turn the cross of Christ into an ordinary, everyday calamity. When you take away the price of following Christ, you remove His lordship from discipleship. Jesus insisted on being Lord of all. "No servant can serve two masters" (Luke 16:13, KJV).

There is a price for the new disciple, but there is also a cost to spiritual leadership. It is not easy to deal with a baby in the Lord. As do natural

children, they make numerous mistakes and ask a plethora of questions. At times we forget that we were once in that spiritual place and someone assisted us through our spiritual transformation.

My wife, Pam, and I treasure pouring into young believers who have a sense of destiny. Each week our house is flooded with people who are eager to know more and do more for God. In fact, we meet regularly with two groups: Newcomers and what I call my Eagles' Gathering. Every week we invite new believers and newcomers to eat dinner with us. We also meet with Eagles, people who feel a call to Christian service. Pam and I pour the Word of God and our life experiences into them. This practice has become the source of our greatest joy. As a pastor, nothing charges my inner

untouchable to their people on a personal level. They hide in the safety of their offices only to appear for a brief sermon or two each week. Consequently, their people never have a firsthand look at the leadership of the Holy Spirit in the daily life of their shepherd; thus, they do not have an adequate example of coping with the conflicts of life. This practice produces pastors who only preach to their people instead of shepherding them into God's best for their lives.

Why did we enter the ministry? To help hurting people and to reach the world with the gospel. Remember, God anoints the one who is in the field with the sheep. When God needed a king, He did not look in an air-conditioned office. He looked in a field. His eye was on a shepherd.

If we do not facilitate spiritual growth for the babies of the Kingdom, we will find our labor has been vain and useless.

man more than to see young believers expand in their capacity for God and in service to Him. Often we are asked, "Why do you go to all this trouble? You pastor a large church. You don't need to do this."

My response is: "You can't change a life from an office."

You must be willing, as was Christ, to live with your people. Jesus said, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations" (Luke 22:28, KJV). The disciples saw Jesus at the weakest moments of His life. In His humanity, Jesus was tempted in all points just as we are (Hebrews 4:15). The dramatic life changes of the disciples were the result of watching Jesus deal successfully with the inconsistencies of life.

Unfortunately, some pastors remain

When God wanted to announce the coming of His Son, He chose shepherds tending their flocks by night. For hundreds of years the *Shekinah* of God's presence had vanished; but when He wanted to reveal His glory, He chose shepherds (Luke 2:8,9).

Jesus is called the "good shepherd" (John 10:11, KJV) who gives His life for the sheep. If you want anointing for ministry, if you want to see God's glory revealed, if you want to pastor as Jesus did, do the work of a shepherd. Live with your sheep. There is a price for discipleship, but discipleship is priceless.

Discipleship Has a Pastor

John Maxwell often says, "Everything rises and falls on leadership." The

Person, plan, people, and price of discipleship are only as good as the pastoral leadership of the church. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18, KJV). Without a visionary, there is no vision. Everything great that God has done on earth, He did through people who were surrendered to Him.

Pastor, your church is a reflection of your leadership. The key to moving forward in God's will is to locate yourself. Evaluate yourself and your congregation using the following criteria:

1. Is the *person* of the Holy Spirit active at every level in our ministry?
2. Do we have a realistic, workable *plan* for spiritual formation in our church? Is it clear? Can our leadership follow it easily?
3. Do the *people* have a vision for soul winning and the discipleship process?
4. Does our organization understand and cope well with the *price* of discipleship?
5. Am I, as *pastor*, actively setting the example of a disciple in my daily walk?

If pastors do not lead their people with vision and prophetic insight in the will of God, they will fail to reach God's destiny for their church. People are waiting for their pastors to become their Joshuas and to lead them across their Jordan. A pastor cannot lead them where he has not walked himself. Pastors must take the initiative. A pastor's role as spiritual leader in the discipleship process is imperative if it is to be effective. 🌱



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NOTE

1. Scriptures marked KJV are from the King James Version.



Tim Lee



Disciple Making for Changing Times and Changing Churches

By Michael J. Wilkins

As I stand on a bluff

overlooking the Pacific Ocean near our home in Southern California, I watch lines of waves forming far out on the horizon. These waves that finally break near shore are much larger today than normal.

The weather is sunny and calm where I stand. But when I checked the surf report, I found that these waves were generated many days ago and thousands of miles away by a ferocious hurricane-force storm off the tip of New Zealand.

To surf these waves effectively, I need to know as much as possible about their size, power, direction, and speed.

Waves on the Ocean and on the Church

In the first decade of the 21st century, waves of various practices, fads, and styles continue to break over the church. Like ocean waves, forces far away and long ago often generate the waves of church issues that impact us today. If we are to ride them effectively, we need to know as much as possible about

the forces that brought them about and how they will impact us.

Following World War II, the parachurch movement spawned various organizations — the Navigators, Campus Crusade for Christ, InterVarsity, and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. These organizations revolutionized campus and evangelistic mission. During the 1960s and 70s, the Jesus movement transfigured traditional ways of expressing worship. The 1980s and 90s saw the arrival of the seeker movement with megachurches that reached out to people who had never darkened the

As a new, powerful wave of discipleship breaks over the shores of our churches, we have the privilege of helping people know how to surf it effectively.

door of conventional churches. In the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, we are witnessing the spiritual formation movement. This movement transcends ecclesial

lines to impact mainline, charismatic, Bible, and emergent churches with the quest for meaningful spirituality.

Each of these movements generated power that impacts today's church. We find different waves of discipleship and disciple making breaking over the church. Disciple making is not a recent or unique phenomenon. It was initiated nearly 2,000 years ago when Jesus called out to men and women, "Follow Me."

But other forces impact disciple making as we know it in the church today. The terms *discipleship* and *disciple making* are related expressions, referring to growing as a disciple of Jesus and helping others to grow as Jesus' disciples. Each of us has various conceptions of discipleship and disciple making that are influenced by our experiences.

Discipleship and Disciple-making Traditions

The waves of discipleship materials that have swept over the church in the past 60 years have, in many cases, caused people today to be more confused than

ever when they consider what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. These traditions developed out of a desire

The root of much of the confusion today about discipleship is the implication that discipleship is a second stage in the Christian life.

to be more like the disciples of Jesus in the New Testament. Yet, they often became so rigorously focused on their particular practices that only an elite few could adhere to them.

The learner. Some emphasize that a disciple is dedicated to intense Bible study. A disciple is actively involved in personal devotional time, Bible memorization, and Bible study as a regular habit of life. This implies that a Christian becomes a disciple when he is dedicated to learning the Word of God and applying it.

The committed. Others emphasize that a disciple is committed to Christ. He has rejected a worldly lifestyle. This means that a Christian is a disciple when he truly denies himself, takes up his cross, and actively follows Jesus every day.

The worker. Still others declare that a disciple is actively involved in Christian

service. His service distinguishes him from nominal Christians who simply attend a group or church. This implies that a Christian becomes a disciple when he is an active worker for Christ.

The mentor. Some are involved in one-on-one relationships in which an older, more mature Christian discipled them. This is often called mentoring. Many people believe that those involved in such relationships can say they have experienced true discipleship.

The small group. Small groups are one of the most effective means of facilitating growth in Christians because we can learn from the examples of others, open our lives to others, and are accountable by others to the growth we desire. Many suggest that because Jesus discipled a small band of followers, true discipleship occurs when a person is involved in a small group.

A Definition of Discipleship

There is truth in each of these because each promotes growth in the Christian life. They have, however, often been mistakenly advocated as ways that an individual becomes a disciple. It is often advocated that once a Christian's life is characterized by one or more of these commitments he becomes a disciple.

The root of much of the confusion today about discipleship is the implication that discipleship is a second stage in the Christian life. An expression found among some goes: "All disciples are Christians, but not all Christians are disciples." In this view, discipleship is for an elite, more committed, or more specially trained group of Christians.

But this is not what Jesus intends for us to understand about discipleship and disciple making. A more accurate conception is seen in the Great



Commission where we understand that a person who believes on Jesus becomes a disciple at conversion. Jesus said that we are to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18–20), not to make disciples out of Christians. So at the moment a person believes in Jesus and receives eternal life, he becomes a disciple of Jesus. The ongoing Christian life for all believers is discipleship.

Therefore, all true believers are disciples of Jesus; the point is whether or not they are obedient disciples. Furthermore, in this more holistic understanding, disciple making is not only one aspect of the church's mission; it encompasses all the church does. Disciple making is the church's ministry to help believers grow in discipleship to Jesus.

The prevalence of elitism in many of our traditions explains why some people are frustrated in their Christian

Disciple making is not only one aspect of the church's mission; it encompasses all the church does.

life. A two-level conception of the Christian life promotes apathy among those who have not yet chosen to be committed. This suggests that the higher level of commitment is optional. In the daily world of most Christians this means that commitment to Christlikeness is optional.

Discipleship and disciple-making emphases of the past 60 years have focused on isolated discipleship passages of Scripture or particular biblical discipleship themes to provide specialized ministry. This specialization, however, often comes at the expense of a full biblical portrait of discipleship. A more complete definition of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ follows:

Discipleship means living in

union with Jesus Christ, growing in conformity to His image as the Spirit transforms us from the inside out, being nurtured within a community of disciples who are engaged in that lifelong process, and helping others to know and become like Jesus.

Essentials of Discipleship for a Disciple-making Church

With this definition in mind, we can explore the following essential features of biblical discipleship and disciple making that must characterize our attempts to develop a disciple-making ministry.

Discipleship must be grounded in a personal, costly relationship with a seeking Savior

The new life that comes at regeneration cost Jesus, and it costs us. Although it is not something we can

buy, it is costly nevertheless.

The cost is life: Jesus' life and our life. The cost

of Jesus' life was given in His death on the cross. He came to make those who were spiritually ill fit for His kingdom. This initiative could only be accomplished through the penalty He paid for our sins in His loving act of redemption on the cross. He gave His life so we might have life (1 Corinthians 6:19,20; Mark 10:45).

The cost for us is also our life. While Jesus' death on the cross is unique, we also lose our life through taking up our own cross (Matthew 16:24–26).

Disciple making begins with intentional evangelism that challenges people to count the cost of accepting Jesus' call to life in the kingdom of God, which prepares them to engage in and expect personal transformation as the normal Christian life.

Discipleship must begin with and strive toward a transformed identity in Jesus

From the moment of salvation, God views us differently. We are born into a new identity as His children (John 1:12,13). We are new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are being transformed into (2 Corinthians 3:18), and conformed to (Romans 8:29), the image of Christ, as Christ is being formed in us (Galatians 4:19).

Our identity as a disciple of Jesus affects all that we are, including the way we see ourselves, the way we relate to God, and the way we relate to others. Disciple-making churches must help new and older Christians find their identity in being Jesus' disciples in their relationships at home, in the workplace, in the community, and in the church.

Discipleship must be initiated and empowered by the Spirit of God

The Spirit of God initiates the spiritual life that accompanied Jesus' inauguration of the kingdom of God (John 3:5,6). This phenomenon is described from different perspectives by different New Testament authors: "regeneration" (Titus 3:5, NASB);¹ "new birth" and "born again" (1 Peter 1:3,23); spiritual resurrection (Romans 6:13; Ephesians 2:5) and "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10); and God's "seed" in us (1 John 3:9).

We are different persons once the Spirit gives us new life. The supernatural work of God deep within our soul implants new spiritual life in us, and from that moment the direction of our lives is placed Godward as the Spirit begins to produce new life — the life of Jesus — in us.

John's gospel gives us three characteristics of Spirit-empowered discipleship that give direction to our disciple-making ministries:

1. *Being set free from the lies of the world by Jesus' truth (John 8:31,32).*

This freedom is the Spirit-empowered ability to do what is right and good, the ability to choose God, and to be liberated from sin's bondage. Disciple making means to help disciples reject the lies of the world about our values and goals. It also helps us find

and the fruit of godly righteousness (Philippians 1:11; Colossians 1:10).

Discipleship must be continually guided by God's Word

Disciple-making churches help people adopt radical commitments to the

on becoming more fully a disciple in every area of their lives.

I had a radical conversion to Jesus and turned from a life of drugs and pleasure seeking. I discovered that my life as Jesus' disciple helped me become what I was intended to be — a person created in God's image. My commitment to Christ continues to affect every area of my life, including my marriage and family, my enjoyment of God's creation as I surf or hike a mountain trail, or in my growth in serving Jesus in my profession.

Discipleship must be nurtured in communities of faith

Each disciple enjoys a personal relationship with Christ that facilitates transformation into His image. This personal relationship must be nurtured within two primary communities of faith — the spiritual family and the biological family.

The spiritual family is the church. Entrance into the church is based on experiencing the new birth (Matthew 12:46–50; John 1:12,13; Matthew 16:18). Brothers and sisters in Christ need each other — a spiritual community of faith — to stimulate their growth as well as the Body as a whole (Ephesians 4:11–13; Hebrews 10:24,25).

The biological family continues to play a major role in God's program. Marriage is a relationship in which husbands and wives mutually nurture each other's transformations. The parental role is designed to nurture children to know God's will for their lives and help them grow as whole persons reflecting the image of Christ (Ephesians 5:22 through 6:4).

A disciple-making church accepts

In the first decade of the 21st century, waves of various practices, fads, and styles continue to break over the church.

the freedom to live life the way God intended it to be lived by continually hearing Jesus' truth about reality.

2. *Being loved by Jesus means to love like Jesus (John 13:34,35).* This love is shown when we make an unconditional commitment to imperfect people to bring our relationships to God's intended purpose. Disciple making helps disciples express this love in their marriages, their parenting, and their relationships within the church and world. Helping disciples experience Jesus' love enables them to love others.

3. *Bearing the fruit of being united to Jesus (John 15:7,8).* Our ongoing transformation into the image of Christ comes through the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23). The Spirit of God is the central empowering agency of our discipleship to Jesus. Disciple-making churches teach people how to walk in the power of the Spirit so their lives exude the fruit of the Spirit

authority of the Word of God as the absolute truth about reality. This is not simply the acquisition of truth, but the internalization of truth so it expresses our worldview, characterizes our values, and conveys our entire lifestyle.

As we teach people the Word of God, we equip them to compare God's Word to the world's values so they can follow Jesus obediently in all circumstances (Matthew 28:20).

Discipleship must be a lifelong process whereby we become more fully human

Because people are created in the image of God, they are like God and represent God in a way like no other creature (Genesis 1:27–31). The image of God is in our nature. It is what we are — mentally, morally, spiritually, relationally — rather than something we have or do. Sin distorted the image of God in us by affecting every aspect of our likeness to Him, yet restoration begins with our redemption in Christ (see Colossians 3:10).

Therefore, disciple-making churches help believers develop in every area of their lives by helping them transition intentionally through life's dimensions and stages so they continually grow into His image. Disciples of Jesus are intent

Profile: of a Disciple-Making Church

► Manchester Assembly of God: Running With a Proven Track Record

"We've been able to do some things in the Northeast a lot of people thought there was no way you could do in this region," says Garry Hamilton, pastor of Manchester Assembly of God in Auburn, New Hampshire.

He's got a point. It is not exactly typical for a New England church to grow from 170 to more than 500 in a decade. But Garry and Diane Hamilton came with an expectation for growth because they



Pastor Garry Hamilton

came with time-tested principles from their previous pastorates.

Just as the Hamiltons have applied consistent principles in their 31-year marriage,

they have consistently promoted discipleship among their congregants.

"I purchased Jim Hall's *Harvester's Handbook* in the '80s and implemented it in Naples and Tampa, Florida," Garry says. "Here in New Hampshire we've revamped it by structuring a new program around it, but we haven't reworked the material."

For Garry, finding good curriculum is the first step in building a successful discipleship ministry. Then, he says, that curriculum needs to be prayerfully adapted to the specific needs of the church.

"Pray and strategize what will work best for your church," he advises. "What we do here may not work best for someone else."

Discipleship is the constant. A church's methods should change if necessary to preserve that focus. Garry points to

his own pastorates to illustrate. The Hamiltons' discipleship method in Florida was primarily small groups.

"That's where I came to the discovery people can sit in a class for 15 weeks, even teach it, and not really know anything," he says. "If you don't get people engaged in what's going on, they can sit there, come out of it, and be blank about it."

While there are still opportunities for group interaction in several small groups, Christian education electives, and the church's Berean extension school, at Manchester Assembly the primary emphasis is on individuals.

Soon after the Hamiltons' arrival in 1997, they invited a core group of people to go through *The Harvester's Handbook* for 15 weeks. With trained leaders in place, they next signed up congregants who wanted to be discipled in a one-on-one partnership.

"We signed men with men, women with women," Garry says. "They could meet in a home, coffee shop, or wherever they wanted once a week."

The program has grown consistently. Over the past 9 years more than 300 people have been discipled, and some of the original group who were trained have personally mentored 10 to 15 people. Garry says there are now second- and third-generation disciplers in his congregation.

A steady stream of people continue to sign up to be discipled thanks to the exposure the ministry gets in regular church services. On scheduled Sundays, Garry recognizes a new group that has been discipled and those who worked with them.

"We give a *Life in the Spirit Study*

Bible to every person who completes a course," he says. "We let them talk about how discipleship has affected their lives and their spiritual growth, and we'll let disciplers talk about how it has blessed them to be a part of someone's life."

Every time such a presentation is made, more people sign up. At times interest is high enough to create a waiting list.

As a result, the church continues to enjoy consistent growth. Manchester Assembly has also multiplied itself.

"Over the past 2 1/2 years we've given away more than 100 people in two church plants," Garry says.

The investment in those churches mirrors on a corporate scale what the discipleship ministry is creating on a personal scale. Manchester will bring on staff a pastor for 6 months and build a core group of people interested in joining that pastor in a new location.

"We have a special Sunday to launch them out," Garry says, "and we continue to support the new work with \$25,000 a year from our missions budget for 2 years."

Whether a church is large or small, located in the heart of the Bible Belt or the more liberal corners of America, discipleship remains a foundational responsibility and the key to growth, Garry believes.

"Don't feel like you can't do this," he says. "Find out what works for your church. Begin to realize this is the main responsibility God has given to the church."



SCOTT HARRUP, associate editor,
Today's Pentecostal Evangel

Disciple Making and Discipleship Programs

Discipleship programs can be helpful because they provide tangible methods and outcomes. When programs are proven effective in helping people gain knowledge, or in solidifying behaviors, or in producing desired leaders, they can be used repeatedly with a variety of people in diverse settings.

But programs can also entice pastors to substitute methods and forms for people. Programs often focus on external behavior as a means of evaluating growth. This

cookie-cutter approach to disciple making expects everyone to look exactly like the model laid out in our particular program. We expect people to perform according to what our program lays out.

If programs help, we should use them. But we need to be careful not to use a program that might destroy the uniqueness of people, or serve as a substitute for the living example of Jesus in the lives of people.

MICHAEL J. WILKINS, San Clemente, California

Christians is to walk as Jesus' disciples and to be continually transformed into His image as we grow in Him. The Holy Spirit is still at work calling people to follow Jesus today. Our joyous task is to fashion our ministries to serve Him to that end.

This is not just another optional program (see sidebar, *Disciple Making and Discipleship Programs*). Disciple making is central to all we do. Disciple making is the expression of how God equips and transforms Christians for this life through the ministry of the church. As a new, powerful wave of discipleship breaks over the shores of our churches, we have the privilege of helping people know how to surf it effectively. Disciple-making churches help everyday people who are being transformed as Jesus' disciples to be a light in the darkness and to be living examples of the hope of transformation that our world desperately needs.

Disciple-making churches help disciples of every age and stage of growth learn how to walk with Jesus and to be transformed by Him in every area of their lives. 🌱



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School of Theology, Biola University, in La Mirada, California. Among the books he has written are: *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Zondervan, 1992), *In His Image: Reflecting Christ in Everyday Life* (NavPress, 1997), and "Matthew," *NIV Application Commentary* (Zondervan, 2004).

NOTE

1. Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (<http://www.Lockman.org>).

its responsibility to equip families so husbands and wives can nurture each other and so parents can nurture their own children. In turn, the responsibility of the family is to train the next generation of leaders within the church (see 1 Timothy 3:4,5; Titus 1:6,7).

Discipleship is developed within the spiritual family and the biological family. Disciple-making churches unite these two families and help them work to support and strengthen each other.

Discipleship must be carried out by sojourning in our everyday, watching world

In this life, a Christian is a sojourner, a resident alien (Psalm 39:12). Creation awaits its renewal, and it groans under bondage to sin and decay (Romans 8:19–22).

Regenerated disciples, however, have been set free from death and sin; our transformation has already begun. Therefore, we are not of this world; our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), and we are aliens and strangers in the world (1 Peter 2:11).

Nevertheless, our purpose is to advance the gospel that has redeemed and transformed us, to be salt and light in a decayed and dark world, and to live as God intends for us to live before a watching world (see John 17:15–21).

Communities of faith are places where believers gather to be strengthened and equipped. The growth and transformation we experience enables us to live effectively as Jesus' disciples in this world. Our transformation enables us to live as sojourners in the world, and "live such good lives among the pagans that ... they may see your good deeds and glorify God" (1 Peter 2:11,12).

Disciple-making churches help transformed disciples bear and exemplify the gospel in their everyday activities, offering the life of Jesus' kingdom to a world that is dying without it.

Disciple Making Is Not Just Another Program, but a Transformation

The tremendous privilege we have as

Why Churches Don't Disciple, and How Yours Can

By Stephen Lim



Discipleship?

Of course, my people are being discipled, I had assumed for years. After all, they attend worship services and Bible classes on Sunday. They participate in small groups and fellowships during the week. With all of this spiritual nurture, they must be growing spiritually. Yet, as the months and years passed, I finally had to admit that, except for newer Christians, for the most part I could discern little growth in discipleship in the members of my church.

In this respect the church I pastored did not differ from most. "Stunningly few churches have a church of disciples," concluded George Barna,¹ even while he recognizes that most churches have programs for this purpose. While most pastors fail to see the need, this could be the greatest problem in the church, negatively impacting everything it does.

Presently, 46 percent of Americans claim to be born again. Gallup, however, found that only 13 percent evidenced behavioral and attitudinal differences compared with the general population.² Barna found that only 5 percent of adults — and less than 10 percent of church youth³ — possess a biblical worldview.⁴ Dallas Willard bluntly states, "Nondiscipleship is the elephant in the church."⁵

Why this dismal state? In researching the lack of discipleship and reflecting on my pastoral experiences, I

found many factors leaders must address. In this article, however, I will focus on the nearly universal problem of flawed ministry paradigms — over which churches have direct responsibility — and how those paradigms sabotage their efforts at disciple making. These divide into two categories — inadequate goals and defective approaches to disciple making. Churches can create a culture of discipleship by replacing these flawed paradigms with biblical paradigms for ministry.

Inadequate Goals

In our culture fulfilling the twin goals of the Great Commission — evangelism and disciple making — to any significant degree requires strenuous spiritual and practical effort. Clear, lasting results require time. We are tempted to substitute more easily and quickly achievable human goals that offer visible impressions of success to validate our ministries. Because these goals have deeply rooted themselves in church culture, we need courage, wisdom, and perseverance to replace them with biblical paradigms that reflect Jesus' calling.

Contrast four popular but inadequate ministry goals with biblical ones.

Growing numbers versus life change

As a pastor, even when I knew better, I was tempted to use growing attendance as a measure of success. In a culture that prizes size, ministers and churches strive



Dave Danielson / Chip Risner

for this visible sign of accomplishment. Barna's studies consistently indicate that churches measure their success by attendance, income, building size, and satisfaction of members.⁶ In this age of residential mobility and consumer Christianity, however, 80 percent of church growth results from believers changing churches. Churches become adept at collecting crowds by offering desirable ministries. Through this means — especially in large or growing population areas — new churches can reach an attendance of hundreds and even thousands within a few years. While

When we have dealt with the sin problem, how to live out our lives under His lordship should become our central focus.

outstanding exceptions exist, Carl George concludes that megachurches generally sustain growth by being *receptor* churches for believers from smaller *feeder* churches.⁷

Instead of simply seeking numerical increase we need to aim at life change. Jesus said that His followers should be so positively different that they flavor a bland culture and illumine a dark world (Matthew 5:13–16). The apostle Paul said that a Christian becomes “a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Willard suggests, “Instead of counting Christians, we should weigh them ... by

focusing on the most important kind of growth — love, joy, peace ... — fruit in keeping with the gospel and the Kingdom.”⁸

Sin management⁹ versus lordship

Christians have confessed their sins and accepted the forgiveness that God offers through the Cross. They become God's children and have the hope of eternal life. Surely this summarizes the essence of Christian faith — or does it? When we have dealt with the sin problem, how to live out our lives under His lordship should become our central focus.

Today a large percentage of adults who become Christians do so because they realize their inadequacy to cope with life's challenges using their own resources. A variety of long-standing problems culminated in their cry for divine rescue. They require the ongoing healing and shaping power of God's Spirit, along with a supportive community of believers, to live healthy and obedient lives.

The Los Angeles International Church specializes in reaching out to people in extreme physical, emotional, and spiritual need resulting from personal dysfunctions, wrong choices, and abuse. One staff member commented, “Everyone likes to fish. No one wants to clean the fish. That's what we do here, clean the fish.”¹⁰

Serious evangelists and disciple makers need to emphasize the lordship of Jesus. Otherwise we continue the scandal of millions professing faith without living it.

Discipleship?

In his book, *Mere Discipleship*, Lee Camp bluntly asks, "Could it be that 'Jesus is Lord' has become one of the most widespread Christian lies? Have Christians claimed the lordship of Jesus, but systematically set aside the call to obedience to this Lord?"¹¹

Compliance and zeal versus maturity and fruitfulness

We tend to produce members who support the church, instead of disciples who impact their world. During 30 years in ministry I observed that most pastors settle for appropriate behaviors and a zealous spirit on the part of their members. Much of the time I did the same. If members regularly attended church activities, accepted its basic doctrines, served in a ministry, and did not create waves, I felt satisfied. If they also tithed, contributed to missions, attended prayer meetings, and occasionally witnessed or invited people to church, I practically jumped for joy.

Yet believers can do all of these and still live self-centeredly. They

can endure miserable marriages, display un-Christlike behavior at church, and irritate their neighbors and coworkers — while making little difference for the kingdom of God. Too often we equate compliance and zeal with maturity. Compliance may be external, without transformation, and zeal simply human enthusiasm instead of deep conviction. Even

We tend to produce members who support the church, instead of disciples who impact their world.

when genuine, zeal without maturity fails to produce the fruit that it could. We cannot settle for less than continuing growth toward mature and fruitful discipleship.

Full programming versus mission-driven strategy

"We offer a full range of activities for every age group," churches boast. Unfortunately, secondary activities divert our focus, crowding out time, energy, and resources for the Great

evangelism or discipleship, leaders need to consider eliminating it. In retrospect, one of my failings as a pastor was to focus on creating and managing programs instead of concentrating on the mission of the church.

Too many activities and programs arise in the course of a church's life, each with vested constituents. These

continue even when ineffective or only partially effective. More is not necessarily better. Peter Drucker urges organizations to assume a policy of abandoning yesterday to release resources for strategies that work today.

Defective Approaches to Disciple Making

Even when we avoid inadequate goals and target biblical ones, defective approaches can still sabotage disciple making. Consider four common but flawed approaches along with the correct biblical paradigms.

Discipleship by osmosis versus intentional discipleship

As a pastor, I failed to craft an intentional strategy for making disciples. Instead, I relied mostly on discipleship by osmosis, confident that growth would naturally occur through participation in church services and activities.

People do tend to accept the values of their faith communities, at least cognitively. Yet, in the case of transforming discipleship, my reliance on this nonmethod assumed too much. First, it supposes a highly spiritual environment in which

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"Okay, Mrs. Dawson, now try to hit the high notes without the helium."

Commission. Thom Ranier's research finds that simple churches that eliminate these activities are more effective in evangelism and discipleship than activity-filled churches.¹²

Busier means less effective. This mission must drive the ministries of the church. Unless an activity contributes effectively to



strong biblical values would naturally transfer. This is rarely the case. Second, it presumes that true community exists, where members meaningfully relate and influence others. Again this seldom occurs. Third, it assumes that when believers regularly listen to biblical preaching and teaching, they will grow in discipleship — a process that occurs only in a small percentage of individuals.

Basics for new believers versus ongoing growth

Many churches label their course for new believers as a *discipleship class*. Typically these run for several months, assuming that this amount of time suffices to transform a convert into a disciple. Since discipleship is a lifelong process, however, churches need to develop means for ongoing growth.

One respected scholar states that during its first several centuries, the church required converts to go through a training period of 2 to 3 years before they were fully accepted into the church. He considers this time frame “probably not transferable for today.” Because of the difficulty of getting newer believers to commit themselves to an extended period of discipling, he recommends a shorter period of initial discipleship.¹³ Most churches have done exactly that.

However tempting, we cannot make this concession if we want to fulfill our mission as the church. We must not ask what we can manage in light of current conditions, instead we must ask: *How can we change the church’s culture to align with God’s mission?* In particular: *How can we motivate believers for ongoing growth?* Leaders must address

these issues in light of significant cultural and personal hindrances and the natural difficulties that discourage discipleship.

Selective discipleship versus holistic discipleship

In discipling, if we are not careful, we emphasize particular doctrines and practices at the expense of others. This results from denominational emphases, training, and personal preferences. Many areas of Christian living, moreover, do not receive adequate attention. As a seminary professor, I regularly survey my students on the topics their churches taught during the previous 2 years. In terms of frequency of teaching, the results indicated that these students received an adequate amount of instruction in most areas of spiritual life — prayer, faith, stewardship,

► Discipleship for All of Life

Following Jesus should make a difference in every aspect of our lives, if He is fully Lord. Most discipleship materials, however, focus on *spiritual aspects* such as right beliefs and practices. These include: Bible study, prayer, stewardship, witness, resisting temptation, and the fruit and gifts of the Spirit. While essential, these scarcely comprise the whole of our lives. The New Testament clearly shows the centrality of the spiritual in the believer’s life. Many other areas, however, must be considered in a holistic discipleship for all of life.

Consider areas of *daily living*, such as work, money, possessions, entertainment, and relationship to culture. These form important arenas in which we honor God.

Understanding the way money affects our lives, Jesus taught more on money than prayer. We also need to address *relationships*, including the meaning of Christian community, relationships with nonbelievers, family, and marriage. We must provide intelligent biblical guidance about romantic love and sexual morality because these have been badly distorted by our culture.

Following Jesus should also lead us to embrace *servanthood and mission*. We need to embrace His concern for the spiritually lost, the materially needy, and those for whom justice has been denied (Micah 6.8; Amos 5.24).

Spiritual growth and *personal maturing* are closely related and affect one another. Spiritual resources not only

produce spiritual growth, but also enable personal growth as well. Those who do not grow personally seldom make much progress spiritually.

Discipleship that honors God and produces maximal fruit requires growth in all five areas above. Failure to grow in one category negatively impacts our growth and effectiveness in others. I have known Christians, for example, who possess a strong commitment to God, yet they make little apparent difference for God. Why? Their weaknesses in relationships or personal immaturities neutralize or limit their effectiveness in ministry and witness.

STEPHEN LIM, Springfield, Missouri

Discipleship?

and temptation — along with the areas of family life and marriage. Many practical areas, however, that occupy a huge part of the believer's thought, time, and energy received scant attention. These include: work, success, money, time, entertainment, romantic love, sex, and servanthood.

Focus on curriculum versus transformation through relationships

Most churches assume that if individuals complete the recommended classes and absorb

the necessary information, they will be discipled. This conveniently avoids the difficult work of engaging people in the confusion and messiness of their lives. Generally Christians have far more spiritual knowledge than they apply. If Bible study does not transform us, warns Reggie McNeal, it is "merely a head trip ... an idolatrous substitute for genuine spirituality."¹⁴

While needed, we must recognize that curriculum alone cannot effect transformation. Mike Yaconelli regretfully observed, "Spiritual

growth has become an industry, a system, a set of principles, formulas, training programs, curricula, books, and tapes that, if followed, promise to produce maturity and depth."¹⁵ People are unique, however, and their circumstances vary. Individuals also learn and implement truth at different rates and in varying ways. They have personal issues calling for resolution and areas of their lives that need development. These processes work best in an environment of ongoing nurture through relationships of trust, vulnerability, modeling, and

6 Ways To Motivate Your Church for Serious Discipleship

Most resources on making disciples assume you have believers who are ready and waiting for discipling. If only this were true, it would make our task much easier. Leaders must consider the crucial — but often missing — factor of motivation. Without it, the best methods and materials have little value.

My appreciation of the need for strong, sustained motivation escalated when I discovered four powerful enemies of discipleship: inherent difficulties; urgent concerns, such as family responsibilities and work pressures; culture seductions, including career success, possessions, and entertainment; and cultural misbeliefs that regularly assault our minds and weaken our resolve to fully follow Jesus.

Duty or Desire

How can we motivate believers for discipleship despite these challenges? Early in my ministry I tried guilt. I quickly found this only has limited, short-term effectiveness. I have emphasized, duty but this also falls short. What delight does God take in the attitude, "I'm obeying You because it is my duty as a believer"?

The only adequate motivation for following Jesus is *desire*. In the parable of the treasure hidden in the field, the man joyfully sells all he has to buy the field because its value far exceeds the cost (Matthew

13:44). How can leaders provide and sustain such motivation for discipleship? Through the years I have discovered six sources.

1 Biblical Vision of God and Reality

A strong biblical vision of God serves as the primary motivator. Believers need to see God's holiness and greatness, and appreciate His goodness, faithfulness, and forgiveness. Foundational is the reality of a loving God who is for us, not against us. Richard Foster wisely observes, "The Christian life comes not by gritting our teeth but by falling in love."¹

Disciple makers must also convey that living for God produces growing joy, wholeness, hope, and a fruitful life in fulfilling God's purposes. Ultimately we gain eternal life with the God who loves us. We must sincerely believe: "While difficult, serving God overwhelmingly beats any alternative — so it's hardly a choice at all."

2 Appreciation of God's Law and Revulsion Toward Sin

For sustained obedience, believers must be convinced of the desirability of God's standards. As a pastor, I regularly reminded my congregation that God's laws are descriptions of reality. He gave them for our good (Deuteronomy 10:12,13), so we can live



accountability. This is what Jesus demonstrated with His disciples.

The new believers' course at a Midwestern megachurch consisted of 13 weeks of lectures. Realizing the need for improvement, the pastor of discipleship took my seminary course on "Building a Disciple-Making Ministry." Afterward, he extended the new believers' course to 6 months, and then a year. More important, he divided the class into groups of 10 and recruited a mature couple to mentor each group. For half of each class

meeting, instead of listening to presentations, participants shared their lives and applied the teaching to their lives. Most significant, group leaders continued to develop these relationships outside of class. Even after the completion of the course these relationships and the process of discipleship continued.

Two of these mentoring couples shared with me how many questions and personal issues they had helped their disciples resolve. One couple found that nearly every person in their group had problems with his marriage

or an addiction. A female convert asked her mentoring couple, "My boyfriend wants me to move in with him. What should I do?" Churches deal with these kinds of issues not simply by giving biblically correct answers, but by prayerful, ongoing support throughout the difficult process of obeying Jesus and by modeling a better way.

Summary

The large majority of American churches have accepted flawed ministry goals and approaches to

the best life possible — that which accords with reality and offers eternal significance. To ignore His laws means to ignore reality, and results in diminished and distorted living, and eventually destruction.

A right perception of sin complements a correct view of God's laws. Sin attracts us because it seems to offer satisfaction. While it may partially and temporarily do so, it cannot yield lasting or complete fulfillment. Instead, it damages our lives.

3 Recognition of Incompleteness

Those who realize their poverty and incompleteness will seek more of God and His reign in their lives (Matthew 5:3). Spiritual lukewarmness characterizes those who lack this awareness (Revelation 3:15–18). Often it takes a crisis to force us to deep and honest examination of our lives. In doing so, we recognize the inability of any earthly circumstances or relationships to satisfy our deepest need. We also may discover inner wounds and broken places that need God's healing.

4 Joyful Experiences of God

The Book of Acts contains numerous accounts of believers who experienced the reality of God. Consequently, they felt highly motivated to serve Him despite persecution. We can experience God in various ways: genuine worship, answered prayer, His working in our lives, and the infilling of His Spirit. These experiences of God inspire and motivate us to grow in relationship with Him.

5 Lives, Testimony, and Encouragement of Others

The quality of other believers' lives and their testimonies of God at work in and through them also motivate us. These put flesh and blood on spiritual principles and demonstrate their effectiveness. Hearing fresh stories from others, we vicariously experience what they experienced, stimulating our growth. Also, the encouragement of others enables us to push through difficult and dry times in our spiritual journey toward maturity.

6 The Joy of Growing

Although our bodies quit growing and decline, emotional, intellectual, relational, and spiritual growth can proceed unabated. God wants us to grow to the "whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). Growing in any area brings satisfaction that motivates me to desire even more growth. When I fail to grow, my life becomes routine and I experience the boredom of stagnation. When I grow, however, I experience a freshness and aliveness in my life.

Conclusion

Without strong, sustained motivation on the part of Christians, growth in discipleship will be anemic. With the empowering of God's Spirit, we can use six sources to generate and maintain desire for spiritual maturity.

STEPHEN LIM, Springfield, Missouri

NOTE

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Overcoming Hindrances to Discipleship

“Stunningly few churches have a church of disciples,” concluded pollster George Barna, even as he recognized that most churches have programs for this purpose. “Never before in the history of the United States has the gospel of Jesus Christ made such inroads,” George Gallup observed, “while at the same time making so little difference in how people actually live.”

The first step toward tackling this pervasive and deeply rooted problem is to understand the hindrances to discipleship. First, we need to overcome two frequent and significant areas of hindrances in our own ministries. Then we need to help believers deal with two imposing barriers in their lives — cultural subversions and personal issues.

Ministry weaknesses divide into two categories: *flawed ministry goals* and *defective approaches to disciple making*. Examples of the first include: striving for growing attendance instead of pursuing life transformation, and being satisfied with compliant and zealous members rather than seeking their ongoing spiritual maturation. One of the most common approaches that falls short is reliance on attendance at church services and activities. At best, they should only be part of an intentional strategy for making disciples.

Cultural seductions include the blatant lure of wealth, possessions, success, and entertainment. They also involve misbeliefs that infiltrate our minds through constant exposure and shape our values. Examples include: The present is what is important; the physical world is more real than the spiritual, and God exists to take care of our needs. These seductions produce spiritual anemia instead of growing discipleship.

Many personal issues also thwart discipleship growth. For example, in a fallen world painful experiences inflict deep wounds in our spirit. These often cause us to turn to substances and behaviors, such as workaholicism, to numb the pain. They easily become compulsive or addictive, and rob us of the time, energy, freedom, and will to follow God’s direction for our lives. Unless overcome, they block meaningful discipleship.

If we want to fulfill Jesus’ Great Commission to make disciples (Matthew 28:19), we must overcome ministry-related hindrances and show believers how to overcome hindrances in their lives through the enabling of God’s Spirit.

STEPHEN LIM, Springfield, Missouri

disciple making. These must be exposed and replaced with biblical ones. While doing so poses many difficulties, God calls leaders to lovingly challenge the cultures of their churches.

We do not need to change all of a church’s ministry paradigms to improve the quality of disciple making. The implementation — even partial — of a single one can improve the process. Sometimes small changes result in visible and positive results, and the accumulation of small victories creates momentum toward progressively greater changes. Then one day, instead of a church that cannot disciple, we will have a church that regularly produces growing disciples. 🌱



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9. Willard, 35. Willard uses this phrase.
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Making Disciples



A Few at a Time

Jesus' Way:

By Greg Ogden

The church urgently needs to recapture its original mission of making disciples of Jesus by creating intimate, relational environments of multiplication and transformation.

The crisis at the heart of the church is a crisis of product,"¹ writes Bill Hull. Is there any more important question for pastors to answer than, *What kind of people are we growing in our ministries?* According to George Barna and George Gallup, we are not producing people who are much different in conviction and lifestyle than the rest of society. This has been well-documented so I will not repeat the bad news. But, here is the solution.

Jesus made it clear that He equates a singular product with the mission of the Church — "Go and *make disciples* of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Every church's mission is the same: *Making disciples of*

Jesus. We may prefer to express it in a fresh, contemporary way — "to turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ."² But, this is just a restatement of the Great Commission.

When I speak to pastors on disciple making, I take an informal poll. I ask, "Raise your hand if you meet weekly with a few people to help them become reproducing disciples of Jesus." Sadly, I get

minimal response. A larger response ought to be expected since Jesus modeled for us how to grow disciples. He called the Twelve to be with Him so He could shape their character and to transfer His mission to them. We have a crisis of product because pastors are not following Jesus' model. As a result we are missing out on a most joyful and fruitful opportunity.

In this article I describe a simple, reproducible way to grow disciples

of Jesus that will forever change your practice of ministry. It will also leave your church with self-initiating, reproducing disciples of Christ.

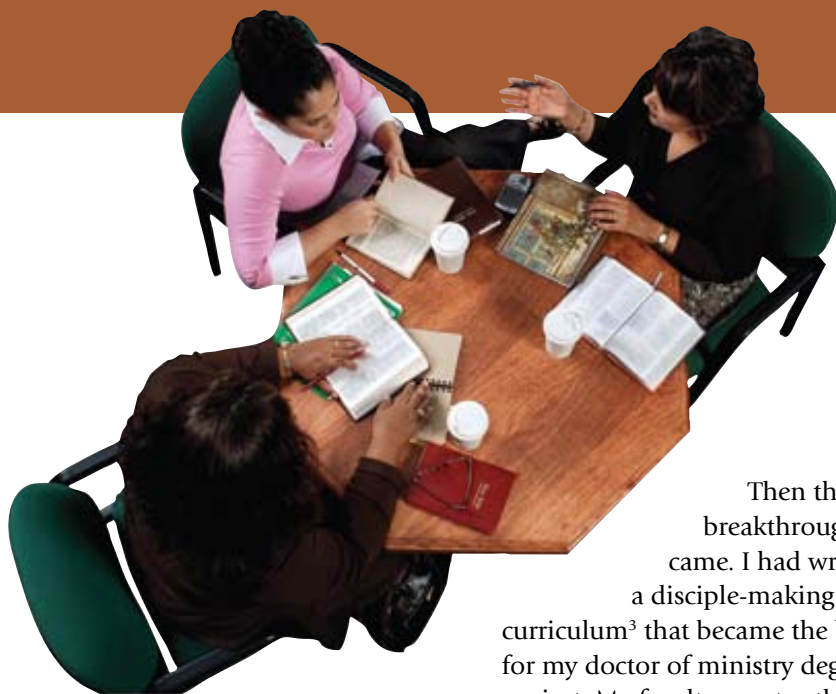
The model is: *Disciples are made in small, reproducible groups of 3 or 4 (triads or quads)*

that cultivate an environment of transformation and multiplication.

In my experience, the following three elements form the necessary building blocks to grow disciples. This, in turn, addresses our crisis of product:

- The model for multiplication.
- The priority of relationships.
- The environment for accelerated growth.

We have a crisis of product because pastors are not following Jesus' model.



Then the breakthrough came. I had written a disciple-making curriculum³ that became the basis for my doctor of ministry degree project. My faculty mentor thought it would be a worthy experiment to test the dynamics of this material in a variety of settings. In addition to a one-on-one approach, I invited two others to join me. I could not have anticipated the potency that would be unleashed. By adding a third person, it seemed the Holy Spirit was present to us in a way that was life giving, transforming, and laid the foundation for multiplication.

I have never returned to the one-on-one model for making disciples because of what I

experienced. Twenty years later I have had considerable opportunity to reflect on the difference in dynamics between triad and quads, and the one-on-one approach.

What were the limitations of the one-on-one model?

1. **In the one-on-one model the discipler is responsible for the spiritual welfare of another.** The discipler is like a mother bird that goes out to find worms to feed to her babies. With their mouths wide open, the babes wait in their nest for the mother bird to return. The discipler is cast in the role of passing on his vast knowledge to someone with limited knowledge.

2. **The one-on-one relationship establishes a hierarchy that often results in dependency.** The one-on-one creates a father-son, teacher-student, mature-immature relationship. As appreciative as a Timothy might be, the one in the receiving position likely will not be able to see himself in the giving position. The gulf between a Paul and a Timothy is accentuated

The Model for Multiplication

I call it the major *ah-ha* moment in ministry that has, more than anything else, shaped my approach to growing disciples. I had stumbled on a discovery breakthrough.

I had been frustrated because I was not seeing a multiplication of disciples. I had assumed the one-on-one model was the best way to make reproducing disciples. After all, wasn't the Paul-Timothy relationship the biblical pattern? *Discipling* meant giving myself to one person to see the life of Christ built in him. This would then lead him to do the same for another and so on. The trouble was that I was not seeing him doing the same for another. There was no multiplication.

What was I doing wrong? The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again while expecting different results. Frustrated, I redoubled my efforts. I made sure I had good content, ratcheted up my prayer life, and taught the skills of Bible study and witness. Yet I was not able to instill confidence, pass on the vision, or empower people to disciple others. All my refinements led to the same results.

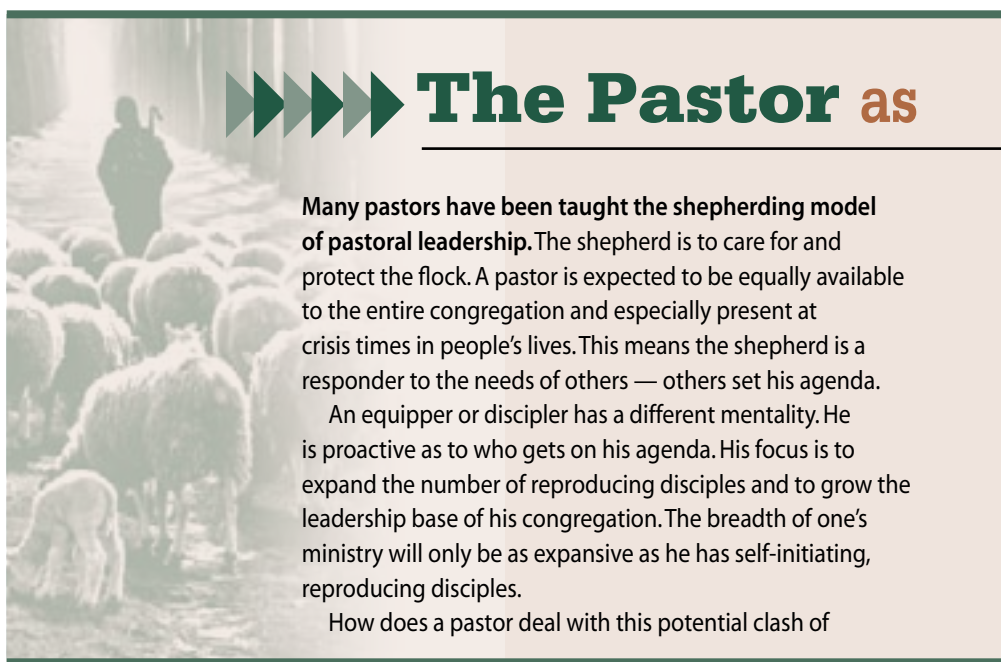


The Pastor as

Many pastors have been taught the **shepherding model of pastoral leadership**. The shepherd is to care for and protect the flock. A pastor is expected to be equally available to the entire congregation and especially present at crisis times in people's lives. This means the shepherd is a responder to the needs of others — others set his agenda.

An equipper or discipler has a different mentality. He is proactive as to who gets on his agenda. His focus is to expand the number of reproducing disciples and to grow the leadership base of his congregation. The breadth of one's ministry will only be as expansive as he has self-initiating, reproducing disciples.

How does a pastor deal with this potential clash of



when the relationship is between pastor and parishioner. The pastor is a trained professional who has biblical knowledge that some laypeople cannot see themselves achieving.

3. **The one-on-one approach limits the interchange or dialogue.** I compare the one-on-one discourse to a ping-pong match. In this back and forth dialogue, the discipler is under continuous pressure to advance the interchange to a higher plane.

4. **The one-on-one method also creates a one-model approach.** The primary influence on a new disciple is one person. The parameters of the discipling experience are defined by the strengths and weaknesses of one individual.

5. **Finally, the one-on-one model usually does not reproduce.** If it does, it is rare. Only self-confident, inwardly motivated people can break the dependency and become self-initiating and reproducing.⁴

We have inadvertently held a hierarchical, positional model of

discipling that is nontransferable. As long as a person senses that another person is over him because of spiritual authority, however that is measured, he will not see himself as qualified to disciple others. We may tout the one-on-one model as a multiplication method, but it contains the seeds of its own destruction.

From my own experience, I commend a nonhierarchical model that views discipling as a mutual process of peer mentoring.⁵ To avoid the dependency trap, the relationship needs to be seen as side-by-side, rather than as one having authority or position over the other.

An alternative practical model of disciple making (triads/quads)

Why are triads/quads energizing, joy-filled, and reproductive?

1. *There is a shift from unnatural pressure to the natural participation of the discipler.* When a third or fourth person is added, the discipler is no longer the focal point; he is a

part of a group process. The discipler in this setting is a fellow participant. Though the discipler convenes the triad/quad, he quickly becomes one of the group on their journey toward maturity in Christ.

2. *There is a shift from hierarchy to peer relationship.* The triad/quad naturally creates a mutual journey. The focus is less on the discipler and more on Christ as the One toward whom we are to point our lives. As a pastor, I found the relationship may have started with a consciousness that I was the Bible expert because of my title and training. Within the first few weeks, though, the triad/quad allowed me to be one of a group of disciples who were attempting to follow Jesus.

3. *There is a shift from dialogue to dynamic interchange.* In my initial experiment with triads, I often came away from discipleship meetings saying to myself, *What made that interchange so alive and dynamic?* The presence of the Holy Spirit seemed palpable. Life and energy marked the exchange. As I have come to

Discipler and Equipper

congregational expectations between the shepherding and discipling model? If a pastor/discipler meets weekly with a few people, the rumor mill may start to churn. The pastor may be accused of having favorites; of creating a power base from which to operate; or of only meeting with the big givers. Jesus' public selection of His disciples was His way of giving pastors cover.

In Luke's account of Jesus' call of His disciples, it appears that Jesus walked among the larger entourage that had been following Him. From this group He called out those whom He designated apostles (Luke 6:12,13). Jesus was modeling the only way to grow people. A discipler must be with his disciples intimately over time. The pastor is doing what Jesus did.

To be an equipper and discipler, pastors need to meet

weekly with people in whom they are investing themselves for growth, maturity, and multiplication. At 6:30 a.m. on Thursdays I feel I am doing what I have been called to do as a pastor. Three men and I open our lives to each other, catch up on the journey of the week, interact with Scripture and the curriculum, share our insights, confess our sin, and confide in each other the challenges of the week. I walk away energized, knowing I have been a pastor. Then when I see these same men take up the challenge to disciple others as a lifestyle, it does not get any better than this.

GREG OGDEN, Oak Brook, Illinois

Excerpted from pp. 40–54, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* by Greg Ogden (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, Illinois, 2003). Used with his permission.

understand group dynamics, I learned that one-on-one is not a group. A group is made when you add a third person. (Think trinity.)

4. *There is shift from limited input to wisdom in numbers.* Wisdom comes from many counselors (Proverbs 15:22). Often those perceived as younger or less mature in the faith have bursts of great wisdom, a fresh spark of life, or just great questions. In a current quad, one of the men at our initial gathering said, "I have never opened the Bible."

I had observed an eagerness and hunger in Mick, so I was sure I had misunderstood his comment. I responded, "You mean you have never studied the Bible seriously."

"No, I have never opened a Bible."

Since that first session Mick has demonstrated a voracious appetite for Scripture. His perceptive questions have led to engaging dialogue and deeper exploration.

5. *There is a shift from addition to multiplication.* For me there is no greater joy than to see a Christian

reproduce. One benefit of the triad/quad model is empowerment. For more than two decades I have observed an approximate 75 percent reproduction rate through the triad/quad model of disciple making.

In summary, a smaller unit encourages multiplication because it minimizes the hierarchical dimensions and maximizes a peer-mentoring model. Providing a discipleship curriculum specifically designed for this intimate relationship creates a simple, reproducible structure that almost any growing believer can lead. Leadership in these groups can be rotated early on since the size makes for an informal interchange and the curriculum provides a guide to follow.

Discipling must create intergenerational multiplication. But this is only one aspect of growing *self-initiating, reproducing* disciples.

Disciples Are Made in Relationships, Not Programs

Making disciples places priority on an invitation to relationships, not an invitation to programs.

Disciple making is not a 6-week, 10-week, or even a 30-week program. Our efforts to make disciples are often conducted through programs, not through the relational process.

Biblically, disciples are made in

relationships. When I am forming a new triad/quad, I approach someone personally. First, I ask the Lord to guide me to those who are spiritually hungry and teachable. When I have a settled conviction as to whom the Lord would have me approach, I ask, "Will you join me and walk with me as we grow together to become better disciples of Christ? I would like to invite you to meet weekly with me and one or two others so we can become all the Lord intends us to be. As I was praying about this relationship, I sensed the Lord drawing me to you."

How does this relational approach differ from a program?

Discipling relationships are marked by intimacy, whereas programs tend to be focused on information

Programs operate with the assumption that if we give someone more information it will automatically lead to their transformation. In other words, right doctrine produces right living. Filling people's heads with Scripture verses and biblical principles leads to a change in character, values, and a heart for God.

Alicia Britt Chole captures this difference between program and relationship, "Program was safer, more controllable, and reproducible — less risky, less messy, less intrusive. It seemed easier to give someone an outline than an hour, a well-worn book than a window into our humanity. How easy it is to substitute informing people for investing in people, to confuse organizing people with actually discipling people. Life is not the offspring of program or paper. Life is the offspring of life. Jesus prioritized shoulder-to-shoulder mentoring because His prize was



much larger than information; it was integration.”⁶

Discipling relationships require the full, mutual responsibility of the participants. Programs have one or a few who do ministry on behalf of the many

Most programs are built on an individual or a few core people who do the hard work of preparation.

In a discipling relationship, the partners share equal responsibility for preparation, self-disclosure, and an agenda for life-change.

The rest of the group are passive recipients of their work. However, this is less true of a more egalitarian small group than it is of a class where one-way communication dominates. Though such a program may provide tremendous benefit to the one who has done the preparation, the result is usually enormous amounts of unprocessed information. As much as I believe preaching produces conviction and decision, I would be naïve to believe that preaching alone produces disciples. If preaching *could* produce disciples, the job *would* have been done.

In a discipling relationship, the partners share equal responsibility for preparation, self-disclosure, and an agenda for life-change. This relationship is not about one person being the insightful teacher while the others are learning from one whose wisdom far exceeds their own. Maturity levels in Christ will vary, but the basic assumption is that in the give and take of relationships, the one who is the teacher and the one who is taught can vary from moment to moment.

Discipling relationships are customized to the unique growth of individuals, whereas programs emphasize synchronization and regimentation

Most programs cannot take into account the uniqueness of individuals. This uniqueness is essential to growing disciples. A program usually has a defined length. You commit to 10 weeks, and you are done.

Churches often follow the academic calendar. They start a program in September when school starts,

and complete it in June in time for summer vacation. Once the cycle is completed, Christians are supposed to be disciplined. Completing the program is equated with making disciples.

Discipling relationships vary in length of time because no two people grow at the same speed. Therefore, discipling cannot be a forced march through a curriculum. Discipling relationships require an individualized approach that takes into account the unique growth of those involved.

Discipling relationships focus accountability around life-change, whereas programs focus accountability around content

Discipleship programs give the illusion of accountability. But the accountability is more focused on

▶ Eight Causes of the Low Estate of Discipleship

1. Pastors have been diverted from their primary calling to “equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Ephesians 4:12, ESV).¹
2. We have tried to make disciples through programs.
3. We have reduced the Christian life to the eternal benefits we get from Jesus, rather than living as students of Jesus.
4. We have made discipleship for super-Christians, not ordinary believers.
5. Leaders have been unwilling to call people to discipleship.
6. We have an inadequate view of the church as a discipleship community.
7. Most churches have no clear, public pathway to maturity.
8. Most Christians have never been personally disciplined.

GREG OGDEN, Oak Brook, Illinois.

NOTE

1. Scripture quotation taken from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version, copyright © 2001, Wheaton: Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

completing the assigned curriculum than on changing or transforming into the Christlikeness expected of a disciple of Jesus.

Growth into Christlikeness is the goal. The gauge of accountability in these programs tends to be easily measurable and observable behaviors. These include Scripture memorization, completing the required weekly reading, and practicing spiritual disciplines. In a discipling relationship, the accountability focuses on learning to “obey everything I [Jesus] have commanded” (Matthew 28:20). For example, there is a huge difference between knowing that Jesus taught us to love our enemies, and loving our enemies. Discipling relationships are centered on incorporating the life of Jesus into all we do.

The Environment of Transformation: The Three Necessary Ingredients

Without question, the setting where I have seen the most accelerated transformation in believers has been in triads/quads or small, reproducible discipleship groups. I call these the *hothouse* of Christian growth. Hothouses maximize environmental conditions so things can grow at a rate greater than would exist under normal circumstances; conditions are ripe for accelerated growth. This is what happens in a triad/quad.

Why is this? What are the conditions in a discipleship group of three or four that create the hothouse effect? Three ingredients, when exercised in a balanced way, release the Holy Spirit to bring rapid growth toward Christlikeness: These ingredients can be summarized in the following biblical principle: When we (1) open our hearts in *transparent trust* to each other (2) on the *truth* of God’s Word (3) in the spirit of *mutual accountability*,

we are in the Holy Spirit’s hothouse of transformation.

Let’s examine each of these elements that create accelerated growth and reproduction.

The foundation for growing in discipleship is intimate, accountable relationships with other believers.

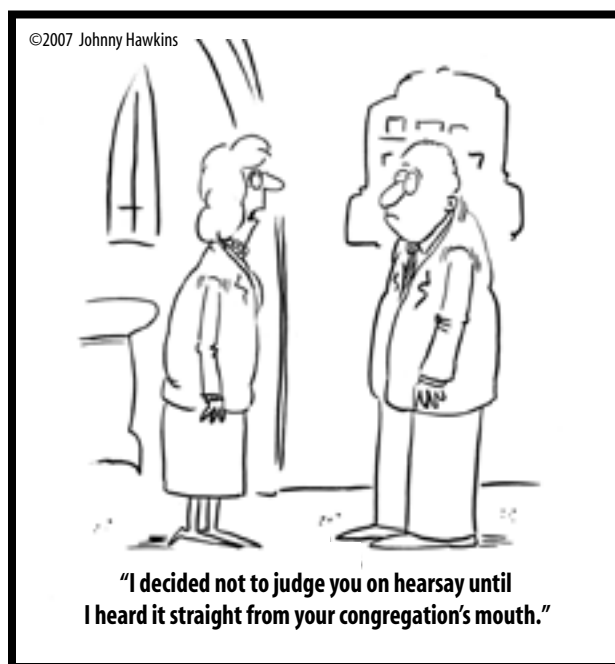
Transparent trust

We return to the fundamental truth that has been repeated throughout this article: The foundation for growing in discipleship is intimate, accountable relationships with other believers. Why is transparency a necessary condition for change? The extent to which we are willing to reveal to others the areas of our life that need God’s transforming touch is the extent to which we are inviting the Holy Spirit to make us new. Our willingness to enter into horizontal or relational intimacy indicates our willingness to invite the Lord to do His makeover in our lives.

The small size of a triad/quad means the discipling relationship is close. There is little place to hide. In an environment of increasing trust self-revelation is drawn out. Trust does not happen instantaneously; it is earned and developed. To get to the deep end of the pool we must go through the shallower waters of affirmation. These include encouragement, support through life’s

difficulties, and prayerful listening to help our partners hear God’s voice in life’s decisions. Only then are we likely to venture in over our heads by confessing our sin to one another.

Few believers have the regular habit or the safe context in which they can reveal to another person what lurks inside their hearts. Until we get to the point where we can articulate to another those things that have a hold on us, we will live under the tyranny of our own darkness. James admonished his readers, “Confess your sins one to another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed” (5:16, NASB).⁷ James makes a direct connection between confession and healing. In this context, healing appears to be of a physical nature. Yet James believed that one’s spiritual health directly



How To Start a Reproducible Discipleship Group



Pray. Ask the Lord to draw you to spiritually hungry people. Take your time. Let conviction settle in. Only then go to the next step.

Make a personal invitation. Approach a person in the following way: “The Lord has placed you on my heart. Would you be willing to join me and one or two others on a weekly journey toward becoming better disciples of Jesus?”

Tell them what is involved. If you are using a curriculum such as *Discipleship Essentials*, give them an overview of the content and the means in which you will cover it.

Review the Covenant.¹ Disciples need a clear sense of what is expected of them. Walk through the covenant line-by-line and have them restate the requirements in their own words. Mention that the triad/quad will be meeting weekly for approximately a year.

Ask the disciple to prayerfully consider the invitation. Specifically, ask him not to give you an immediate answer, but to examine whether he has the time and the heart for what lies ahead.

Inform him that at least one other person will be joining you. If this is your first invitation, this person may even

suggest who the third or fourth person might be.

Set the first regular meeting and get started. Find a quiet place where you will be able to develop intimate transparency. At the first session ask each person to share the process by which he came to commit to the group.

Guide participants through the sessions. Go at a comfortable pace. Encourage questions. Address personal matters. Life will happen while you are together. The curriculum is only a tool, not something in which to be enslaved.

Model transparency. The group will go as deep as the leader’s willingness to be vulnerable.

Keep multiplication as a high value. The commitment to disciple others must be in the original covenant and remain the focus. Since all group members will take turns leading the process, they will quickly see that it can be done.

GREG OGDEN, Oak Brook, Illinois.

NOTE

1. Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide To Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 14.

affected one’s physical health.

What is the connection between confession and freedom? Bringing the shame of our guilt into the light before trusted members of the body of Christ can have a liberating effect. Once sinful behavior is admitted before others, it begins to lose its power to control. Sin loves darkness, but its power weakens in the light.

To learn to swim in the deep waters of transparent trust is a necessary element for accelerated Christian growth. Learning to swim can be a scary experience, especially when you are in over your head. But once you learn to

trust the water to hold you up, you can relax and experience its refreshment.

Truth in community

The second of three environmental elements that creates the conditions for the hothouse of accelerated growth is *the truth of God’s Word in community*. I started with relationships because the context in which God’s Word should be studied is in community. A great failing today is that we have separated the study of God’s Word from transparent relationships. We have been more concerned about correct doctrine than correct living.

Having knowledge and right doctrine is important, but it is not enough. The goal is to incorporate truth into our being. This happens as we process it with others.

A disciple must have opportunity to cover the essential teachings of the Christian life in a systematic and sequential fashion. We are living at a time when the average person has a minimal foundation for his Christian faith. A generation ago Francis Schaeffer and Elton Trueblood warned us in prophetic voice that we were one generation away from losing the memory of

Christian faith in our culture. We are the next generation of which they spoke.

The Tonight Show with Jay Leno seems an unlikely place to find evidence for this loss memory. One night Leno took to the streets to question people about their biblical knowledge. He approached two college-age women and

Accountability brings us back to what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

asked, "Can you name one of the Ten Commandments?"

Quizzical and blank looks led to this reply, "Freedom of speech?"

Then Leno turned to a young man and asked, "Who according to the Bible was eaten by a whale?"

With confidence and excitement, he blurted out, "I know, I know, Pinocchio."

The memory of Christianity has been lost.

One of the participants in a discipling triad I led was a woman about 10 years my senior. She had been raised in the home of a Congregational pastor. After we had completed our time together, she said, "Greg, I have something to confess. When you asked me to join this group, I didn't think I had much to learn. After all, I have been studying the Scriptures all of my life having been raised in a home where the Bible was central. But I discovered as we covered the faith in a systematic and sequential order, that my understanding was much like a *mosaic*. I had clusters of tiles with a great deal of empty space in between. This approach has allowed me to fill in those places where tiles belong. I now see in a comprehensive fashion how the Christian faith makes sense of it all."

Life-change accountability

The third environmental element that contributes to creating the right climatic conditions for accelerated growth is *mutual, life-change accountability* — the *covenantal* relationship between those on the discipleship journey. What is a covenant? "A covenant is a written, mutual agreement between two or

more parties that clearly states the expectations and commitments in the relationship."⁸ This definition implies that the covenantal partners hold each other accountable to keep the covenant.

Yet for most Westerners, to willingly give others authority to hold us accountable to what we said we would do is a violation of what we hold dear. Robert Bellah's groundbreaking research, *Habits of the Heart*, is a sociologist's search for the core of American character. He found that freedom from obligation defines what it is to be an American: We want to do, what we want to do, when we want to do it, and no one better tell us otherwise. We want to be in control of our own choices, life direction, character formation, and schedules. Everything in us grates against accountability.

Yet, accountability brings us back to what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. A disciple is one under authority. Disciples of Jesus leave no doubt that Jesus is exerting the formative influence over their lives. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23, ESV).⁹ To become serious about this truth we need to

practice coming under authority in our covenantal relationships in Christ.

Conclusion

"The crisis at the heart of the church is a crisis of product." I challenge every pastor to schedule a 90-minute time slot into his week to meet with two or three others for discipling for multiplication. Imagine the impact on the quality and quantity of the product when we began to see an organic multiplication of these reproducible groups over the next 10 years. George Barna would be giving us different statistics about the difference between believers and nonbelievers in America. 🌐



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NOTES

1. Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1988), 14.
2. Mission Statement of Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, Illinois.
3. Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide To Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998).
4. These generalities are not meant to demean the positive and powerful experiences that a one-on-one relationship has meant to many. When it comes to the multiplication of disciples, my experience teaches me that this generally does not lead to reproduction.
5. Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 17. "Discipling is an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples to encourage, equip, and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well."
6. Alicia Britt Chole, "Purposeful Proximity — Jesus' Model of Mentoring," *Enrichment* journal [Internet]; available from http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200102/062_proximity.cfm; accessed April 2, 2007.
7. Scripture quotation taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)
8. Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 14. Provided is an illustration of what a mutual covenant might look like.
9. Scripture quotation taken from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version, Copyright © 2001, Wheaton: Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Moving Target:

Reframing Discipleship for Postmoderns

By Earl G. Creps

At a recent meeting in Seattle, Washington, a friend and I were laughing about the stack of books dating from the early 1990s we owned that claimed to explain postmodernism.

As a church planter, he had depended on these resources to help him navigate the future of his young congregation. I had used these materials, and had even written some of my own, to help Christian leaders come to terms with what another planter described as the *epochal change* racing through our culture.

As concern about postmodernism in the American church increased in the last decade, conferences and seminars began to spring up with titles that ended with the phrase: *in a postmodern world*. Pastors and other leaders flocked to these events to learn about leadership in a postmodern world, or children's ministry in a postmodern world. The P word quickly became a way of summarizing everything in our society that seemed scary or incomprehensible. And so, young people with tattoos and church services featuring rooms illuminated only by candles were labeled *postmodern*.

Ten years later some of these early ways of thinking about postmodernism seem outdated and unhelpful. This article describes some of the changes in my own thinking about postmodernism, and suggests that discipling the citizens of this new culture depends on how we

think of them, and the ability to morph that thinking as circumstances change. The ability to admit that my ideas have a shelf life cultivates a humility that will make following Christ attractive to those walking through this epochal change.

Reunderstanding Postmodernism

Getting a grip on a concept like postmodernism is like nailing Jell-O to the wall. So much has been written on this subject that one academic publisher now has a 400-page

encyclopedia to provide an *overview* of the major ideas in circulation. Yet, understanding what is happening in our culture is a crucial part of discerning how and where the Spirit is leading us to reach it.

My point of view on postmodernism has morphed in many significant ways. Some of the conclusions that seemed obvious to me a few years ago are not as helpful any more, proving that the path to reunderstanding is often misunderstanding. I can identify at least

three shifts in my effort to reunderstand the challenge of discipling those who are navigating the postmodern turn:

Shift #1: From the stock market crash to the Torino Scale

Some observers define *postmodern turn* to mean that the modern worldview (at least in the northern hemisphere) has been completely demolished. In this sense, *postmodern* means both *after* and *replacing* modernity. Everything from clothing styles to English literature classes to popular

Millions of people still hold the modernist perspective with its optimism, faith in science and technology, and a logical approach to problem solving.



Moving Target

music is now somehow postmodern (whatever that means) and we can do nothing about it. The battle — if there was one — is already over.

This claim, common in the Christian literature of the 1990s, interpreted our cultural situation as something like a stock market crash in which the modern worldview lost its perceived value in a massive sell-off that essentially ended the modern world. The basic cause of this collapse was disappointment with the disparity between what modernity claimed to deliver (a technological utopia) and what it actually delivered (personal despair and environmental ruin). I found this idea compelling at the time and tended to see evidence for it everywhere I looked (something like the way you start noticing red cars everywhere as soon as you buy one). Today I understand this perspective is much too simplistic. Modernity's hold on our culture has been weakened, and a postmodern shift has happened, but the latter has not swept the former away by any means. For example, can

you name anyone who refuses to take penicillin because it was discovered by *modern* science?

The analogy that helps me reunderstand this change is the Torino Scale used by space scientists to estimate the risk of our planet being impacted by celestial objects, such as near-earth asteroids. This 1 to 10 scale (*see below*) calculates both the likelihood of an asteroid strike and the degree of damage that would result, based largely on its size. A cataclysmic event, the subject of countless science fiction films, is thus placed in relative terms.

I now view postmodernism in the same way. The modern world is not gone. Millions of people still hold the modernist perspective with its optimism, faith in science and technology, and a logical approach to problem solving. Moreover, the impact of postmodernism has been far from uniform. Like the possible arrival of a cataclysmic asteroid, we need to understand the impact as relative to the location we are visiting.


For example, I have visited neighborhoods such as the U district

in Seattle, Washington; Pearl Street in Boulder, Colorado; and the Uptown area of Minneapolis, Minnesota, where I would rate the impact of postmodernism as a 10 on the Torino Scale. While some traits of modernity remain (for example, no one refuses to stop at red lights because they doubt their existence), the postmodern embracing of every form of pluralism is in full flower. On the other hand, my travels in other regions have found some regions much less affected by the larger trends in our society. Conservative politics, church attendance, and modern values are still the mainstream. A region such as this might rate a 2 or 3 on the Torino Scale — there is a postmodern impact among young people, but not enough (yet) to shift the cultural center of gravity. Survey research routinely turns up both locations.

The great benefit of the Torino Scale analogy is that it can help pastors develop a ministry strategy that is specific to their communities, rather than yielding to the fear that their entire world has been smashed and so they must discard everything they know about ministry and invent something that looks *postmodern*. Many of the ministries that went this direction a few years ago have had to retrench or are out of business. A knee-jerk reaction to a postmodern cataclysm is not the path forward. We cannot lead from a posture of despair or paranoia. Instead, making disciples depends on grasping how culture has been influenced where I am serving and then customizing my approach to that context. Think of it this way: Nothing works everywhere. Everything works somewhere. So where are you?

Shift #2: From bulleted list to black hole

Much of the early writing on the church's engagement with postmodernism was

THE TORINO SCALE		
0	Zero or virtually zero chance of impact	
1	Impact extremely unlikely, merits monitoring	
2	Impact very unlikely	
3	Close encounter with at least 1% chance of local destruction	
4	Close encounter with at least 1% chance of regional destruction	
5	Close encounter with significant threat of regional destruction	
6	Close encounter with significant threat of global catastrophe	
7	Close encounter with extremely significant threat of global catastrophe	
8	Certain collision with local destruction	
9	Certain collision with regional devastation	
10	Certain collision causing global climatic catastrophe	

analytical; that is, it focused on understanding the subject by breaking it down into its constituent parts. This *autopsy* model attempted to show what was inside the idea by pulling out the smaller ideas that made it up. The result was a small army of traveling speakers (of which I was one) who presented hundreds of PowerPoint slides with bulleted lists to depict the traits of postmodern people. While this method brought needed clarity to a murky topic, it also brought the penalty of labeling huge groups of people with generalizations invented by outsiders. Oddly the postmodern resentment of labeling in any form rarely showed up on anyone's lists, including my own.

Slowly, I began to sense that my habit of describing postmoderns using a set of traits was not serving them or the church well. This is not to say that there are no such traits, but that we should understand them in a different way. A second analogy helped me place the various kinds of people influenced by this worldview into relationship with each other. I came to think of postmodernism as a black hole — a gravity whirlpool in deep space so intense that light itself cannot escape from it. (See graphic to the right.). The center of the black hole is the word *no*, a place where the existence of truth and the possibility of communication are denied. In other words, hard-core postmodernism can be thought of

as a folk religion of *no*, as contrasted to faith in a God whose promises are “‘Yes’ in Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:20). Those closest to the center of this black hole are philosophical postmoderns who reject the possibility of absolutes in either truth or language (infinite uncertainty). While this group is relatively small in my view, it seems to attract most of the attention from Christians. Farthest from the depths of the gravity well

be known as absurdly impractical. Yet they share the philosophical postmodern's suspicion of power and authority. Breaking down the trait theory of postmodernism even further is the fact these three kinds of people can change positions in the black hole depending on their life stage and the issue under consideration.

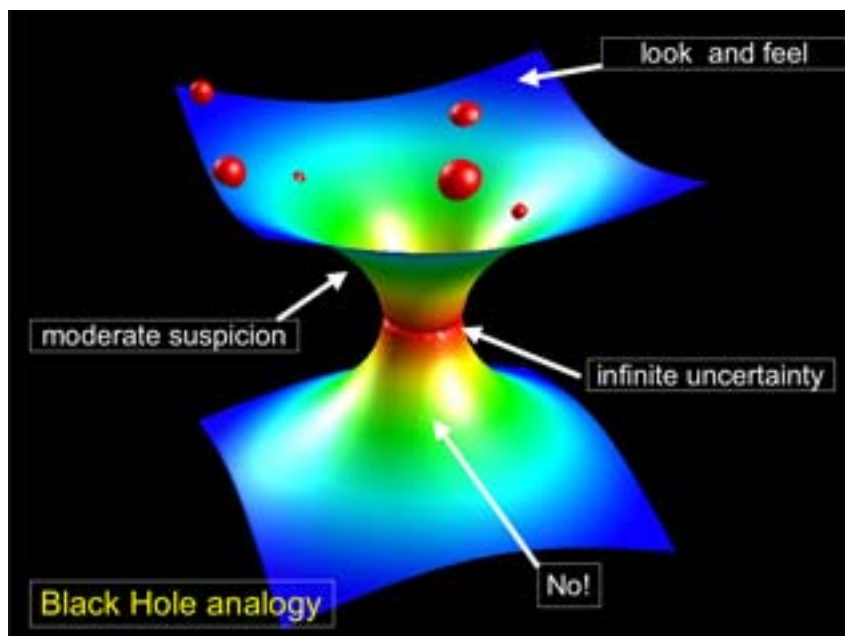
The value of the black-hole analogy is that it lessens the tendency to stereotype all citizens of

The value of the black-hole analogy is that it lessens the tendency to stereotype all citizens of postmodernity as identical.

are look-and-feel postmoderns who, while largely uninterested in negative philosophies, are eager to adopt the cultural style of the era. Their fashion sense might say *postmodern*, but their attitudes and behaviors may be surprisingly mainstream. In between are the *moderates* who tend to see the style emphasis of their *look-and-feel* peers as trivial, while regarding the hard-core notion that truth can never

postmodernity as identical. The truth is the opposite: The central trait of this worldview is its *lack of a central trait*. Just as the Torino Scale helps us understand that our communities are affected in different ways, the black hole implies that we should think of individuals not so much as *postmoderns* but as *people* who have been influenced by postmodernism in varying ways. Jesus did not die for worldviews; He died to save people.

Treating the natives of post-modernity as individuals rather than stereotypes also has great practical value. Early in our grappling with this subject I met many people who used this reasoning: Postmoderns like visual things. If we will add visual elements to our services, postmoderns will attend. In reality, this tactic



Moving Target

usually accomplished little more than lowering the lighting or adding video clips to a service designed in the 1970s.

The citizens of the black hole were largely unmoved. As Sarah, a young professional woman, noted, “We know you have tried to get us to church. That’s part of the problem. Many of your appeals have been carefully calculated for success, and that turns our collective stomach. Take worship, for instance. You think that fashionably cutting-edge liturgies relate to us on our level, but the fact is we can find better entertainment elsewhere. The same goes for anything you term *contemporary*. We see right through it. It is up to date for the sake of being up to date, and we are not impressed by the results.” What if Sarah had been treated as an individual rather than as part of a target group or market segment? The relationship that could have been built with her as a person might have changed her entire perspective on the corporate meeting of God’s people.

Shift 3: From absolute relativism to Rubik’s Cube

Ten years ago Christians began discussing postmodernism as a threat equal to the black plague because it seemed to place individual perspective above absolute truth — leading to a lack of confidence in the authority of the Bible. I saw this potential threat as well. A complete undermining of truth is damaging to everyone — even to postmoderns. So, while I never embraced the extreme versions of the black-plague theory, I did tend to think of postmodernism mainly as a philosophy of total relativism in which the possibility of knowing truth shrinks to the vanishing point. This new worldview, I taught, has one primary effect on people: It immunizes them against absolutes, making it impossible to believe in anything.

However, my explanation of postmodernism based on *absolute relativism* was off-target because it had been influenced by European (rather than American) writings on the subject, and because I formed these

conclusions in the wrong way: I based them almost entirely on research without listening to any citizens of emerging culture. The more I came to know postmoderns as people, the less credible my one-issue interpretation seemed. In reality, people affected by the postmodern worldview believe many things,

especially in regard to spirituality. For example, actress Sarah Michelle Geller, best known for her TV role in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, said: “I consider myself a spiritual person. ... I believe in an idea of God, although it’s my own personal ideal. I find most religions interesting, and I’ve been to every kind of denomination: Catholic, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist. I’ve taken bits from everything and customized it.” This revealing personal statement illustrates the *compound spirituality* so popular in emerging culture.

Being postmodern, then, is much less about believing in nothing than it is about believing in everything. Many friends who participate in this worldview are passionately committed to what they believe to be true, sometimes holding their positions with greater resolve than some Christians I know. The difference between these two groups is that the postmodern tends to assign value to things almost without limit. The one thing that may not be valued is any claim to an absolute account of the human condition, such as the claim that Jesus is the *one* mediator between God and man. As one student of culture put it, “The only enemy is the person who is not open to anything.”

By virtue of their openness to *truth* in almost any form, I now describe postmoderns as *relative absolutists*. While many who do not believe that truth can take an absolute form (despite the seeming contradiction of that statement itself), a more common view is that people have the right to choose which truths are absolute for themselves — today. A friend described this in his own life as “personal absolute truth.” From this point of view, for example, offering salvation to the world through only one means — the Cross — is



unthinkable because it breaks the first commandment of postmodernism: Thou shalt not place any limit on what can be true for a while.

As my thoughts changed on this issue, the analogy of Rubik's Cube helped me articulate my new perspective. The object of this popular game is to twist its multicolored facets until each surface of the cube has a uniform color. The only problem is that the potential combinations are so complex that winning the game became the province of geniuses and the clever. I found myself part of neither group.

Once we understand postmodernism is more than just relativism, the picture becomes more complicated. The Torino Scale analogy tells me that communities vary greatly, while the black hole analogy depicts how diverse individuals within those communities can be. The Rubik's Cube analogy puts these two dimensions in relationship to each other, multiplying the number of potential combinations almost infinitely and making it impossible to draw simple conclusions about discipleship using only demographics or trend analysis. In addition, every time culture morphs, the cube is twisted, and the combinations change unpredictably. The more postmodern a person is, the less likely he is to believe that the cube can ever be returned to a uniform color on each surface.

This challenge reinforced for me our abject dependence on the leading of the Holy Spirit in forming disciples in emerging culture. I am reminded of the ongoing challenges faced for many years by missionaries trying to reach Muslims outside the United States. Recently, we have heard of the supernatural interventions among Islamic people that have opened doors of ministry that might have seemed

If we view the people of Berkeley as simply underinformed about the gospel, then discipling them means choosing the right curriculum and arranging clever ways to expose them to it.

impossible not long ago. We have the same need as we reach out to people influenced by postmodernism. Without the kind of leading that Paul received from a Macedonian man who appeared in a night vision (Acts 16:6–10), our methods and analysis will only lead us to futility, or worse, to ministries built on transferring in young Christians who prefer our music, creating a parody of real mission. Paul's obedience to the Spirit's leading brought the gospel to Europe. The same kind of obedience will be necessary to bring the same message to emerging culture.

Engaging Postmodernism

My wife Janet and I recently decided to become church planters in Berkeley, California. A friend immediately supplied us with a detailed demographic study of this liberal, pluralistic city of around 100,000. One of the most striking things to come out of this in-depth report is that almost 50 percent of the young (median age just over 30) mostly single population can be characterized as trend setters. These are the people who invent the urban culture that millions of other Americans soon come to accept as ordinary life. As a friend put it, "These people are post, post, postmodern." In other words, they are *pre* everything, living perpetually in the run-up to the future they are inventing in real time. I call their lifestyle *culturenext*. Like the men of Athens whom Paul addressed, they spend "their time doing nothing

but talking about and listening to the latest ideas" (Acts 17:21).

If we view the people of Berkeley as simply underinformed about the gospel, then discipling them means choosing the right curriculum and arranging clever ways to expose them to it. If I choose to define them as enemies of the church, discipleship becomes a matter of confronting them until they see things our way.

But what would it mean if the people of our city were not underinformed or overly rebellious, but merely underexposed to credible representatives of the Christian faith? Making disciples would then mean living a witness among them — both personally and corporately — until the claims of Christ take on reality, until the power of the Spirit gives truth a pulse. Modeling how believers live and worship, then, may begin before conversion and continue afterward as a natural part of a spiritual friendship. Our gospel preaching will only be as effective as our gospel living in this community. While our message remains constant, we will need the Spirit to supply the gift of wisdom and grow the fruit of humility to adjust our approach in real time. With God's help, even a moving target can be hit. 🎯



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By Wes Bartel

Cake is my favorite food. I have enjoyed cake since I was a child, and I have never outgrown its appeal. I do not require that it be covered with icing, or chocolate, or fruit, or any other embellishment. In my opinion, it is perfect just as it comes out of the oven. It makes little difference to me when it is served. I could eat cake for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. It is good as a wake-up snack, and it serves well as an evening tonic for the insomniac. I like cake in almost any size, shape, or form. To me, cake is the 21st-century manna. Its appeal is not in its form or even in the way it is decorated or served. Its appeal is found in its ingredients. What goes into the cake is what makes it a cake.

Just as a cake is not defined by its form but by its essential ingredients, 21st-century discipleship must be defined in the same way. While we cannot identify a specific recipe that every church can follow, we can identify some indispensable ingredients. These ingredients are necessary for healthy spiritual growth. "Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:13,14).

Today, Sunday School serves as the primary discipleship meal for more than 90 percent of our churches. Unfortunately, in many churches the meal has become



somewhat mundane. Bored students, declining attendance, tired teachers, and other problems seem to testify of a need for change.

Often our solution is to discard past methods and create a *new* and *dynamic* template of ministry that will more effectively fit the 21st century. It is possible, however, that the real problem lies not with our existing methods, but with *our application* of existing methods. We need the ability to see old things in new ways.

What should an effective discipleship ministry look like in the 21st century? There are at least four necessary ingredients needed to create an effective Sunday School or Christian education ministry.

Effective Discipleship Intentionally Emphasizes the Systematic Study of God's Word

Try this. Put on a pair of glasses that are not your own. The results will be dramatic: Everything you look at will appear blurred; you may be unable to see clearly enough to read; and, if you leave them on long enough, you may suffer from dizziness, a headache, possible disorientation, and nausea.

Clear vision is important to us. It provides our depth perception and is a primary factor in what we view as reality. This is the reason why Christian education is indispensable in the church's discipleship process. It provides the biblical lens through which we view our life, our world, and our God.

In the spiritual realm, the journey from sinner to saint is a journey of vision. It is a dramatic transition from viewing ourselves, our world, and our future through the human lenses of unregenerate man to a completely new worldview. It is, in fact, a call to repentance.

Just as a cake is not defined by its form but by its essential ingredients, 21st-century discipleship must be defined in the same way.

The word the Early Church used for repentance is *metanoia*. Repentance is more than a simple prayer at an altar. It means a complete turning from sin, from our old life and its pursuits and desires. It is a demand for an utter change of mind to a completely new perspective. Repentance is, in fact, a new way of looking at everything — including God himself.

Nothing is more important following conversion than the intentional movement of a new convert into systematic Bible study. There, the student must move from the humanistic, secular view so prevalent in today's culture to a biblical worldview. He begins to see God as Sovereign Creator, man as fallen, sin as unacceptable, success as obedience to God's revealed will. In reality, the Sunday School classroom could be compared to an advanced eye-care clinic and the teacher to a skilled optometrist. The outcome should be students who have developed a Christian worldview.

This process begins with leadership asking some important, often painful questions: *Where are we now?*

What do our people know? What have we taught them? What have we missed? Where are they strong? Where are they weak? If people are the product of the church, then the church must address the condition of its product and implement intentional plans to improve it.

A frightening reality is that pastors are often not even aware of what is being taught in their Sunday School classes. They have relegated the selection of curriculum to the teachers who have often allowed the students to choose the topic. The result is a church that exhibits faulty or limited knowledge of important doctrines, and individual students who understand a great deal about very little.

In today's synchronistic culture, it is imperative that church leadership develop intentionality in their approach to Christian education. Practically, this should include a *scope-and-sequence* approach to Bible lessons. The curriculum of choice needs to embrace and teach our doctrinal distinctives and be designed to appeal to the learning styles of the student. Radiant Life curriculum was developed specifically to accomplish those purposes.

Topical studies are also important because they allow the teacher

lack a comprehensive understanding of God's Word. Such a deficiency can be spiritually *terminal*. Leadership needs to insist on an *intentional, systematic* method of study that moves the individual from a spiritual infant to a spiritual adult.

Effective Discipleship Is Cross-Generational in Its Approach

True biblical discipleship begins at birth and continues until death. It is a *lifelong* journey, and the church that limits its teaching ministry to adults



only has made a tragic mistake. The Bible provides a clear mandate to parent and pastor: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not turn from it"

A frightening reality is that pastors are often not even aware of what is being taught in their Sunday School classes.

to address specific needs, such as family issues, character studies, doctrinal studies, and spiritual-growth issues. While topical studies are appropriate and necessary, however, a steady diet will result in spiritual deficiency. The students will know what God's Word says about specific issues, but they will

(Proverbs 22:6). This mandate leaves little room for any method that by its function exempts the child or the teen from the process of discipleship.

In my travels I have visited with church leaders concerning the creative and varied discipleship models employed within the church. These models can be effective, and they are

legitimate in their approach. They range in scope from affinity groups to cell groups, from cell-based churches to free-market groups. The list is long and varied.

My concern is not with the effectiveness or the legitimacy of these methods. My concern arises from the fact cross-generational teaching and discipleship often become the unintended victims of these methods. In my conversations with church leaders I have observed that discipleship is often referenced in adult terms only. Youth ministry is relegated to midweek gatherings or other large-group meetings and children often garner most of their biblical education from children's church. In fact, these age groups are often viewed as inconvenient to the overall discipleship methods the church has chosen. The solution to this inconvenience is programs that many times amount to little more than entertainment or childcare while the adults are discipled.

The church is under the mandate of the Great Commission to teach the Scriptures to its people — all of its people. To accomplish this effectively the church must creatively employ varied methods and programs. I only ask that pastors not succumb to simple, pragmatic solutions, but base the selection of their discipleship methods on established biblical principles that embrace lifelong learning and growth.

This is the primary reason Sunday School is such a valued discipleship tool for the 21st century. It allows the church to provide age-level biblical instruction to students from cradle to grave. It also allows the teacher to design an educational model that will meet the unique learning needs of individual students and make the Bible relevant to the age-level needs of

the class. If the church is serious about the Great Commission, this must become an indispensable ingredient in the process.

Effective Discipleship Is Relational in Its Structure

The Bible describes the unique community that developed in

the Early Church following the outpouring of Pentecost: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had

everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their

Raising the Discipleship Bar

The pastor who awakens the sleeping giant of Sunday School and plans for aggressive Bible teaching will arm his church with biblically literate Christians. And armed they must be. Secular organizations have spent millions on publishing and advertising their principles. Yet the church has often failed to prepare its members for this worldly onslaught; biblically illiterate Christians are sitting ducks.

Even the lines of faith are becoming increasingly blurred because of this dangerous illiteracy. Universalism is creeping into the Lord's house. The all-roads-lead-to-heaven prophets are energetically — and often effectively — trying to convince believers of their pluralistic doctrine. But the standard is clearly marked in the Scriptures: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Pastor, you have the opportunity to raise the bar. It is the church's job to arm its members with the truth so they can withstand "the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Ephesians 6:16).

Set the standard. Open the pages of God's Word to your audience weekly (not weakly). Let biblical principles take precedence over popular ideas; memorize and quote the Scriptures; illustrate with Scriptures; and read from the Scriptures in your worship service. When it comes to Bible knowledge, all eyes are on the pulpit.

Plan your attack. Watch over your curriculum like a hawk. Make sure it offers a systematic teaching of God's Word. Offer exciting electives that are Bible focused.

Ask questions. Use the pulpit to ask hard questions about current issues. Use questions to make people thirsty for more Bible knowledge. Only God's Word can satisfy. Only God's Word can answer the foundational issues of life.

Teach the teachers. Make sure that those who teach your classes or small groups have adequate knowledge of the Word, and know how to rightly divide it.

Celebrate successes. Give assignments, and then publicly acknowledge those who have reached Scripture reading or memorization goals.¹

Sometimes ignorance seems cute: Sixty percent of Americans cannot name five of the Ten Commandments, and 50 percent of high school seniors think Sodom and Gomorrah were married.

Stephen Prothero, chairman of the religion department at Boston University, isn't laughing. "Americans' deep ignorance of world religions — their own, their neighbors', or the combatants in Iraq, Darfur, or Kashmir — is dangerous," he says.²

"We're impoverished by ignorance," says Joan Brown Campbell, former general secretary of the National Council of Churches. "You can't draw on the resources of faith if you only have an emotional understanding, not a sense of the texts and teachings."

But if people do not know Sodom and Gomorrah were two cities destroyed for their sinful ways, Campbell blames Sunday Schools that "trivialized religious education. If we want people to have serious knowledge, we have to get serious about teaching our own faith."³

WES BARTEL, Springfield, Missouri

NOTES

1. Elmer L. Towns and Stan Toler, *What Every Pastor Should Know About Sunday School* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal, 2002), 29.

2. Cathy Lynn Grossman, "Americans get an 'F' in Religion," *USA Today*, 8 March 2007.

3. Ibid.

number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42–47).

This exciting model provides an ideal template for effective ministry within the church. Every congregation of Christians needs to be transformed into an authentic

can be encouraged. Often however, classes reflect the atmosphere of the public school system more than the atmosphere of the church. We seat our students in straight rows, on hard chairs, and then lecture to them for an hour. Interaction by the students

If Sunday School is to be an effective model for 21st-century discipleship, it must intentionally embrace and encourage a relational approach both in and outside the classroom.

Christian community that exemplifies the true essence of church. Biblically, this community known as the church is the visible body of Christ. However, this transformation will only happen when Christians truly connect in an interdependent, relational network of ministry.

The Sunday School class should be the flagship for this biblical model. It is the original small-group ministry. It is an ideal place where fellowship, friendship, and ministry

is often viewed as unnecessary at best, and undesirable at worst.

If Sunday School is to be an effective model for 21st-century discipleship, it must intentionally embrace and encourage a relational approach both in and outside the classroom. Time should be scheduled within each class for meaningful fellowship and personal ministry. Activities outside of the classroom, such as picnics and parties, need to be regular class events.

Many churches have embraced small-group or cell-group ministry to facilitate the relational aspects of discipleship. This encouraging, positive development has roots in the New Testament church model. Unfortunately, some church leaders have viewed this issue through the lens of exclusivity. In their opinions, it is *either* small

groups or Sunday School. However, effective discipleship can and must embrace aspects of both models. In fact, many pastors have found that small groups can best be administered through the Sunday School. This provides continuity of focus and also simplifies administrative challenges.

Effective Discipleship Is Life-Change Focused

Although an intentional, systematic study of God's Word is essential in the discipleship process, it will not produce strong, mature, overcoming Christians by itself. Paul established the correct goal for those involved in ministry: "It was he who gave some



to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11–13).

Paul's words seem to suggest both a goal and a result. The goal is to teach in such a way that maturity is achieved. He also informs us that if we achieve maturity, we will witness

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Pioneer Pastor Wally Waldrop knew that the crowd would likely be slim on opening Sunday, but he was surprised to find out that his wife, Wilma, had visited another church.

stability. In other words, the teacher must not focus on knowledge transfer alone, but must have life change as a primary goal.

Christian education, at its core, is dynamic. It is a cooperative venture between the teacher, the Scripture, and the Holy Spirit. The goal is never fully accomplished until the student experiences the life-changing power of the Living Word. In the final analysis, teaching, like any ministry, is “not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of

hosts” (Zechariah 4:6, KJV).

First, the teacher must implement a life-change focus. It can be done

must be sensitive to opportunities for ministry within the classroom and to the Holy Spirit as He directs.

The goal is never fully accomplished until the student experiences the life-changing power of the Living Word.

in several ways. First, teachers must prepare themselves spiritually for this encounter. Prayer and self-evaluation are an indispensable part of the preparation process. The teacher

The teacher must also be aware of each student’s individual needs and spiritual condition.

Students must be encouraged to personally evaluate their own lives

► **Profile:** of a Disciple-Making Church **CHRIST THE ROCK CHURCH: ROCK CLIMBING FROM 5 TO 170**

Lou and Kristine Zinnanti grew up under the ministry of Steven and Meredith Giles in Alcove Full Gospel Assembly of God in Alcove, New York.

“I remember when Kristi got saved at the altar at 14,” Lou says. “Pastor and Sister Giles did incredible discipleship with us.”

That foundation helped lead Lou and Kristine into Bible college, marriage, and ministry.

They first served as children’s pastors in inner-city Philadelphia in 1989, taking on a weekly outreach of Sidewalk Sunday Schools and other special events for 1,800 children. Three years later they were reaching more than 5,000 children every week.

Then their pastor admitted to moral failure. His exit revealed the church’s shallow spiritual foundation.

“The church grew a mile wide, but was an inch deep,” Lou says. The congregation disbanded.

After 3 years of work without vacation, Lou and Kristine were on the edge of burnout. The night they left the church, they took a long drive and ended up sleeping on the beach.

“We were heartbroken,” Lou says.

Rescue came from an unexpected source. London Gospel

Temple with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada had worked with the Zinnantis on several ministry projects. Pastor Robert Smith invited Lou and Kristine to join a youth outreach team from the Ontario church and hold children’s crusades in Trinidad. Smith flew to the Caribbean to invite Lou and Kristine to join his staff.

When they moved to their new assignment, Smith unveiled the next part of his offer.

“We met in his office and Kristi and I asked him what he wanted us to do,” Lou remembers. “‘Nothing,’ he told us. ‘Just get healed.’”

For 6 months, Lou and Kristine soaked in the ministry of London Gospel Temple. Renewed, they invested themselves in the church’s youth, training about 75 young people who would continue to grow that group long after the Zinnantis completed their year at the church.

By 1999, Lou and Kristine had served 7 years in inner-city Miami with John Hernandez when God’s next assignment brought them to Dorchester, Massachusetts, on the outskirts of Boston. They saw nothing but potential when



Lou & Kristine Zinnanti

based on what they have learned from the Sunday School lesson and their study of God's Word. They must then be encouraged to creatively address areas of deficiency and aggressively move toward spiritual maturity. No class should ever end without the student actively addressing the practical application of the lesson content. As stated above, discipleship by its nature is life-change focused. For Sunday School to be an effective tool in the discipleship process, it must become

a ministry that results in changed hearts and lives. Anything less is not truly Christian education. It is just education.

Effective discipleship demands that the four ingredients listed above be a necessary part of the process. Sunday School can and must remain an important tool in this biblical process.

What can a church leader do to move discipleship from being ineffective to effective?

First, he must address the issue of

priority. Today's church is multifaceted in its ministry. Many voices clamor for the attention of the pastor and his staff. However, if he intends to successfully fulfill Christ's mandate in Matthew 28:19,20, he must give Christian education priority. This begins with the pastor.

Often the pastor is not adversarial in his approach to Sunday School or Christian education but has so many other responsibilities that it is just not a priority to him. In his book, *High Expectations*, Thom Rainer

they approached the Southern New England District with a request to salvage a church with five members.

Those five members shared the Zinnantis' vision. Lou and Kristine arrived in January. Christ the Rock Church was running 15 to 20 by June and 45 by December. With the donation of a Sidewalk Sunday School truck and immediate involvement with neighborhood children and youth, the church was growing.

In 2000, a merger with nearby Metro Harvest after the retirement of their pastor brought in more families.

At each stage of growth, the Zinnantis maintained their focus on discipleship. The church offers weekend sessions called Rock Climbing 101, 102, and 103 and taught by the Zinnantis or an associate pastor.

"When someone gets saved," Lou says, "our prayer partners give them Efraim Espinoza's *Rock Solid* booklet. We encourage them to go through it with the person who brought them to church. Then we encourage them to get involved in Rock Climbing 101."

For those wanting to study beyond the three-tiered program, Christ the Rock's 18-month Timothy Training program trains leaders.

"Those in Timothy Training are active in our services as prayer partners and in discipleship and assimilation," Lou says. "They're literally lay pastors."

Christ the Rock represents about 30 nationalities in a congregation of 170. Many parishioners work unpredictable hours, so small groups during the week are secondary to the weekend discipleship emphasis.

With their building's recent remodeling, the Zinnantis are shifting their Growth Groups from homes to on-site on Wednesday nights.

Lou and Kristine's experiences at their home church and in Philadelphia showed them both sides of the discipleship scenario. In the absence of consistent discipleship, the largest church can disappear. With consistent commitment to growing disciples, the smallest church can multiply itself.

Christ the Rock has planted a Vietnamese church on-site and another church in South Boston.

"My philosophy of discipleship comes from three things," Lou says. "Jesus said in John 8:31 that if we abide in His Word, we are His disciples. That's a worldview change. John 13:35 tells us all men will know we are His disciples if we have love for one another. That is the outward connection with other believers. But in John 15:8 Jesus says, 'By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit' (NASB).¹ That is the proof of our discipleship — that we have created another disciple."



SCOTT HARRUP, associate editor, *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*

NOTE

1. Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)



writes: "In the 1980s I had become a 'Sunday School skeptic.' Though I did not try to dismantle the Sunday Schools in the churches I pastored, I certainly was not a leader in making the organization stronger and more

dominant discipleship program in most churches. Second, he undertook a major research project that surveyed more than 2,000 church leaders and nearly 600 churches. In this project he found that "the research is clear if not overwhelming. Sunday School is the most effective assimilation methodology in evangelistic churches today. ... Sunday School is not only our past, it is our future as well. And we who are leaders in the church will ignore this reality to our churches' peril."²

If Sunday School is to be a viable discipleship arm of the church, the pastor must make it a visible priority and give it strong and vocal support.

evangelistic. If anything, the Sunday Schools of my churches suffered from pastoral neglect.

"I was not alone in my sentiments. Many of my peers were like me, enamored with some of the latest methodologies and innovations to help a church grow. Sunday School just seemed a bit old-fashioned compared to the 'cutting-edge' information we were receiving from a plethora of sources."¹

Rainer then goes on to acknowledge that he had definite doubts that Sunday School could even be a viable growth and assimilation tool in the 21st century. However, two important developments changed his mind.

First, he noticed that many highly visible new methods heralded by church growth experts had relatively short life spans. What was hyped to be new methodology for the church was gone in a year or two. They proved to be little more than expensive fads. Meanwhile, Sunday School ministry continued to be the

The bottom line is: If Sunday School is to be a viable, discipleship arm of the church, the pastor must make it a visible priority and give it strong and vocal support. Speak often about the importance of Sunday School to the people of your church. Become personally involved in training and recruiting teachers. Do not relegate Sunday School promotion to staff members or Christian education directors; do it yourself. Be sure to express gratitude and encouragement to the teachers who have labored and ministered so effectively in the past. If Sunday School is important to you, it will be important to the people of your church.

It is also important that pastors address the issue of intentionality. Effective discipleship does not happen simply because it was a command of Christ to His church, or because the pastor believes in it or wants it to happen. It only takes place when an intentional plan is put in place and when that plan

is intentionally implemented.

So What Is the Plan?

You have probably observed that I have not provided a specific organizational structure or recipe for your Sunday School or Christian education ministry. I also have not been prescriptive in times, days, or methods. This omission is intentional.

Twenty-first century ministry requires that each church prayerfully develop methods that are biblically based and culturally sensitive to the people to whom they have been called to minister. For many, the traditional Sunday School model will be ideal. Others will embrace a more nontraditional approach. Still others will find alternative times and dates more desirable. It is my opinion that if anyone desires to study the Word of God, we need to make it possible. While our methods may change, the ingredients listed above will not. These principles must become part of the recipe for effective discipleship.

Look again at the ingredients listed above. These ingredients can make for an exciting meal if they are served in a way that intentionally addresses the needs of the student. Then prayerfully prepare these ingredients to fit your church and culture and begin to disciple the people of God. You will find that mealtime can be the most exciting time of all. 🍴



WES BARTEL, director, national Sunday School Department, The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri

NOTES

1. Thom S. Rainer, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret of Keeping People in Your Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1999), 31.
2. *Ibid.*, 47.

Balancing Our Out-of-balance Structure



Photos.com



By Darren Daugherty

The Agony of Defeat

Vinko Bogataj, a Slovenian ski jumper, became famous in the United States for a moment of grand failure. Bogataj was competing in the World Ski Flying Championships in Oberstdorf, West Germany, on March 21, 1970. At the start of the event, snow began to fall, getting heavier as the jumping continued. Midway down the ramp for his third jump, Bogataj realized that the conditions had made the ramp too fast. His failed attempt to end his jump resulted in a horrific crash. Bogataj's crash may have remained obscure had not a film crew from ABC's *Wide World of Sports* been on hand to record the event. The producer of the show decided to use the clip in the opening seconds narrated by host Jim McKay. For many years people watched Bogataj's crash as they heard "and the agony of defeat."

If you remember that clip, you know Bogataj as the agony-of-defeat guy. It is amazing that Bogataj suffered only a mild concussion. What most people do not know is that Bogataj was successful in what he was trying to accomplish at that moment: stopping his jump before his fate became much worse.

Bogataj could have thought, *I've done this a thousand times. I know what I'm doing. I've jumped in difficult conditions in the past, and I've always survived to jump again.* Instead, he recognized that the situation required serious action.

There are many ways churches can respond to today's culture to make disciples of Christ. There is one change, though, many are unwilling to make because it is

In keeping with the analogy of a structure, the demolition of our ministry structure is not being advocated. It is merely out of balance.

too difficult and does not fit with the common structure or plan. To make matters worse, there are few models to learn from. Would it not be better to apply Bogataj's strategy and make difficult adjustments before it is too late rather than face a worse outcome?

This illustration is not meant to create a sensational extreme or the preview of a miracle cure for the numerical losses in our congregations. But, the examination of a subject, a strategy, a philosophy of ministry can be easily brushed aside by church leaders and Christian educators.

What if you could help your church bring greater community, foster greater responsibility in Christians, and invest more effectively in younger generations? Would you be willing to do something that does not fit with the conventional structure of church?

What Is Missing From Conventional Church?

Justin became a Christian and began attending church with believers who had many things in common with him. This church was relevant to his

needs and the needs of his friends. A few years later, Justin had to leave this church. He chose to attend another that was as relevant as his first church. Although it was a good move and he was still among friends, he had a second option. If Justin did not want to attend this new church, his second choice was to stop attending. Many of his friends chose this option.

In his new congregation Justin made great progress in his spiritual growth for the next 6 years. After 6 years, he had to leave that congregation. At this point, there was another congregation he could attend, but he was not sure where he would fit, so he stopped going to church.

We ask ourselves, *Why do so many young people leave the church?* Beside the lack of training with a strong, biblical worldview during childhood and adolescence, is our structure missing a vital component? Have we implemented our ministry tools into constructing an inadequate ministry structure?

As we lose individuals during movement from one age-segregated congregation to another, our answer

is usually to create more specialized and exciting ministries in our congregations. We work in a structure that needs remodeling. Because remodeling involves uncomfortable and unnecessary change, we often put most of our efforts into covering the structure with more attractive paint. Like the Tower of Pisa, our church

ministry structure is out of balance.

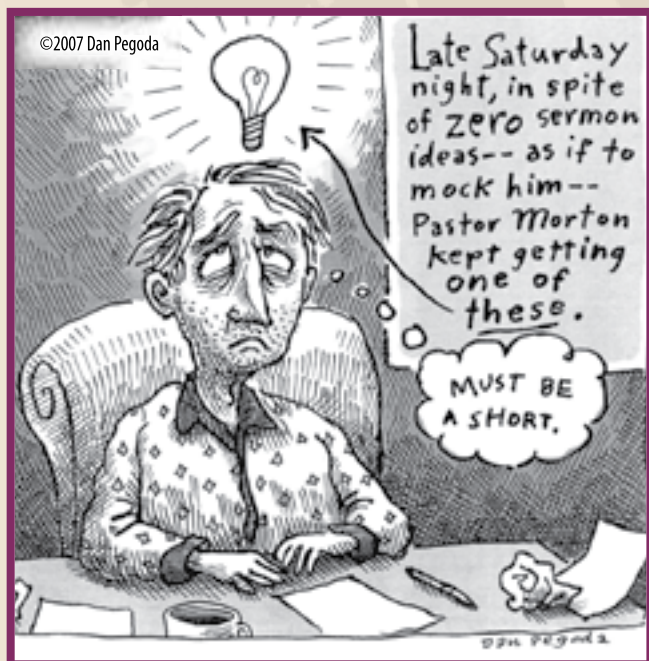
There is also a problem with our age-segregated system. This system inadvertently encourages parental irresponsibility in spiritual training. Discipleship is relegated to the professionals who are ready to effectively minister to family members who split from each other as they enter the church. From time to time parents are welcomed to support what the professionals are doing with their children. To help ourselves feel better about this we disguise our ministry as *family ministry*. If we look closely, though, most of our ministry remains *family-member ministry*.

If you are a senior pastor, children's pastor, or youth pastor, you may feel the need to defend conventional church structure. In keeping with the analogy of a structure, we are not advocating the demolition of our ministry structure. Our structure may merely be out of balance.

The typical human reaction to an inconsistency is to go the other direction and create another inconsistency. If churches were to abandon age-specific ministry, the structure would lean the other way. Age-specific ministry is needed. Specialized ministry is needed. Yet, to do what is best for individuals and the church, pastors must expand their vision and shift their paradigm to include intergenerational and family ministries. The key is balance, but we have such a slanted view we do not see a need for balance.

The Intergenerational Family of God

The Bible demonstrates the plan of God for the family. It starts with a family and ends with a family reunion. In between we are given glimpses and commands of generational togetherness. When everybody came together, families stayed together so children would know how important



that time was (Exodus 10:8,9; Deuteronomy 12:12,18; 29:10,11; Joshua 8:35; 2 Kings 23:1–22; 2 Chronicles 20:13; Nehemiah 12:43). Even the holiest worship that required understanding included all ages. The

Old Testament is clear that God's Word was to be imparted in homes as well as in family gatherings.

We often quote Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:14–16; Luke 18:16,17 in

support for children's ministry. But if we honestly look at how we do church, our motivations may be more like those of the disciples in Matthew 19:13 who thought, *This is important adult stuff here. This is our*

Practical Ideas for Intergenerational and Family Ministry

Parenting classes and small groups

If you do not know where to start, invite a couple known for good parenting to host a small group and utilize one of the many curricula that are available. Equipping parents makes a dramatic, long-lasting difference in how younger generations demonstrate their faith because their parents were disciplined to be disciples.

Summer Sunday School class for families

The teacher operates as a facilitator to help parents lead their families in spiritual growth. This leadership then carries over into everyday life as parents are trained and empowered to direct family devotions. Children and teens without parents at church are paired with adoptive spiritual parents.

Parent-child events

Father-daughter, father-son, mother-daughter, and mother-son events are great ways to assist parents in building meaningful lifelong memories for their children. Encourage them to write letters to each other that are accompanied by a professional photo taken at the event.

Intergenerational home small groups

Instead of creating small groups that only add to the smorgasbord of age-specific efforts, use this ministry style to combine people's God-given need for relationships along with the lost experience of interacting with other generations.

Wednesday evening meals

Lessen family stress on Wednesday evenings by starting a meal ministry. Recruit cooks, set up round tables, charge a minimal fee, and serve dinner during the hour preceding the weekly activities. For some families, this may be the only meal they have together.

Family worship

Involve all ages, once a month, in a combined Sunday morning service. Such an effort involves addressing children, using visuals during the sermon, giving all ages opportunities to serve, and developing creative ways to help children pay attention. Develop activity sheets that directly apply to the sermon and encourage parents and children to do them together. Do not give in to having parts of the service as a token for the children. Make them welcome throughout it.

Intergenerational special events

If you have Sunday evening services, plan an intergenerational service in the monthly rotation. If you do not have Sunday evening services, find another place on the church calendar. This is a good way to communicate vision, staff teamwork, and relationship building throughout the generations. For each event the pastoral staff puts much effort into creating an evening that includes visuals, games, discussion, and other creative activities. For those who try it, it often becomes the best attended Sunday evening of each month.

Family missions trips

Why should teens have the corner on world-missions trips? One of the greatest ways to build bonds between people is to minister side by side. Help parents birth a heart for missions in their children as they grow closer as a family. Include all ages, families, and singles. The connections established between people who may have never spoken to each other in your church will enrich everyone. After one such trip, teens asked, "Can we do it this way again, instead of just us going on a trip?"

DARREN DAUGHERTY, Waxahachie, Texas

Church ministry that disciples children through parents, not around them

Purpose

The purpose of family ministry is to minister to the family as a whole and to equip parents to create a family whose heart is turned toward God now and in future generations.

Focus

The focus of family ministry is to help parents communicate with their children and with God in a world that often works against family life and Christian principles.

Goals

- **Prayer:** To help parents understand how and why they need to develop a life of prayer for themselves and their children.
- **Activity:** To develop programs and events that help give parents and their children time together in ministry.
- **Resource:** To be a source of wisdom in helping families through the challenges of childhood and adolescence and to be positive memory makers in the lives of their children.
- **Evangelism:** To communicate effectively to unbelievers that the answer to their family struggles is Jesus Christ, and the help needed to be a functional family is readily available at church.
- **Nourishment:** To support parents and their children in their Christian growth while leading them in helping each other in growth.
- **Training:** To give parents the needed resources to follow God's plan for being stewards of His children.

DARREN DAUGHERTY, Waxahachie, Texas

time. Children should be somewhere else.

When we keep children separated from the rest of the church body, we teach them they are not part of the church — at least not the most important part of church. How many children have never stood side by side with their parents during corporate worship? How many children have never seen and heard the gifts of the Spirit in action? How many teens have never heard the testimony of a senior adult who has an intense passion for Christ? How many churches rob younger generations of such vital experiences? How many church leaders believe that younger generations would not receive much from the Lord in such settings? Have we underestimated what Jesus said about the Father revealing truths to little children (Matthew 11:25)?

What if churches operated in a way that fostered involvement of all ages, together as one church body? Would children, teens, and college students easily depart from a community in which they are invested, known, and involved? Are you concerned about how much our younger generations are missing because they are spending most of their church life with only their peers? They have so much to offer the church body, and the church body has so much to offer them.

The church has been stuck in a societal structure that many historians recognize as a by-product of industrialization. A little more than 100 years ago our American family-centered society moved toward being a matrix of age-segregated societies. In reaction, many churches became a matrix of age-segregated ministries. Whether minor or major, it is time to make changes aimed at bringing balance to our ministry structure.

Skills and Proactive Ministry

Many baby boomers left churches in droves because they could not find practical application for their lives. The church continued to teach biblical principles such as “train up a child in the way he should go” (Proverbs 22:6) and “love your wife as Christ loved the church” (Ephesians 5:25), but failed to offer practical application.

Still today, Christian parents ask, “How?” Yet, most of the answers are found in books, conferences, and seminars instead of in the place that should be characterized by quality family ministry — the intergenerational body of Christ.

The most common concerns offered in skepticism of intergenerational and family ministries include those who come to church with one parent, no parents, or dysfunctional parents. What is most amazing about this concern is the premise that age-segregated ministry is the best way to minister to those who have less-than-adequate family situations. This is a sign that church ministry is more reactive than proactive.

One might say, “By doing family ministry, we leave out those without families.” Rather than opting for this immediate, pragmatic reaction, we need to ask: *How can we make people more connected to the intergenerational family of God? How can we introduce them to what family life was meant to be? How can we equip them with the family-life skills they may not receive from their families?*

First, we need to admit that this approach to ministry requires a great acceptance of change and responsibility from everyone in the congregation as well as a philosophical shift by every pastoral staff member. People will need to reach out to others, especially those without spiritual parents. Families will

need to see themselves as evangelistic units, inviting spiritually orphaned children, teens, and young adults to join them both in the pew and outside the church building. If such change is done methodically and with scriptural explanation, people will catch the vision.

What if churches operated in a way that fostered involvement of all ages, together as one church body?

Second, we need to ask ourselves: *Where will these children, teens, and young adults learn about being Christian men and women, husbands and wives, moms and dads?* By constantly being grouped with their peers? No. It is by involving them in what the church body is supposed to be — the intergenerational family of God.

Meeting the Need of Spiritual Photo Albums

Second Chronicles 34 and 2 Kings 22 tell the story of Josiah, who was only 8 years old when he became king of Judah. The legacy he was given is one of the most disappointing in history. His father, Amon, was killed by his own servants (2 Kings 21:23). Others killed the servants who had plotted against Amon and then set up Josiah as king (verse 24, 640 B.C.). Josiah's grandfather, Manasseh, had dragged the nation into idolatry, instituted astrological worship, sacrificed children to the Ammonite deity of Molech, and shed innocent blood to silence people. Although Manasseh repented and returned to his throne following captivity in Babylon, the condition of the nation when Josiah took the throne indicates that Manasseh was unable to reverse the evil practices he had instituted. Josiah had no one to equip him for living and leading in ways that honored God. Yet, Josiah

looked past the legacy he was given to the legacy he could build.

How could an 8-year-old develop a heart for God when he had such a disappointing legacy? How did Josiah obtain the vision and courage to clean up Israel, even destroying high

places that had stood since the days of Solomon? There must have been some adults who gave him a vision — a picture — a dream of a different legacy.

Josiah likely associated himself with priests and elders who had sufficient knowledge of the Law to give him oral instruction. From this came the firm conviction, during the first 12 years of his reign, that national reform was necessary. Knowing the shameful practices common to his family, he was concerned that destruction might come. He did something to prevent it.

Like Josiah, many young people attending our age-specific ministries come from dysfunctional families. On one hand we rejoice that they have been saved and transformed by the power of Christ. On the other hand we must realize that we fail such individuals when we do not equip them for the future through relationships with others outside their age group.

To disciple them the church must create a spiritual photo album that includes pictures other than age-specific interactions. If we want them to grow into godly husbands, wives, and parents, we must connect them with godly people of all ages who will deposit photos into their albums that will last a lifetime.

First, we must pray that the inadequacy, deficiency, and tragedy of their past will serve as a catalyst, as a

way to birth dreams that propel them into future service to Jesus. Second, we must facilitate relationships between them and other generations who will deposit pictures into their spiritual photo albums.

Closing Thoughts

There may be churches in America that have found an effective balance between intergenerational ministry and age-segregated ministry. Instead of a family of families, many churches are a matrix of age-segregated congregations. The millennial generation and subsequent generations may be the most relational, connectible generations in American history. They are not as resistant to connecting with previous generations as many older individuals assume. The time is right, and the church is ripe for change. Start connecting the generations, and effectively model what the Psalmist wrote: "We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands" (Psalm 78:4–7). 📖



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The Power *and* Potential *of* Small Groups

Connecting 100 percent of your congregation in small groups is far more than a sales pitch.

By Brett Eastman

New Life Christian Center in Turlock, California, had plateaued. For 7 years, Associate Pastor Allen White had been trying to develop a small-group program that connected every member of the church. He knew an effective small-group ministry was the key to taking the church to the level of ministry he dreamed about. But despite his best efforts, they could only get a third of the adults involved.

"The thought of connecting everybody in a group was my dream," White said, "but we were stuck at 30 percent. We were slugging it out the old-fashioned way — raise up an apprentice, birth a group, and deal with the aftermath. But, we were headed nowhere.





"I thought my senior pastor was in favor of small groups, but not enough. My small-group leaders were stifled by the whole apprenticing-multiplication process. None of them could find an apprentice in their group. Some of them were greeting me on Sunday morning with 'I'm working on my apprentice.' Whatever happened to 'Hello'?"

"Only one guy, Carlos, ever birthed anything in our church. It seemed that connecting everyone was only a dream."

A few months later, at a gathering of church leaders, White listened to Kent Odor from

Canyon Ridge Christian Church in Las Vegas, Nevada. Odor shared how his church had connected large numbers in the congregation in a short time. White heard how groups could multiply without dividing. He learned how people overlooked in recruiting could start some of the best new groups.

White was intrigued, but unconvinced. He had some decisions to make.

On the drive home he began to think about what his senior pastor, David Larson, was most passionate about. At the time, Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, was soon to be released.

Larson had planned a message series and ordered a banner for the church sign by the highway.

The light suddenly came on for White: *Why not launch small groups based on The Passion of the Christ?* And that is what they did.

White asked his senior pastor to invite

We had discovered what we called *the Rick Factor*. The secret weapon for recruiting new leaders in any church is the senior pastor.

people to open their homes and host a small group for a 6-week study. In one day, the 800-member church doubled the number of its small groups. After Easter, the church added 50 percent more new groups in another campaign. Things were getting out of control in a good way.

When autumn came the church started recruiting hosts for its biggest launch of the year. Larson aligned his weekly messages with a Lifetogether™ study. The leaders selected 50 Bible verses and asked 50 church members to write a one-page devotional. The leaders then compiled these devotionals into a book. When it was over, small group attendance was 125 percent of their average adult attendance. They had also given out 1,088 devotionals books.

"We were all in awe," White says. "The dream was suddenly a reality."

A Spiritual 4-Minute Mile

White realized that the only reason the church had plateaued was because of a mental block. "In the 1950s everyone said no man could ever run a 4-minute mile. It was just a dream," he says. "Then, on May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister ran the mile in 3:59.4

minutes. After that, several runners broke that barrier. Four minutes wasn't a physical barrier; it was a mental block.

"New Life Christian Center had just broken the 4-minute mile. Churches could start small groups that would involve the majority of the congregation, and then reach their communities through community."

This was not about numbers, though. One man named Ken invited his coworkers to join him for a study on *The Passion of the Christ*. Two of them accepted Christ.

We asked David, the host of another small group, "What motivates you to continue your group?"

He replied, "My dad showed up."

Because of a painful experience years before, David's dad had turned his back on church. Even though he refused to walk through the church doors, he was willing to attend a small-group meeting at his son's house. That was his first step back to God.

New Life's small groups began to reach out beyond the congregation. Groups served hot meals to the homeless every Friday night. One host took the study to a local women's shelter. Another started a group on her commuter train. Another woman decided to attend a study because she and her friends went to Starbucks® for coffee every Thursday morning anyway. Why not attend the study too?

Rick picked up the study to do with his friends. Carlos, who was now a small-group coach, called him to check in. He found that Rick was passionate about his group — and the pastors did not even know who Rick was.

Connecting 100 percent of your congregation in small groups is far

more than a sales pitch. Connecting 100 percent is the first step in reaching beyond the walls of your church and connecting with your community. Following are the principles that have unlocked amazing growth and community outreach for church after church. It can happen in your church, too.

The Saddleback Small-group Story

When I first arrived at Saddleback Church, weekly attendance was around 15,000, but only about 700 people were in small groups. Pastor Rick Warren assigned me and my team the task of getting the other 95 percent connected into groups. Tackling that challenge forged the strategies that not only helped Saddleback connect its congregation, but also helped thousands of other churches of every size across North America.

The first success at Saddleback came after I was on staff for only a few weeks. Warren told me he had reserved seats for more than 800 men on seven different airplanes headed for Washington, D.C., for a Promise Keepers event. I had a bright idea — what if we recruited leaders from the existing men's groups to launch a few more groups from the 800-plus men going to the event? More than 300 men said they wanted to join a group, but I only had a half dozen volunteers to lead them.

The next Saturday morning the men came to join a group. I tried what I call *the small-group connection process*. We grouped the men by where they lived, first into pairs, then in fours, and then in groups of eight. The men were then asked to traverse a spiral of questions, moving from icebreaker questions into deeper spiritual conversation. This allowed them to discern the spiritual leader of their group rather than



Providing Good Materials for Your Small-Group Ministry

One of the biggest challenges in small-group ministries is finding the best curriculum or study materials for your small-group ministry. While many great suppliers and resources are available, what is the best material for your church? How can you be assured that it is on par with your core beliefs? With many new believers and worshipers from non-Pentecostal traditions joining our small-group community, we have worked hard to ensure that biblical truth and doctrine are preserved. Let me offer a few suggestions to ensure that groups are communicating what we need and want them to share.

Create Your Curriculum

The most successful method is to produce the studies yourself. If you want a clear handle on who provides the central teaching for your groups, *Doing Life Together™* is one of many companies that will custom produce DVDs of you or your staff teaching. Some companies will even provide you with the materials to teach from. You can customize these materials to fit your congregation. This form of small-group curriculum gives you another opportunity to teach your church in the privacy of homes where people are more relaxed and open. These materials can also be recycled and given to other groups in the future.

If you have tech-savvy people in your church, you can also produce and distribute your own teaching DVDs. All you need is a digital video camera and a video-editing program on a computer. While producing your own DVD may seem outside the reach of the normal church, most congregations have people with this capability. When we first transitioned our church family to small groups, I sat before a video camera and recorded six weekly sessions to be played at the beginning of each group meeting. Though I used the teachings from a small-group curriculum, I personalized it for our congregation so they could hear my heart and passion.

Even if you do not have video capability, many discussion tools are available to help you craft your own discussion questions for groups to follow. In the past, I often used my

Serendipity Bible for Groups™ (NIV), which has questions in the margin. This way you can influence the direction and outcome of your groups' discussions. They can personalize your teaching and discuss it with others. One group that meets after one of our Sunday morning services takes my message outline. The facilitator leads the group through the Scriptures I shared, crafting discussion questions along the way.

Preapproved Curriculum

Many Christian authors today provide discussion questions at the end of their books. Some produce small-group materials with teaching videos to accompany them. We have found these series extremely helpful when it comes to issues such as finances, parenting, marriage relationships, or dealing with life-controlling difficulties. While many of these materials are popular and well-written, make sure you or a member of your staff previews the material to ensure the teachings fall in line with the direction of your church. All group studies must be preapproved by our small-groups pastor or coaches before groups are allowed to use them.

Personal Follow-up

Finally, we make it a priority to coach every small-group leader and to visit every small group. Frequently, a staff member or small-group coach contacts or makes a personal visit to our groups to ensure each group is being led or conducted properly. While some instruction and leadership training is provided before a small-group leader is given a group, we have found on-the-job training is the best. These visits have helped us address problems, confront discourteous group members, and coach the leaders to be more effective.



MARK CANFIELD, senior pastor, Pinellas Community Church, Saint Petersburg, Florida

We discovered that the best way is to deliver just-in-time leadership training through a video curriculum.

having one assigned by the pastor. We got this idea from Acts 6, where the disciples encouraged the people to select from among themselves seven people to serve tables.

We launched 32 groups that day — connecting almost 300 men. While a few of those groups did not last, we came away with an idea that would serve the churchwide small-group ministry for years to come. The 50

We refined the process with training, coaching, and raising up coleaders instead of apprentices.

Our next step forward came when we decided to align small-group study topics with weekend services. Warren made a videotape of himself teaching from the Book of James. The congregation loved it — and so did our small-group leaders. Finally, ordinary members could be leaders

percent group success rate we began with grew to a 72 percent rate. The success rate continued to improve until, over a 2 1/2-year period, we had connected almost 800 more people in groups.

because they did not need the same teaching skills or Bible knowledge our pastor had. In one weekend, we signed up more than 1,500 people into small groups. The only complaint was about whether Warren was ever going to change his shirt (because we shot the entire series in one day).

We had discovered what we called *the Rick Factor*. The secret weapon for recruiting new leaders in any church is the senior pastor. Now we had the No. 1 recruiter on our side, plus a video curriculum, as well as small-group and service alignment. We had made progress but we still had only 50 percent of our average weekend attendance connected in a group. We still had between 8,000 to

► Historic Assemblies of God Church Embraces Small Groups



Christ Church Assembly of God, Fort Worth, Texas, is an innovative congregation with a great history. Founded in 1910, Christ Church is older than the Assemblies of God. Most churches this age are locked into traditional Christian education programs. While Christ Church has not abandoned these programs, Darius Johnston, senior pastor, realized, “We needed to get smaller before we could get bigger. I don’t think you can be an Acts 2 church without small groups.

“When I first started here in 1986, the main thrust was a Sunday morning gathering. We only had a couple hundred people in the church at that time. We started in Sunday School, but we’ve reached a point where we couldn’t just keep building buildings. And, there is a percentage of people from other denominational backgrounds that think Sunday School is a foreign thing. Small groups are much more open to their lifestyle,” Johnston said.

About a year ago, Christ Church joined a Lifetogether™ consulting group in the Fort Worth area for a 1-year journey. At that time, Christ Church had 790 adults on Sunday morning and 30 small groups. By stepping out in faith and following a few simple principles, there are now more than 875 adults worshipping on Sundays and 70 small groups.

Associate Pastor Stephen Blandino attributes this to the

fact “small groups helped our people see that Christ can be in the living room, not just in the church on Sunday mornings. Sometimes it can be easier to invite a friend to join you in your home, at Starbucks®, or over lunch at work than in a church service. But once they start in the small group, it’s not that big of a step to come on Sunday morning.”

“Our big payoff is that I have more people involved in ministry than I’ve ever had before,” Johnston reports. “A lot of pastors have never been a part of a healthy small group. I had never really had that in 48 years either. Now, I’ve found the importance of being connected with other believers in a small group. People get much more real sitting in a living room with a cup of coffee. If you’re afraid of answering the questions, maybe you need to go back to the altar and see what you really believe.”

The small-group success at Christ Church is a great example of leveraging the latent potential of the body of Christ. “By taking small groups into their workplace and their homes, our members have proven that being a follower of Christ is something you do 24/7 and not just on Sunday mornings,” Johnston concludes. (See *Christ Church Assembly of God’s ad opposite page.*)

BRETT EASTMAN, Rancho Santa Margarita, California

Curriculum is the key to starting and sustaining groups after a campaign.

12,000 people to go before we felt like we were fulfilling what God had called us to do: Connect the entire congregation under the care of a shepherd.

On the eve of the first 40 Days of Purpose campaign at Saddleback, we

had another idea: What if we invited people to *host*, rather than *lead*, a group? It seems like such a small change in terminology, but it proved to be a phenomenal factor in rapidly growing our groups.

With the new video curriculum we

told our people: "If you have a VCR/DVD, you can be a star." Anybody can host a group. More than 3,000 people opened their homes for 6 to 8 weeks. I was overjoyed and overwhelmed. Who were these people, and where did they come from?

The elders and I thought these people must be living in their cars. How long had those people been Christians? Were they Christians? Had they been in a small group? Had they



The Winds of Change: One Church's Experience in Transitioning to Small Groups

Watching my television in August 2005, I was saddened and sickened by the pictures coming out of the Gulf Coast states in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Living on the Gulf Coast of Florida, I knew that not only was I witnessing a there-but-for-the-grace-of-God-go-I moment, but I was also deeply concerned about the impact a storm such as this could have on the church that I pastor. If my church, like so many others, was completely devastated or was unable to function at its central location, would it survive and how?

I believe it was no small coincidence that long before Katrina hit God had been stirring in the hearts of our pastoral team that it was time to take the church outside the four walls of the building. For months before the winds of Katrina began to blow, we had been in a time of prayer and discovery for the next phase of our congregation's development. We were sensing it was time to lead our people through some revolutionary changes — moving from a church *with* small groups to a church *of* small groups.

Doing Life Together

With the leading of the Holy Spirit and the pictures of Katrina burning in our minds, we announced to the church our strategy for discipleship and the importance of doing life together. During our weekend and midweek services, I began to lay out the biblical pattern of small groups. I also told how

the pastoral team believed God was leading us to move outside the confines of our facility. I shared the strategy of how small groups could be the catalyst for assimilating new members into the church, discipling them through study and accountability. Through these close-knit groups, needs could be lovingly met and biblical fellowship (*koinonia*) could be experienced.

While a few in our congregation were not convinced that this change was in the best interest of the church, we continued to lead as God was directing us. Many people in our church were not familiar with the small-group concept. Our staff and leaders frequently held meetings and coaching opportunities to help people see the benefits for our church. We learned that paradigm shifts do not come easily, so we gave careful attention to those who had concerns; gently but firmly leading them in the direction God was leading.

After weeks of teaching and training the church how to transition from being a church in one central location to a church spread out within the community, we launched 40 groups with more than 400 adults (two-thirds of the adults) into the community. Based on Brett Eastman's small-group series, *Doing Life Together*™, we developed five weekend messages that corresponded to the group discussions each week. Each leader was given study guides and a 15-minute DVD we had developed so he could plug and play without feeling the burden of preparing or presenting the main teaching.

even attended our church?

Glen Kruen, Saddleback's executive pastor, and Tom Holladay, our teaching pastor, helped me create a survey. It showed us that something amazing had happened. The new hosts had, on average, been Christians for 14 or more years. They had attended Saddleback for 10 or more years, and many had attended small groups before. On average they had heard more than 500 of Warren's messages.

They were definitely capable of hosting a video-led study and asking a few questions.

When the dust settled, our team had trained more than 2,000 new hosts and launched another 2,300 groups. Well over 20,000 people joined in a 6-week study of *The Purpose Driven Life*, taught by Warren. Virtually every Christian in our church family was aligned in reading the book and participating in the 40-Days study.

Preparing for What's Next

At first, these results may seem possible only in a megachurch like Saddleback. But I have helped hundreds of other churches duplicate similar results in their own congregations — small and large, urban and rural, regardless of denomination. We have seen thousands of churches use our Purpose Driven Group™ curriculum, *Doing Lifetogether*.™ These congregations are not just getting a taste of the

Better Together

Group members began to care for one another's needs, serve and share ministry responsibilities, reach out to their friends and community. They also experienced a joy in their Christian experience when they realized that God had not made them to live life alone. Increasingly, our congregation experienced the power of community and how much better they were together.

One young woman, a new believer, e-mailed me about her and her husband's first group experience: "I said a small prayer before we left, confessed my fear and trepidation, and also asked Him to help and guide us to find what we were looking for — a strong group of people with whom we could grow in faith and some Christian friends. That night God let me know that He had heard me. We had such a great time. The group accepted us as we were and made us feel like we had always been there. We have built friendships in that group that we are blessed to have. We have come to know what it means to have friends who really care for us and hold us accountable. I am amazed by what God made happen, by that *small* thing in our lives."

A Healthy Church

Our congregation has been transformed. It is the healthiest it has ever been as the Body is learning to care for and nourish one another through small groups. Over the last 18 months our congregation has grown, not only spiritually, but also numerically from 800 to 1,200. Our people are experiencing new life in Christ. They are also praying for their friends in more than 70 community groups throughout our area. The pastoral care ministry provided by the pastors has shrunk. Group members are now accompanying other members to the hospital, providing meals, caring for those who have lost a family member, or providing materially for those who have needs.

Small groups have also provided a rich atmosphere for developing leaders. Our system sharpens existing leadership skills while providing opportunity for potential leaders to be discovered and trained.

Ministry Outside the Walls

Eight months after this journey began, my leadership team was recounting the miracles and transformation of our church. One story struck me and brought it all back to Katrina. Kim, a single mother from Mississippi, had been displaced by the storm. Her apartment was leveled and she lost everything she owned. Not knowing what to do, she moved to our city and began working at a local company to put her life back together. After hearing of Kim's plight, a coworker and member of our church went back to her small group. She shared that Kim and her daughter were sleeping on air mattresses and had no furniture or cooking utensils. This group bought her beds and furnished her apartment, prayed over her new house for God's blessings, and invited her to church. Kim came to church with her daughter. That Easter she was baptized during our sunrise service at the beach.

My mind quickly went back to that moment in front of my television when God confirmed the direction I was about to lead our church. I was reminded of my question, *Would our congregation survive such a storm?*

At that moment, I knew we would because we were no longer a church stuck inside the four walls of our building. Our faith and fellowship had been set free to impact our city with the love of Christ, no matter what circumstances might blow through our community.

MARK CANFIELD, senior pastor, Pinellas Community Church, Saint Petersburg, Florida

purposes through 40 Days, but are being transformed.

I have yet to hear of a church or even a small group that was not impacted by a 40-Days campaign. Day 41, though, can be traumatic if the church small-group leadership is not prepared for what is next. You can launch a small-group ministry overnight during a small-group campaign, but sustaining those groups and developing those leaders is another issue.

The point of any spiritual growth or small-group campaign is to organize a principle, a program, and a process to help people in the church live healthy, balanced lives.

How do you train and develop leaders for a large number of new small groups? Not in a classroom. We discovered that the best way is to deliver just-in-time leadership training through a video curriculum. We conducted orientation training for new hosts and put our basic leader training in a decentralized off-campus format. Every week, small-group leaders received another 20 minutes of training, just when they needed it.

There is more to training effective small-group leaders, however, than watching a video. They still need a personal touch. The intentional development of a small-group supervision system is crucial to supporting and retaining group leaders. New hosts need someone to encourage them and back them up. This does not necessarily require additional staff, however. It can be accomplished with bivocational leaders and even volunteers.

Curriculum is the key to starting and sustaining groups after a campaign. The deciding factor for up to 50 percent

of groups is what curriculum to use, when to use it, and how to introduce it to groups. The right curriculum is especially significant after a campaign, during a launch season, and in aligning with leadership training and a weekend sermon series.

Recruiting an unlimited number of leaders is possible in any church at any time of the year, especially in late September, January, and after Easter. The problem is that most

pastors and church leaders think only in terms of one 40-Days campaign, a fall emphasis, or one sermon series. You need to take a long-term view to successfully connect 100 percent of your congregation in community and sustain those relationships so they transform your community through community.

Leaders are best trained and developed in living rooms, not in the 6- or 16-week training classes. I had thought these training classes were the reason our groups did so well. I am ashamed to admit it now, but when we launched 200 new groups and I had no coaches, I thought, *I will train them all in a half-day class*. They came, but I did not have one coach or division leader in place, and no infrastructure. A year later, 80 percent of those groups were still rolling along. Can I claim that the reason for their success was my 3-hour class? Forgive me, Lord, if I try to take credit for it. Shame on anybody else who tries to. With the right training at the right time, new hosts will succeed

because God is backing them up.

We have had our share of blowups. One man told me he and his live-in girlfriend were excited about the 20 people who were coming to their group. Then there was the member who asked if it was okay to study the new book, *Embracing the Light*, instead of the Bible. But these are the exceptions, not the rule. (I married that live-in couple a few weeks later in a breakout room at Saddleback Church, with their small group cheering them on. We allowed them to carry on because they were the most mature members of their seeker group and because of their act of obedience when they were confronted with the truth about their relationship. You should have seen the water baptism service that day — more than 10 new believers from that group were baptized by their spiritual shepherd.) The point of any spiritual growth or small group campaign is to organize a principle, a program, and a process to help people in the church live healthy, balanced lives. Your campaign is not just about connecting people into community for the sake of community. Your goal should be changing your community *through* community to draw family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers to Christ.

That is what Jesus came to do — draw everyone to himself — not just in the Upper Room, but also at the foot of the Cross, so we might have life together with Him and one another. 🙏



BRETT EASTMAN, founder of <http://www.Lifetogether.com>, Eastman Productions, and Lifetogether Publishing; and former small group champion from Willow Creek Community Church with Bill Hybels and Saddleback Church with Rick Warren. Eastman lives in Rancho Santa Margarita, California.

Turning Decisions into Additions and



Additions *into* Disciplers

(New Convert Care)

By Jim Hall

Where have all the spiritual babies gone? An alarming and disturbing trend is occurring in the Assemblies of God. When more than 75 percent of all decisions made for Christ in Assemblies of God churches are lost through the back door, something is desperately wrong and begs the question, "Why do so few decisions for Christ result in additions to the church?"

In an attempt to answer this question, we must first consider the apostle Paul's example to the Thessalonian believers: We were "gentle *among you*, as a nursing mother tenderly *cares* for her own children" (1 Thessalonians 2:7, NASB, emphasis mine).¹ Paul knew these newborn babes in Christ would live and grow through loving relationships, or they would die if left alone. Paul's association with them continued so he could exhort, encourage, and implore "each one ... as a father would his own children" (1 Thessalonians 2:11, NASB). The result was their spiritual survival and their transformation into powerful witnesses. Like a proud father, Paul noted that "in every place your faith toward God has gone forth" (1 Thessalonians 1:8, NASB).

New believer discipling is indispensable if pastors are to curb the alarming spiritual death rate among them. Does your church have a well-developed discipling ministry that will ensure the survival rate of your new converts

and help them become growing, thriving members of the church?

This article addresses practical steps to establish an effective new-convert discipling ministry in a church of any size that will turn *decisions* into *additions* and *additions* into *disciplers*. These dynamics are timeless and effective.

Discipling Values

God rejoices whenever a lost person is found, and calls us to rejoice with Him (Luke 15:6–10). The Prodigal's father argued with the older son that he needed to join the celebration because "this brother of yours" has returned (Luke 15:32, NASB). Clearly spiritual newborns

New believer discipling is indispensable if pastors are to curb the alarming spiritual death rate among them.

are our brothers, and each one needs to be welcomed because new believers have the same value to their Heavenly Father as we do.

In the New Testament, the value of each babe in Christ is reflected in apostolic references to individualized care. Paul told the Thessalonians that he guided "*each one* of you" as a father (1 Thessalonians 2:11, NASB, emphasis added). He reminded the Ephesians that "night and day for ... three years I did not cease to admonish *each one* with tears" (Acts 20:31, NASB, emphasis added). Jesus disciplined Peter one-on-one from

Identity and community are primary issues in the church today.

the beginning of His public ministry. The first goal for new convert follow-up is to provide individual care for each new believer by placing him into relationship with another mature Christian or trained discipler.

Discipling Friendship

The friendship ingredient of discipling may precede conversion or may be developed through a discipler who is assigned to a new believer after his commitment to Christ. Disciplers need to be the same gender as the new believer. Also, take into consideration age, personality, profession, job schedule, where people live, and the leading of the Spirit. Initial awkwardness between the discipler and a new believer is usually overcome with a little persistence. On rare occasions, a reassignment may need to be made.

Discipling Faithfulness

It is critical that new a believer be contacted by the church and/or

would-be discipler within the first day after his conversion to schedule a time (1 to 1 1/2 hours) for informal discipling. Choose a comfortable place to meet that is convenient for the new believer — the new believer's home, or some other place of his choosing.

Meeting in the new believer's home allows the discipler to meet other family members and friends and support the new believer's witness to them. It also provides an important context for the discipler to observe and understand the environment out of which the new believer comes.

Discipleship needs to take place weekly. The discipler's faithfulness creates a consistent experience that is critical for the new believer's spiritual life.

The church needs to develop an accountability system for the discipler to report the consistency and quality of each discipling meeting.

Discipling Formation

Discipling meetings need to focus on helping new believers interact with Scripture to learn how to have a daily relationship with Jesus. Workbook-style lessons that take the new believer directly to the Word to see for himself what God is saying are best. Communication with God is learned through listening to His written Word, responding in

prayer, and then hearing God speak by His Spirit while praying.

Moment-by-moment cooperation with God is the goal for each new believer. The discipler, as well as the lessons used, need to emphasize that Bible content is learned for the sake of Bible conduct. The discipling relationship needs to provide supportive accountability for applying what God is saying to the new believer about how He wants him to live. Celebration of progress needs to be frequent and sincere (Acts 11:23).

Discipling Process

First meeting

After becoming acquainted, the discipler needs to ask if he can pray for God to help them as they study His Word together. The prayer needs to be simple, short, and in everyday language. This sets an example for the new believer that prayer is naturally talking with God. At the end of the lesson, the new believer needs to be encouraged to talk to God in a similar way. His sincere and unpolished prayers need to be affirmed by the discipler. (For example: "That was a good prayer. I know God loved hearing you say those things to Him.")

Second, use discipling lessons that are written so a nonchurched person can understand. The lessons need to take the new believer to simple passages in God's Word that show how He wants to have communication and cooperation with believers. The content of the lesson series needs to include: (1) a review of the contract to follow Jesus; (2) His constant presence to guide and assist obedience; (3) the first and second commandments; (4) water and Spirit baptisms; (5) Communion; (6) work- and money-management

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These photos finally confirmed what many suspected, and why Pastor James and Jimmy the janitor were never in the building at the same time.

principles; and (7) how to witness and disciple others.

Third, go through the first lesson with the new Christian, discussing in simple language how to do the lesson, how to look up Scripture references, how to understand the truth in the lesson, and how to apply the truth to everyday living.

Have the new believer read each question and the accompanying Scripture passages, and then ask questions that gently guide him to see the answers to the workbook questions from the Scripture that was read. Do not settle for a good guess or an answer based on prior knowledge. You are launching this new believer into a lifelong discipline of using the Bible to find the answers to life.

Have the new believer explain what he sees in the passage that answers the question in the lesson — and anything else of interest he sees. The Spirit will often show him truths not addressed by the lesson question, but that are expressed in the Scripture passage and helpful to him. Correct observations need to be affirmed, and incorrect answers need to be gently reguided until the truth is grasped and affirmed. Answers to each question need to then be written in the spaces provided on the worksheet. Bible truths provide the Spirit with handles for conviction concerning replacing old-life practices with new behaviors.

Fourth, agree on a regular time to meet each week — as much as possible at the convenience of the new believer. In addition, there also needs to be weekly informal contact or shared activity (having coffee, shopping, recreation, or phone conversation) to help the friendship grow. In this setting, the new Christian can talk about things that are on his mind and heart or ask questions. This allows the discipler to better understand how

well the new Christian is growing spiritually or where his struggles and values are. Be faithful in meeting and spending time with the new Christian. His spiritual life depends on it.

Finally, at the end of this meeting explain the importance of a daily time of study and prayer in addition to the lesson assignment. Assist him in planning a time and place for his time with God, and encourage him to be faithful in meeting with God.

Second meeting

Go through the next lesson — or finish the first lesson — with the new Christian, giving whatever help is needed. Ask if he has applied anything he learned in the previous meeting to his life. Inquire about his devotions, and if he became aware of God's presence or God speaking with him during that time — or at any other time during the week.

If the new believer seems to be getting comfortable with the lesson format and the learning process, assign the next lesson to be done on his own before your next meeting. Encourage him to do his best, and help him with whatever is unclear.

Third and remaining meetings

Go through the lesson you assigned at the previous meeting. Guide your new believer to see the truth in the passages being studied. Discuss his answers, questions, and other responses to the assigned lesson. If he wants to discuss questions that are not immediately important to his life, gently tell him you will answer his question later and stay with the lesson. If the issue is distracting him from learning and a later lesson deals with that subject, go to that lesson and deal with his pressing issue. Flexibility is an advantage of one-on-one discipling.

Make sure you continually discuss

Resource List

1. Hall, James, H. <http://www.newchristian.com>. Among the valuable resources at this site is: *Church Discipleship Ministry* available as a free PDF download in the Pastors Corner. Also, available in the Discipleship Store are *The Harvester's Handbook* series discipling manuals.
2. Hirsch, Alan and Leonard Sweet. 2006. *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press.
3. Hull, Bill. 2006. *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*. Colorado Springs: NavPress.
4. Hull, Bill. 1998. *The Disciple-Making Church*. Grand Rapids: Revell.
5. Hull, Bill, and Dallas Willard. 2004. *Choose the Life: Exploring a Faith That Embraces Discipleship*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
6. Roberts, Bob, Jr. 2006. *Transformation: How Global Churches Transform Lives and the World*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

JIM HALL, Springfield, Missouri.

how he is applying the lessons he has learned from the Word to everyday life. This establishes a friendly accountability for reaching the goal of your meetings — for this new believer to become a doer of the Word. It also allows for a celebration of progress that affirms and encourages him. When praying together, include thanksgiving for progress and evidence

Make sure you continually discuss how he is applying the lessons he has learned from the Word to everyday life.

of God at work in his life. Prayer should also include asking for God's help with the day-to-day challenges he faces.

At the end of every meeting, assign the next lesson. Continue this process for the remaining lessons. I recommend a 6- to 8-month, one-on-one time frame. After completing this discipling process, some churches transition new believers into a group-learning setting. Whenever one-on-one discipling ends, the new believer needs to join whatever group is most appropriate for his next phase of learning and growth. A tracking system should be in place for monitoring his continued participation in the group-learning process.

Discipling Pace

Meeting regularly is more important than completing a lesson at every

meeting. Sometimes dealing with pressing needs in the new believer's life means several sessions are required to finish a lesson. It is important to give whatever time is necessary for understanding and applying truth to life. It is like feeding a baby — the baby decides how fast you feed him. Flexibility in the pace of discipling is greatly facilitated by the one-on-one process.

Discipling Connects

The discipler becomes the new believer's connection to the church by hosting the new believer at church or in a small group. The discipler either meets the new believer at the meeting or gives him a ride. The discipler also needs to sit with him and introduce him to people and activities. This is a major role that needs to be faithfully fulfilled by the discipler.

Water Baptism

Water baptism is an important step of obedience for new believers and should be strongly encouraged as soon as possible after his new birth. The discipler can assist the new convert in preparing a brief testimony to be shared before baptism. This can be written out and read by the new believer to alleviate nervousness and to conserve time. (Another option is to show an edited video of him testifying.) It is a good idea to have the discipler participate in the baptism by praying for his disciplee — or by the discipler doing the baptizing. This is also an opportunity for the new believer to invite family and friends to witness his baptism and hear his testimony.

Measuring Progress

The discipler needs to exercise patience

Discipleship Leading to Decision

Predecision discipling can occur in the context of friendship to prepare a nonbeliever for a life-changing decision based on:

- 1** A clear understanding of the contract.
 - a. For example, it needs to be made clear that Jesus only offers eternal life to those who submit to His authority. No submission; no salvation.
 - b. Use vocabulary that is clear to a nonchurched person and terms that relate to the individual. For example, Jesus spoke of fishing to fisherman and of the water of life to the woman at the well.
- 2** An inner persuasion from God that the gospel is true. It is the Spirit's job to convince and draw a person toward Christ. The person must decide. Jesus said, "When the crop permits, he [the farmer] puts in the sickle" (Mark 4:29, NASB).¹ Our role is to pray.

- 3** An informed decision to enter into relationship with Jesus based on His terms. Praying can be explained as signing the contract and the terms need to be reviewed and included in the prayer. Salvation seekers can be encouraged to pray on their own, or be led in a prayer as explained.

Informal discipling sets the stage for the more formal discipling (coaching) that is needed afterward.

JIM HALL, Springfield, Missouri

NOTE

1. Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

True Decision: Salvation and Lordship

Billy Graham's magazine, *Decision*, has an appropriate title for a publication focused on evangelism. Whether in one-on-one personal evangelism or a public evangelistic service salvation, decisions are a central issue.

Throughout my life I have heard this question many times in Pentecostal churches: "You have received Christ as your *Savior* — but have you received Him as your *Lord*?" This question should motivate people to a deeper level of spiritual commitment. Unfortunately, it can also create an unbiblical distinction in some people's minds between salvation and lordship.

We should never imply to nonbelievers that salvation is merely an issue of escaping hell. Christ came not only to free us from the *penalty* of sin but also from the *power* of sin.

The two most important decisions of my life were both made at an altar. The first was receiving Christ; the second was marriage. Those decisions have several similarities. Each decision, made at a particular moment, determined a multitude of future choices.

When I said "I do" — two little words — at my wedding, I had little concept of the lifelong consequences my commitment entailed. In that one decision I was making thousands of other decisions. Essentially, I was deciding what I was going to eat for

most of my future meals, the kind of dishes on which my meals would be served, the style of furniture that would be in the kitchen, and which curtains would hang on the windows. Asking Ruth to be my wife involved choosing her tastes, preferences, and decisions concerning many things.

At age 7, I made the choice to receive Christ as my Savior. Although I did not understand it at the time, I was also making thousands of decisions. I was determining where I would be each Lord's Day, where the first 10 cents of every dollar I made would go, what kinds of books I would read, and in what kinds of entertainment I would participate.

When we receive Christ, we obtain the benefit of sins forgiven. But we are also to give an appropriate response to Jesus' sacrifice by submitting to His authority in our lives.

Whether in personal evangelism or a public service, when we pray with someone to receive Christ, we must ensure that they understand the nature of the decision they are making. At salvation we receive forgiveness by God's grace and surrender to Christ's lordship.

God's Word teaches that a person's decision to receive Christ is not the finish line of the evangelism process. It is an entry point into a lifetime of following Him.



RANDY HURST, Springfield, Missouri

and give time for the Word and the Spirit to bring change from within as former-life habits yield to God's replacements. Change in the new believer's life needs to be a response to Christ's lordship, not compliance with human pressures. Celebration of change needs to be expressed when change occurs. Measurable evidence of transformation needs to include: consistent effort in prayer and Bible study; evidence of hearing from God through Scripture and prayer, followed by obedience; and, conscious pursuit of growth in loving God and loving people.

Reproduction

Basic discipling is not considered complete until the new believer is

discipling another new believer. The discipler needs to encourage the new believer to be a witness to his network of relationships. As discipling progresses, explain to the disciplee that he is being disciplined to disciple someone else. Show him that God can use him to help other new believers. The new believer needs to provide coaching as the disciplee begins to disciple.

Recognition

After completing the basic discipling process, the discipler and new believer need to be honored in a Sunday morning service. The pastor can present the believer with a certificate of completion and a study Bible to publicly affirm the value of

the discipling experience for both persons involved.

Preparing To Disciple Discipler recruiting

By preaching a sermon series on discipling, you will motivate potential discipler candidates in your congregation for training. Candidates, however, need to be approached individually — not publicly — and be invited to be trained. Disciplers who might lack the self-confidence to volunteer publicly will often respond to a pastor's or staff person's personal invitation. A personal invitation will also prevent unqualified individuals from volunteering for training.

Discipler candidate characteristics need to include: a consistent and

Profile: of a Disciple-Making Church

► Crossway Christian Center: Relationship, Relationship, Relationship

After 30 years, the emotion still breaks into his voice when Mark Gregori tries to describe the genesis of his pastorate in the Bronx, New York.

"It was a Sunday morning at Evangel Temple in Springfield, Missouri," he remembers. "Pastor David Rees-Thomas prophesied over Joanne and me. 'You will go through many trials and tribulations,' he said,

'but after that a prevailing church will rise up.'"

Mark stops. His voice catches. "That still gets to me after all these years."

Evangel Temple was committed to planting churches. Mark and

Joanne Gregori sensed God's calling to urban ministry. The marriage of those missions created Bronx Christian Center, now Crossway Christian Center.

When the Gregoris came to the Bronx in the mid-1970s, they had meager finances, no place to live, and no car. But one person or church after another came forward with the resources necessary for building a new community of believers in New York City's neediest borough.

Today, the church and borough are both thriving beneficiaries of that investment.

Crossway's history is chaptered with relationships, Mark says, relationships being the essence of discipling.

"All of discipling is about relationships, not about programs," he insists, "and the American church too many times has leaned on programs."

When Mark describes his personal journey into ministry, his focus is on the people who invested in his life: The pastor who invited him to preach as a teen. The professors at Central Bible College and Assemblies of God Theological Seminary

who "gave me a hunger to pursue God's Word and implement it." The Texas minister who opened his home to Mark and mentored him in all things pastoral.

Mark also lists the people of Evangel Temple.

"That church didn't just leave us in the Bronx," Mark says. "They would fly us back to Springfield, and we met with a team to help us lead and to encourage us. They let Joanne and me cry about some of the things we went through in the early years."

Today, anyone coming to Crossway Christian Center encounters a network of personal and group support structures. No single avenue of discipling is sufficient because none can address the many life needs and lifestyles at the church.

"From the altar, when people give their hearts to the Lord," Mark says, "no matter what back door they're coming through or front door, we encourage people to be mentored. We encourage our people to take care of new converts one-on-one."

For some, the one-on-one interaction works best. Others are more comfortable choosing from among Crossway's many small groups.

"And we have discipling classes throughout the week" Mark says, "that catch people whose schedules don't allow for the other two options."

The Harvester's Handbook by Jim Hall is the common thread among the three options.

"Jim Hall is another relationship that built this church," Mark says. "He helped us see you don't 'make disciples.' You're in a discipling process. It's not about some end product. He helped us experience how that can be delivered."

Results at Crossway are multifaceted. Many times, reaching an individual has led to touching a family and then to

ministry to that family's corner of the Bronx. Second-generation members at the church are remaining in the borough and changing their communities rather than fleeing to the suburbs. And pastors from surrounding churches are taking to heart Crossway's model and applying it.

"Mario Gonzalez in Jersey City came through our coffeehouse and saw how we use the arts to share Christ," Mark says. "That ignited him. Today his church, The Hope Center Tabernacle, is completing their new building, and it's going to be the largest art gallery in New Jersey. All the pieces are by professional artists who have given their hearts to the Lord."

Mark encourages pastors wanting to establish or strengthen their church's discipling identity to apply two foundational principles.

First, pastors must shape the culture of the church.

"Leaders think because they have a certain mission statement they can create momentum and move the church toward its goals," he says. "But before you start talking about discipling with some kind of mission statement, you have to address and change the culture of the church."

He next points to the need for different levels of discipling.

"You need to take one approach with new converts, for example," he says, "and another with the core leaders you are developing."

Above all, he insists, it is about relationship.

"When there is a relationship, the grace and mercy of the Lord invites people to pursue fellowship and cooperation."



Pastor Mark Gregori



SCOTT HARRUP, associate editor,
Today's Pentecostal Evangel

When the church follows the lead of societal attitudes and structures, its missional focus becomes unclear and its members are driven off course.

genuine love for Jesus and for people; devotion to obeying God; good learners; and, good listeners and communicators. Would-be candidates should also be baptized in the Holy Spirit or be honest seekers of this spiritual gift. Candidates also need to be trained to become proficient with the discipling system being used. Training is also important because most were never disciplined. Training will allow them to develop (or improve on) the skills and confidence for discipling.

Discipler training

It is recommended that the pastor both *model* one-on-one discipling and conduct the discipler training. The pastor's involvement adds value to the discipling ministry, and by discipling he gains valuable experience that will enhance his training of others. Disciples feel valued because their pastor is entrusting them with a part of the pastoring process in the church. Training must include:

1. Privately studying the new believers' lessons to become familiar with the biblical content and format.
2. Convening weekly as a group to discuss the questions and answers in the discipleship material. Trainer and trainees need to help each other avoid jargon and use everyday vocabulary so new believers will understand. This can be a challenge for the well church, but it is critical for helping new believers.
3. Practicing patient and attentive listening.
4. Practicing being honest and open about their own background

and growing experiences. When discipling, this helps a new Christian understand the growing process in Christian living.

5. Accepting the assignment of a new believer — or a struggling believer — for discipling while the training is in progress. (This adds the advantage of in-service training.)

Effective discipler training is a boot-camp experience — guided learning by doing.

Discipling Potential

Experience has shown that a responsive new believer can usually be disciplined to become a discipler of other new believers within 1 year; thus, doubling the number of disciplers each year. A pastor needs to assess the number of potential disciplers in his church whom he could train and then consider the numerical growth potential of the church if every year the discipler count doubled. For example, if he trained 10 disciplers who each disciplined and added one discipler the first year, the result in 5 years could be 320 disciplers in the church ($10+10=20+20=40+40=80+80=160+160=320$). God's plan yields the best results in transforming the life of the individual believer, and the best results in multiplying the number of believers.

Conclusion

Disciple all nations is our Commander-in-Chief's job description for His church. When we stand before Him, what will our record of obedience be for those whom we lead as pastor and for our life as a follower? How many will be present to stand before their Lord as a result of our obedience?

We can experience a preview of

this future celebration now as new-believer discipling brings *new* and *growing* life to the church. The fruitful task of loving babes in Christ greatly increases the faith and fulfillment felt by the spiritual parents in the pews. When disciplers become spiritual grandparents, the rejoicing is even greater. There is no greater expression of "equipping of the saints for the work of ministry" according to the "effective working" of each individual part (Ephesians 4:12,16, NKJV²) than a new convert discipling ministry that trains new believers to become discipling laborers in the harvest alongside of those who disciplined them. This was God's plan all along, and the Kingdom has suffered greatly from its neglect. The Kingdom flourishes when we are faithful to follow instructions, and Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rejoice. May we give ourselves to preserving and multiplying the harvest, using the methods modeled and prescribed by the Lord of the harvest. 🌱

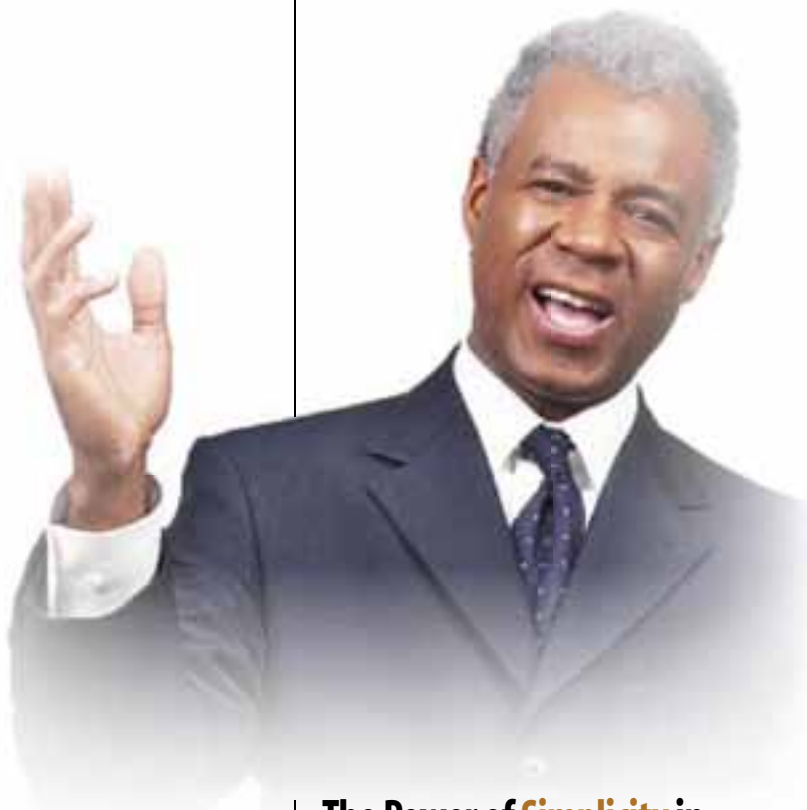


JIM HALL, founder of New Life Christian Ministries, Springfield, Missouri. A national U.S. missionary with the Assemblies of God,

Hall focuses on the major population centers of the U.S., including training in friendship evangelism and discipling, publishing materials used in training courses, and assisting urban pastors in more than 35 cities in the operation of Urban Bible Training Centers.

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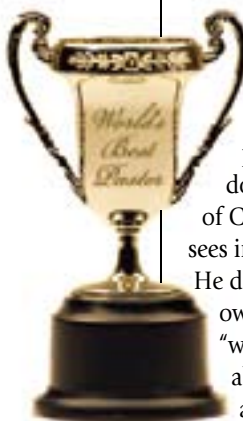
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The Power of **Simplicity** in Spirit-filled Preaching

BY THOMAS LINDBERG

"The wise and useful preacher knows the mind of man is not a debating hall, but a picture gallery," Lindberg insists. Lindberg, citing the apostles and church history, makes an effective case for clear communication, a sign of Spirit-led sermon preparation. "The godly preacher does not preach to other preachers or to his seminary professors," he concludes. "He preaches to people in the throes of life who are longing for a word from God."



Honor, Recognition, and Ministry

BY ALAN R. JOHNSON

Johnson explores the human tendency to connect acts of ministry and service with personal prestige and reward. Three Kingdom values need to motivate the follower of Christ: God alone gives true honor; God sees in secret; God cannot love anymore than He does regardless of one's actions. "When we own these three truths," Johnson says, "we become free to do what Scripture talks about — serving others, loving others, and honoring others above ourselves."



Desire for the Sea

BY T. RAY

RACHELS

Rachels uses an illustration from shipbuilding

to make a key point about team ministry — leaders must communicate passion rather than routine. To build a ship, communicate a love of the sea rather than a mere blueprint. To build a church, cast a vision that aligns a ministry team with the passion of God. "When we align ourselves with the river of God," Rachels says, "... then we become touched by a deep and infinite mystery."



Faith and the Media: Can We Coexist?

BY DAN PRATHER

The media

are an often-demonized societal force, a favorite target in countless sermons. Prather admits there are reasons to be cautious of secular media outlets, but encourages churches to build partnerships with local mass communicators. "It's possible to reach hundreds of people by knocking on doors," he says. "But it's possible to reach thousands, if not tens of thousands, each time a story is printed in a newspaper or airs on a television station."

And You Have the Bread!

BY T. RAY RACHELS

"Part of our task as communicators of the world's greatest message, God's Word, is to say it straight, with simplicity, and to provide all the windows possible for people



to get the message," Rachels says of the minister's life mandate. The prepared preacher distributes the Bread of Life to hungry souls in a manner that encourages eternally significant digestion. To create the simple, however, demands the difficult. "Healing ... comes," Rachels says, "from those hard-earned words you speak."

Discipling the Shepherds

BY CLYDE W. HARVEY

Harvey calls on pastors and other church leaders to be honest about their own spiritual and emotional needs. To remain isolated will soon reduce one's effectiveness. But the leader who seeks affirmation, accountability, and assessment can thrive in an environment of healthy feedback. Out of such a relationship, a leader can translate the guidance of a trusted friend into greater commitment to fulfill God's purposes. "Let us all seek the opportunity of enabling the enablers," Harvey says. 🌀



God Looks at All Sin the Same: Sound Biblical Teaching or Sloppy Bumper-Sticker Theology?

*Absolute truth
is determined
not by what is
popular or
frequently
repeated.*

Introduction

All sin is sin." "God treats all sin the same."
"No sin is any worse than other sins."
"All sin is the same in God's eyes."
Most people have heard some version of this popular view that God is so forgiving, evenhanded, and merciful that He views no sin as being worse than any other sin. In church circles, these statements were once restricted to the conclusion of evangelistic meetings to encourage those who were not right with God to come forward. The intent was to proclaim that God will accept all who come in true repentance, regardless of the heinousness of their sins. Unfortunately, this assurance once offered to unbelievers was repeated so often it became a part of the language of Christians as well. It is heard in private conversations between Christians and in discussions in Bible studies. It is recited in the pulpit and in Sunday School classes as though it were a memory verse or a fundamental Christian doctrine. Sadly, it is often used to excuse unbiblical behavior and probe the reaches of

God's mercy. Is this current emphasis healthy for the individual Christian or for the body of Christ? Does it reflect the will of God for His people?

From time to time, we must remind ourselves that absolute truth is determined not by what is popular or frequently repeated. Instead, in matters of faith and practice, the Scriptures determine absolute truth.¹ What we must learn to yearn for is what the Word of God tells us about whatever issue is under discussion. It is only there can we be assured that we are hearing His mind on the matter. Therefore, leaving the mantras, the personal opinions, the words of the gurus, and the political correctness of tolerance and acceptance behind, we turn our attention to Scripture to discover whether from God's perspective if all sin is the same.

In the Old Testament

Law of Moses

The first piece of relevant evidence that the reader of Scripture encounters is a series of events in which God brings irreversible judgment on groups of people. Some examples to consider are the Flood (Genesis 6–9), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah



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(Genesis 18:16 through 19:29), the Exodus (Exodus 7:14 through 12:41), the conquests of Joshua (Joshua 2:1 through 21:45), the Assyrian captivity (2 Kings 17:1–41), and the Babylonian exile (2 Kings 24:1 through 25:21). The point is that God bore with the sin, rebellion, oppression, violence, and mutiny of these peoples to a point. When a line was crossed, however — whether in degree, number, or frequency — God's love, mercy, patience, and forgiveness were exhausted (compare Genesis 6:5–7; 15:14,16; 18:20; Exodus 3:7,9; 2 Kings 17:7–20,23; 2 Chronicles 36:16). Prior to this point, God had extended His grace to those involved, but after His self-determined threshold had been reached, He treated these same people in a vastly different manner.

Furthermore, in the Old Testament, when individuals sinned there were different sacrifices available to deal with the specifics of each situation (Leviticus 1:2 through 6:7; 16:1 through 17:16). Evidently, different people and categories of sin required different sacrifices. When it comes to punishments for certain sins, Scripture is even more specific. For example, for the most heinous sins, such as premeditated murder and adultery, the death penalty was required (Exodus 21:12–14; Leviticus 20:10). For less grievous offenses, however, fines or corporal punishment were imposed (Exodus 22:3–7; Deuteronomy 25:1–3). In extreme cases, excommunication was decreed (Numbers 15:30; Leviticus 17:14). In all these examples, it should be observed that there existed a clear stratification of offenses and penalties (similar to the principle of American jurisprudence, that

the punishment fit the crime). For those who take the Bible seriously, it must be concluded that God was the source of all biblical legislation. Therefore, it is an accurate reflection of His will and His own stratification of human infractions as sometimes more and sometimes less grievous.

Before leaving this brief survey of the Law of Moses, one final passage must be considered. Numbers 15 describes two different kinds of sin. The *unwitting* (accidental, unintentional) sin is forgivable and there is an offering prescribed for it (verses 22–29). The *defiant* (premeditated, intentional, haughty) sin, however, *cannot be forgiven* and therefore has no prescribed sacrifice attached to it. Such behavior, by its nature, is persistent, deliberate mutiny. Blasphemous activity casts a permanent shadow over the entire covenant community and the reputation of God. This is no mere isolated infraction. It goes beyond the breaking of a [specific] commandment to the point of total rejection or despising the Word of the Lord (verses 30,31). Evidently, in the Law of Moses, not all sin is the same.

Prophets

According to the prophets, God makes a distinction between those sins that can be forgiven and those for which forgiveness can no longer be offered. For example, God told Amos that the sins of Israel and Judah had reached their full measure, and He would no longer spare them (1:4–16; 8:2). On three occasions God told Jeremiah to cease his intercession for the forgiveness of His people because He was no longer willing to listen (7:16; 11:14; 14:11). They had evidently crossed the line established by God, and their fate was sealed. No amount of sacrifices, acts of contrition, or even prayers of the prophet could divert judgment at that point. According to Ezekiel, not even the intercession or righteousness of Noah, Daniel, or Job would have had any effect at that point in their spiritual decline (14:14,20). Evidently to these Old Testaments saints, not all sin is the same.

Application

At this point in our study, some might think: *That was then; this is now. God was like that in the Old Testament. Now because we have the example of the patient and forgiving Jesus, His once-for-all death, and a new and better covenant, we can be assured that God always stands ready to*



God makes a distinction between those sins that can be forgiven and those for which forgiveness can no longer be offered.

When the clear teaching of Scripture is rejected in favor of bumper-sticker, feel-good theology, the playing field is arbitrarily leveled.

forgive any and all sin. Although this approach at first glance has the appearance of deep spirituality and appears to cast God in a favorable light, it is fraught with practical and theological dangers.

First, it is essentially the same as the heresy of Marcion, who in the early second century, taught that the God of the Old Testament was fundamentally different from the God of the New Testament. For this teaching the Early Church honored him with excommunication.

Second, this view of God is no different than that of liberal process theology and postmodernism — that God is ever evolving to a more enlightened, kinder, gentler God.

Third, such an approach abandons the clear teaching of *both* Testaments — that an important aspect of the nature of God is His *immunity* (Psalm 55:19; 102:27; Isaiah 46:4; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 1:12; 13:8; James 1:17).

Fourth, such an argument repudiates the many claims of Scripture that it is consistent with respect to how it depicts God (Psalm 18:30; 117:2; 119:89,152,160; 138:2; Isaiah 40:8; 2 Timothy 3:16).

Fifth, if we allow ourselves to go in the direction of an evolving God and Word of God, there is no reason to assume that He will not eventually change things that we *do* hold dear, such as the way of salvation or the promise of baptism in the Holy Spirit to all who seek it.

Finally, by dismissing passages we find uncomfortable or outmoded, we become guilty

of the same error committed by many Christian groups we have criticized in the past who pick and choose, and in so doing, create their own cafeteria-style religion.

In the New Testament

Gospels

If, God and His Word are consistent, we should expect to find the same dynamics in the New Testament that are in the Old Testament. Thankfully, that is true of every section of the New Testament. Jesus picked up where the Old Testament left off by teaching that certain situations render it impossible for a sinner to receive forgiveness from God. For example, those who commit the sin of unforgiveness are unable to receive forgiveness from God for their own sins (Matthew 6:14,15; 18:23–35). Similarly, according to Jesus, anyone who commits blasphemy of the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven (Matthew 12:31,32). Much has been written and said about the exact nature of what constitutes blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and I also have my opinion (compare this language to that of Numbers 15:30). The current discussion, however, requires only that we note that Jesus' teaching is perfectly in line with that of the Old Testament: some sins can be forgiven and some cannot. Evidently in the mind of the Master, not all sin is the same.

Acts

In the Book of Acts, God also punishes those who sin differently. Some He rebukes (7:51–53; 8:18–24); some He strikes blind (9:7,8; 13:8–11); some He strikes dead (5:1–10; 12:20–23). Those who would hasten to question the evenhandedness of the Lord in these matters must remember that God is all-knowing (Jeremiah 17:9–11; Acts 1:24), just (Deuteronomy 32:4; Acts 17:31), and not a respecter of persons (Deuteronomy 10:17; Acts 10:34). The first-century Pentecostal church that witnessed these events knew the Old Testament, and they recognized that God's work among them was consistent with Scripture that had already so accurately revealed His character. At no point did it feel compelled to offer the rationale: That was then; this is now.

Epistles

The Epistles also attest to God's ability and willingness to view and treat sins differently. For example, Paul told of some who persisted

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**"It's called 'crane-itis.'
I would suggest sitting in the very last pew
or pray through over 'nosey-itis!'"**

in their rebellious ways to the point that God “turned them over to a reprobate/depraved mind” (Romans 1:24–32, especially verse 28). In addition, John described two distinct categories of sin: one that is “not unto death” and the other that is “unto death” (quite possibly with the same two categories that appear in Numbers 15 in mind). He encouraged Christians to pray for those caught in a sin of the first category, but (reminiscent of God’s prohibitions of further prayer by Jeremiah) proscribed prayer for the last category (1 John 5:16,17). The later church eventually generated detailed lists of specific sins for these two categories that came to be called *venial* and *mortal* sins. Whether every line item of those lists matches the revelation of Scripture is irrelevant to the current discussion. The fact remains, like the Old Testament, the New Testament teaches that God distinguishes between some sins and others. Evidently the apostles, the authors of the New Testament, and the Early Church did not believe that all sin is the same.

To deny the legitimacy of such distinctions only muddies the waters and trivializes the discussion. When the clear teaching of Scripture is rejected in favor of bumper-sticker, feel-good theology, the playing field is arbitrarily leveled. Child molestation can then be trivialized and sanitized as being no more destructive or nefarious than embezzlement. Consequently, it is not helpful to compare a private verbal indiscretion to the lifestyle sin of Ted Haggard that not only hurt him, but also his wife, children, church, fellow ministers, the body of Christ at large, and the reputation of God. It only lowers the bar to offer, “Well, I’m not perfect either. If I can curse privately, I suppose I am capable of committing the same sin as Haggard or worse.”

Capacity and commission are not synonymous. Temptation to sin and commission of sin are not the same. Surely we would not be so quick to admit that we could just as easily have committed the same sins as Ted Bundy, David Berkowitz (Son of Sam), John Wayne Gacy, Jeffrey Dahmer, Rev. John Geoghan (the pedophile priest), or Mohammed Atta.



Conversely, the sin of Haggard is eclipsed by the sin of Adolf Hitler. The little whopper my 2-year-old granddaughter told me about how she harvested a trophy deer with her little (also apocryphal) bow and arrow that is (really not) in my garage pales in comparison to the genocide wreaked by Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. The same two teenagers can both break curfew and engage in premarital sex, but the potential fallout (seriousness of effects, number of people impacted, damage to Christian witness) of these two rebellious

acts bears no comparison. Evidently, not all sin is the same.

Conclusions

In this inexhaustive study, it has been demonstrated that both Testaments instruct us contrary to much popular theology and preaching. Therefore, our responsibility is to declare the full counsel of God in season and out of season, whether popular or unpopular. It is not our responsibility to make every jot and tittle palatable to modern man.

Furthermore, the unified message of Scripture challenges us to avoid providing our hearers with any false sense of security. As leaders, we must know how to “have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some, have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh” (Jude 22,23, NASB).² We must recapture the willingness to speak “the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15, NASB), and to rebuke “those who continue in sin ... in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning” (1 Timothy 5:20, NASB). The spiritual health and eternal destination of people, the purity and effectiveness of the witness of the church, and the reputation of the holy God we serve will need to be our motivation, not our own popularity, the numerical growth or financial stability of our church, or the comfort of the person in sin.

Those of us in positions of leadership must also remain true to our historically and biblically based position on free will and the possibility of voluntary forfeiture of right relationship with God.³ It is not enough to merely give intellectual



The unified message of Scripture challenges us to avoid providing our hearers with any false sense of security.

No matter how lofty our goals, no motivation to alter the message of Scripture can ever be justified.



assent to this important tenet of our faith. We must be willing to go against current trends and make this position a regular emphasis of our preaching and teaching. Most adults and youth in our Movement with whom I have discussed this issue are not even aware that the Assemblies of God has an official position. Even more important than disseminating information, however, is our pastoral responsibility to warn backsliders of their spiritually dangerous position and challenge people to live holy lives that will please God and win unbelievers. On this matter, the official Web site of the Assemblies of God says:

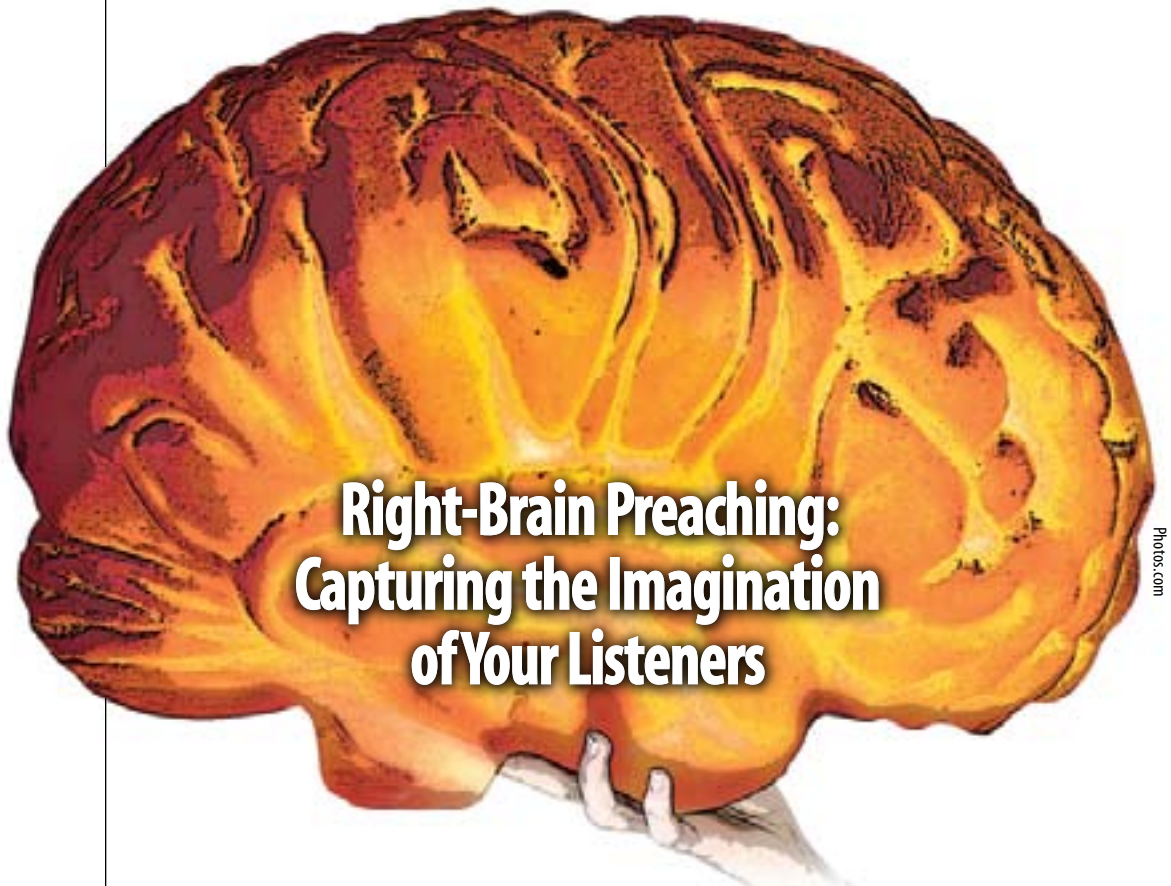
"In our Fellowship we believe carelessness can lead to apathy, apathy to neglect, and neglect to a conscious decision to sin. We often refer to this spiritual decline as backsliding. We believe one who backslides is in danger of losing his salvation if the individual persists in rejecting the Spirit's call to repentance and restoration."⁴

If this is what we believe, we need to begin to address the seriousness of continuous, conscious mutiny against the mastery of the Lord Jesus over various aspects of our own lives and the lives of our parishioners. This includes (but

not limited to) gossip, manipulation, self-indulgence, gluttony, hedonism, pornography, and sexual immorality. Let's recommit to proclaiming God's perspective as found in Scripture on the issues we are addressing. No matter how lofty our goals, no motivation to alter the message of Scripture can ever be justified. His Word convicts, renews, transforms, and sets free, not our new and improved version of it. Let's discipline ourselves and help our listeners learn to process issues and build faith systems on the Word of God rather than personal opinion/feelings or pop theology/psychology. Perhaps then God will trust us with the power and numerical growth for which we have been yearning and praying for so long. 🙏

NOTES

1. *Statement of Fundamental Truths*, art. 1. Assemblies of God Fundamental Truths can be downloaded at http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Statement_of_Fundamental_Truths/sft_full.cfm#1
2. Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)
3. *General Council of the Assemblies of God Bylaws*, art. 9b, sec. 1.
4. "Security of the Believer (Backsliding)," available from http://www.ag.org/top/Beliefs/gendoc_09_security.cfm; accessed 19 April 2007.



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Many preachers are trying to preach with half their brain tied behind their back.

Nothing in the medical universe is more fascinating than the 3 pounds of gray matter housed within the human cranium. The human mind is the magnum opus of God's creative genius.

Neurologists subdivide the brain into regions that are responsible for a variety of neurological functions. The visual cortex handles input from the optic nerve. The posterior hippocampus stores spatial memory. The ventral region of the medial prefrontal cortex is the seat of humor. Whether you are humming a song, solving a Sudoku, or interpreting facial expressions, a unique part of the brain is responsible for performing those functions.

The brain is also divided into two hemispheres: the right brain and left brain. Those two hemispheres are connected by approximately 300 million nerve fibers called the *corpus callosum*.

Think of the two hemispheres of the brain as parallel processors. They overlap in function. This is a gross simplification of something that is divinely complex. The left brain is the *logical* half of the brain, and the right brain

is the *creative* half of the brain.

Now juxtapose brain topography with Matthew 22:37: "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind" (NLT).¹

Loving God with half your mind does not cut it. Half-minded is no better than half-hearted. Many preachers, nevertheless, are trying to preach with half their brain tied behind their back, which is about as effective as running on one leg, clapping with one hand, or twiddling one thumb.

Half-formed Imaginations

During the modern era, seminaries focused on left-brain logic. We studied systematic theology. We developed three-point sermons with alliterations in homiletics. We learned to put together an order of service in practical theology. Such preparation is worthwhile. There is nothing wrong with having an order of service. Our sermons need to be logical, and we need to develop theological paradigms. But the key to preaching in today's world (postmodern, or post whatever)



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is combining right-brain creativity with left-brain logic.

C.S. Lewis is the patron saint of whole-brain preachers. Can you think of anyone in the last century who was more left-brain logical? Consider his theological writings, from *Mere Christianity* to *The Problem of Pain*. Lewis, however, combined left-brain logic with right-brain creativity. *The Chronicles of Narnia* series has captured the imagination of children since it was written.

Lewis once referred to himself as the most reluctant convert in all of Christendom. The night before his conversion, Lewis had a long conversation with J.R.R. Tolkien, author of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Tolkien tried to convince Lewis of the credibility of Christ, but Lewis was full of objections. At one point, Tolkien countered Lewis' objections by saying that his inability to understand stemmed from a failure of imagination on his part. Maybe a lack of faith is a failure of imagination?

In his book, *The Celtic Way*, Ian Bradley writes about the celebration of the imagination in the Celtic tradition. Celtic Christianity may offer us a lifeline in the form of an approach to faith that is rooted in imagination. Too many Christians today, brought up on the penny plain prose favored by Rome and even more by the Reformers, have half-formed imaginations. God wants to sanctify our imaginations and use them for His purposes.

The first verse of Hebrews strikes me as a good definition of right-brain preaching: "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways" (TNIV).² God does not say the same thing the same way every time. He mixes it up. He finds new ways to say old things.

When you examine how the Old Testament prophets communicated, it borders on the absurd. Jeremiah hid his belt in Perath. Hosea married a prostitute. Poor Ezekiel baked his bread over cow dung for 390 days. Definitely right-orbit illustrations, but one thing is for sure: God is not a broken record; He loves to communicate in various ways.

Berlyne's Law

According to the research of psychologist Daniel Berlyne, what strikes us as good art is usually a slight derivation from our expectations.³

Art that is too large a deviation from what we already know is considered bizarre. Art that fits our expectations perfectly is considered

boring. Good art is somewhere in between. We like mild surprises that fall somewhere between boring and bizarre. What most people consider great art is a modest change from the status quo.

This idea has huge implications for preaching. To stay connected with contemporary minds preaching needs to say *old things* in *new ways*. Preaching should approach truth from slightly different angles, almost like turning a kaleidoscope. Great preaching is a slight deviation from expectation.

Sir Thomas Moore said, "It's my conviction that slight shifts in imagination have more impact on living than major efforts at change." Slight shifts in imagination is what right-brain preaching is all about. How do we produce slight shifts in imagination? The key is using metaphors.

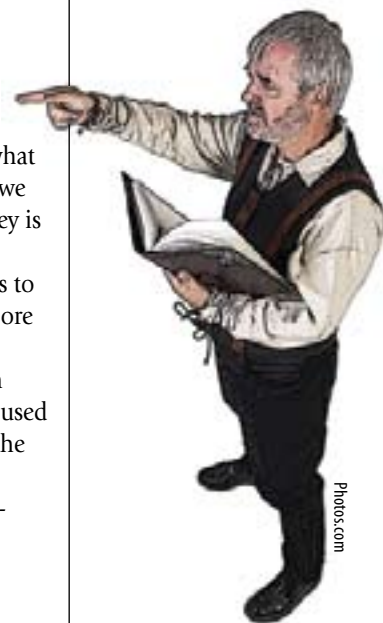
Aristotle said, "The greatest thing by far is to be the master of metaphor." No one was more masterful than Jesus. The parables are case studies in right-brain preaching. Hear them once and you remember them. Why? Jesus used metaphors that created mental pictures in the right brains of His listeners.

One key to right-brain preaching is cross-pollination — redeeming metaphors from a variety of disciplines and using them to communicate spiritual truth. Consider the sciences, for example. In a recent series that Mark preached at National Community Church called *The Physics of Faith*, he borrowed basic laws of physics like Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, Bell's Theorem, and the Law of Entropy and used them to talk about spiritual principles. Each message in that series was a scientific parable. Metaphors enable us to reframe truth in ways that are biblically accurate and culturally relevant.

Cross-pollination also gives you intellectual leverage. Quoting Scripture gives the speaker credibility with people who are church and unchurched alike. Nonbiblical quotes give him added credibility with people who are unchurched. When the speaker references a law of physics, quotes Aristotle, or cites a Fast Company article, he scores points with skeptics. The searcher-for-truth, though, is still profoundly interested in what the Bible says.

Cultural Exegesis

Too many pastors get As in biblical exegesis but Ds in cultural exegesis. We know Scripture, but it is easy to lose touch with the times. The result



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Jesus' parables are case studies in right-brain preaching. He used metaphors that created mental pictures in the right brains of His listeners.

is a gap between theology and reality called irrelevance. As one of our favorite philosophers, Yogi Berra, once said, "In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice. But in practice there is." When we withdraw to the comfortable confines of our Christian subculture, we can lose touch with whom we are trying to reach — the unchurched and dechurched. We need to exegete our culture to close the gap. That is what incarnation is all about.

According to Anthony Mayo and Nitin Nohria, all great leaders share one common denominator regardless of their age or industry: "They possessed acute sensitivity to the social, political, technological, and demographic contexts that came to define their eras." Mayo and Nohria call it *contextual intelligence*. After studying 1,000 leaders they concluded that contextual intelligence is "an underappreciated but all-encompassing differentiator between success and failure."⁴

First Chronicles 12:32 says the men of Issachar "understood the times and knew what Israel should do." They had tremendous insight — they understood the times. And they had tremendous foresight — they knew what Israel should do. Another way of saying it: They had foresight because they had insight. They were visionary leaders because they were experts in cultural exegesis.

At times there is a fine line between redeeming culture and compromising truth, but it is a line we must be willing to walk.

God is omnirelevant. He speaks more than

six billion languages. Redeeming culture does not mean watering down or dumbing down the gospel. It means translating the gospel into a language that people can understand. It is using culturally relevant metaphors so people can grasp spiritual truths.

Isn't that what Jesus did? He used agrarian metaphors to communicate spiritual truths. We call them parables.

Every generation needs to redeem cultural lingo and use it to communicate timeless truth. The only alternative is irrelevance, and irrelevance is irreverence.

The key to unforgettable preaching is packaging truth in ways that are biblically sound and culturally relevant. Let me borrow from the Parable of the Wineskins. Think of biblical exegesis as the wine. Think of cultural relevance as the wineskin. If you have one without the other, you will not quench anyone's thirst. You need the substance (biblical exegesis) and the container (cultural relevance).

If we divorce biblical exegesis and cultural exegesis, we end up with dysfunctional truth that does no one any good. Either we answer questions no one is asking, or we give the wrong answers.

Every year, National Community Church and Capital Church in the City do two sermon series that redeem culture: *God @ the Box Office/God @ the Movies* and *God @ the Billboards/God Behind the Music*. The reason is that 60 percent of Americans who do not attend church get their theology from movies and music. For better or for worse, musicians and moviemakers are the chief theologians in our culture. Troy Champ, lead pastor at Capital Church (Salt Lake City), uses the central propositions of movies and songs during these series as metaphors to examine conceptually related biblical principles.

The 18th-century Scottish thinker, Andrew Fletcher, said, "Give me the making of the songs of a nation, and I care not who writes its laws." Our culture is shaped, even more than we know, by the movies we watch and the music we listen to. *God @ the Movies* and *God Behind the Music* are attempts to exegete the movies and music that are shaping the cultural consciousness of 175 million unchurched Americans. Then we juxtapose them with Scripture.

Those two series are among the hardest hitting series NCC and Capital do all year. The reason is simple: Movies and music are brutally honest about the human condition. They may



not contain the truth, but they are in touch with existential realities. Ravi Zacharias says, "I credit them with a greater degree of honesty and unmasked vulnerability in recognizing the anguish within the human heart than the academician, who often conceals such a struggle behind a façade of self-assurance."

Sermon Branding

John 12:49 is a poignant preaching mantra. Jesus said, "I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it."

What is sermon content?

How is a sermon branded?

Try this core preaching value: The greatest truths need to be communicated in the most unforgettable ways. When it comes to communicating things in unforgettable ways, *how* is just as important as *what*.

Sermon branding is nothing new. The ancient prophets used God-inspired props to make their messages stick. Jesus took the Old Testament art form to a new level. No one was better at branding truth than The Truth. His parables are pure genius.

Sermon branding is hard work, but it is not optional if we are serious about engaging the right brain of our listeners as Jesus did with His parables.

Seven Steps To Sermon Branding

Develop a series title

A fine line exists between catchy and cheesy. The goal is to reduce an entire series to a single word, phrase, or symbol that captures the essence of the series.

Book titles, magazine ads, TV shows, board games, and movies are a great source of creative inspiration.

Here are some recent National Community Church and Capital Church in the City series titles: *The Physics of Faith*; *Y: Why We Do What We Do*; *Soulprint*; *20/20: Vision for Life*; *The Game of Life*; *Dangerous Prayers*; *10: the Life Behind the Laws*; *Paradox*; *The Wild Goose Chase*; *Creed*; *Illuminate*; *God @ the Billboards*; *God Behind the Music*; and *Wired for Worship*.

Create a series logo

The old aphorism is wrong. A picture *isn't* worth a thousand words.

According to neurological research, the brain is able to process print on a page at a rate of

approximately 100 bits per second. But the brain can process a picture at approximately 1 billion bits per second. Mathematically speaking, a picture is worth 10 million words.

Logos are important because of the way the brain processes information. The brain recognizes and remembers shapes first, colors second, and content third. This is the sequence of cognition. If you want people to listen to the content of what you say, you need to think about shapes and colors. If choosing color schemes seems to be void of spiritual significance read the Book of Exodus. A dozen chapters are devoted to design. God gives specific instructions about colors and scents.

Aesthetics are important.

Design a series e-vite and invite

The key to buzz is word of mouth and word of mouse. One way to generate buzz about a sermon series is to send an e-vite by way of your church e-mail list. Encourage your congregation to forward it to a friend and give them invitations to give to friends.

Brainstorm big ideas

The more you say the less they remember. The law of scope is: More is less and less is more. That is why every message needs to be boiled down to one *central proposition*, also known as the *one big idea*.

If you try to make too many points, your message becomes a bed of nails. Lie down on a thousand nails and they will not penetrate your skin. Why? The pressure of each point is diffused by the others around it. Too many sermons are a bed of nails. But a single point will penetrate the heart and soul like a single nail.

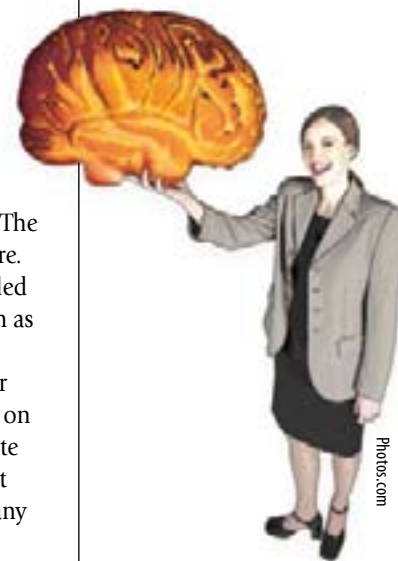
During *The Game of Life* series, the board game by the same name functioned as the central metaphor. The series incorporated seven spaces from the game to symbolize seven big ideas:

1. Graduation Day: Enjoy the Journey.
2. Tour Europe: Take Calculated Risks.
3. Night School: Keep Asking Questions.
4. Win Marathon: Set God-sized Goals.
5. Start a Career: Pursue God-ordained Passions.
6. Get Married: Fall in Love.
7. Pay Day: Pay it Forward.

Shoot a series trailer

One way to brand a series and generate excitement

When it comes to communicating things in unforgettable ways, how is just as important as what.



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Every message needs to be boiled down to one central proposition, also known as the one big idea.



is to add creative video elements. Show a series trailer the week before kicking off the series and put it up on your Web site.

For samples, visit <http://www.theaterchurch.com>, or <http://www.capitalchurch.com>.

Add sermon props

Jesus used everything from mustard seeds to Roman coins to make His messages stick. He preached from boats, washed feet, and used little children as sermon props.

The reason sermon props make messages more memorable is they involve more than one sense. The more multisensory your message is the more memorable it will be.

Over the years we have used everything from nails to pop rocks to silly putty to make our messages more memorable. You may even want to design series clothing and accessories. It is a great way of turning your congregation into walking billboards.

Add sermon staging

It will take time and effort, but try redesigning

your stage for every sermon series. This is a great way to keep things fresh. A new look will generate new excitement. Have fun with it.

For example, during our annual *God @ the Box Office* series, NCC rolls out the red carpet and treats every NCCer like an Oscar nominee. It gives NCC an excuse to give them the red-carpet treatment. 🎬

NOTES

1. Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.
2. Scripture marked TNIV is taken from the Holy Bible, Today's New International® Version TNIV©. Copyright 2001, 2005 by International Bible Society®. Used by permission of International Bible Society®. All rights reserved worldwide. TNIV and Today's New International Version are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society®.
3. Neal Roesse, *If Only: How To Turn Regret Into Opportunity* (New York, Broadway), 168, 169.
4. Anthony J. Mayo and Nitin Nohria, *In Their Time: The Greatest Business Leaders of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press), xv.

Reaching the Homosexual

Homosexuality is changeable —
but change is a process,
not an event.

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*Today, churches
want to be involved
in ministry to
homosexuals,
but they are unsure
of how to proceed.*

Sixteen years ago I was an 18-year-old young man desperately battling same-sex attractions I neither wanted nor knew how to deal with. I was not one of the gay teens you might see today on one of MTV's numerous reality series. I was not *out* and *proud* or fighting for the rights of my people.

I was a *church kid* in every sense of the word. I was respectful to my parents, was every youth pastors dream for his youth group, and I loved Jesus and was committed to Him. Yet, I wore the unwanted label of gay, at least privately.

From age 11, I was keenly aware of my struggles. My sexual temptations were exclusively homosexual. My attractions were seemingly

fixed. Despite much prayer, Bible study, fasting, and midnight cries, I felt hopelessly, irreversibly gay.

In those days I prayed far more for someone to help me and for God to heal me than I gave into the temptation to lust. I wanted to be free. I would have given anything to hear a compassionate word spoken in a sermon, Sunday School lesson, or conversation with friends. Not a condoning or sin-affirming word, just an acknowledgment that the church was a safe place to openly and honestly find help, healing, and redemption.

I did not find what I was looking for from my fellow believers. I heard many

NOTE: Photographs accompanying this article are used for illustrative purposes only. Individuals shown are models and have no connection to concepts, behaviors, or events referenced in the article.



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references to 1 Corinthians 6:9,10 and Leviticus 18:22, which confirm that the consequences of homosexuality is eternity in hell. I did not need to be told over and over that homosexuality was wrong — once was enough. God, through His Holy Spirit, also revealed this to me every time I chose to sin or to contemplate sinning. *Enough of the hand up approach, I often thought. Someone reach a hand out to save me.*

There was not much help available then. But God knew what I needed, and He led me to the ministry of Exodus International. Since 1990, many more resources are available for men and women struggling as I did; yet, there is still much to be done.

Thankfully, today, churches want to be involved in ministry to homosexuals, but they are unsure of how to proceed. Those with gay-identified loved ones are eager to share the good news of Christ, but how can they do so without sounding judgmental? Can they promise those they love that change is possible? Is change possible?

Getting Started

I am thankful for the ministry of Exodus International, a worldwide network of ministries dedicated to helping those affected by unwanted homosexuality. There was an Exodus member ministry in my hometown where I found a counselor, support group, and an introduction to a life-changing church that enveloped and helped me.

I believe in the ministry of Exodus, which led me to become the president of the organization just over 4 years ago. I wanted to help Exodus move into the chapter of its life for which it was created. Today, Exodus International is far more a ministry of the church to the church than one focused on individuals.

My friend, Joe Dallas, often says that healing for sexual struggles is resident within the body of Christ if the Body only knew it. While Exodus has helped hundreds of thousands — if not millions — find freedom, the truth is that more go into homosexuality than come out of it.

Our goal at Exodus is to impact, equip, and mobilize the church so it becomes known as the place where people struggling with their sexual identity can go for help, healing, and community. I do not want Exodus to serve as a halfway house anymore; let's get people plugged into the Body. The only way to do that is to train the army of God to do what Exodus has done for the last 30 years.

Getting Educated

Understandably, it is difficult to know where to start when reaching out to those involved in homosexuality. We are paralyzed by the fear of offending, of what others will think, and of being labeled. We are afraid to minister for many reasons, the biggest of which is ignorance. Whether intentional or not, we simply do not know much about homosexuality other than that it is wrong.

The first step to reaching out to homosexuals is becoming educated. The opposition has a better working knowledge of biblical arguments and can even argue them better than most Christians. The pro-homosexual organizations and activists have gone to great lengths to study the Bible in depth, even in the original languages, and have a rebuttal for everything that is thrown at them.

For a Christian to simply quote Leviticus 18, Romans 1, or 1 Corinthians 6 is to be unprepared in today's dialogues. It takes more than knowing a verse or two; it takes understanding it, dissecting its meaning, and being able to defend it passionately and compassionately.

The leaders within the activist homosexual community have made it their life's goal to disseminate misinformation. The majority of gay-identified youth today have read everything their gay heroes have written, listened to everything they have had to say, and committed it to memory. I suggest you do the same with the scientific, psychological, biblical, medical, and anthropological information that backs up why homosexuality is not God's intent for His creation.

From 1999 to 2002, I served on the pastoral staff of Calvary Assembly of God in Orlando, Florida. My sole duty was meeting with teenagers who were struggling with gender-identity issues — along with their families. Some teens did not necessarily want help overcoming homosexuality, so I regularly found myself being their sounding board, dispenser of advice, encourager, and coach. For those who did not want to overcome homosexuality my advice to them was to research both sides and to talk with me about what they found. I believe this saved some teens' lives. They did not need, nor did they want me to convince them of anything. So I empowered them to seek the truth on their own.

A good education on homosexuality means you will know what homosexuality is and is not, and just how God changes the hearts,



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minds, actions, and lives of those who struggle with same-sex attraction issues.

The Worst Sin of All?

When speaking publicly to Christians about the issues surrounding homosexuality, I allow time for questions and answers. Inevitably, one person makes the point that homosexuality is not just a sin, but also an abomination. Translated: Homosexuality is worse than anything else. Your sin is worse than my sin.

It is true that homosexuality is abominable to God. The Hebrew text uses the word *toeva* (abomination/hatred) to describe how God feels about homosexuality. That word, however, is also used to describe how God feels about adultery. In Proverbs 6:16–19, we see seven other things that are also linked with the word *toeva*: “There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.”

This list of abominations levels the sin playing field. I can look at the list and see more than one abomination I have struggled with as a fallible human. Thank God for His redeeming grace, His gift of Jesus, and His forgiveness.

As Christians we must realize that Christ died because of all of our sins and not just because of the perceived big sins. When reaching out to someone struggling with homosexuality, approach him as a brother — willing to walk alongside him, not as a judge standing over him.

Deliverance

Another common misconception is that casting out the demon of homosexuality will instantly free someone from his past, present, and future sin. Casting out demons, reading the Bible more, and even getting saved will not miraculously fix one’s struggle. Our Christianity is not immune to our humanity.

Historically, the church has hijacked Bible verses such as 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” We have misunderstood that verse to mean: *Come to Christ and get fixed immediately. If you struggle after you come to Christ, then there is something wrong with you.*

In reality, the reference to “new” is related to quality, not to time. In Christ we are a new

creation with a new quality of life that takes time to achieve. Perfection is not possible in this life and healing is often not instantaneous.

Deliverance, for the most part, is a process. As Christians we are not promised a struggle-free existence. John 16:33 states, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” Far more often, deliverance serves as a revival helping us reach a stable place where we can start with a clean slate unhindered by the past.

I am not saying that God cannot instantly deliver people from whatever they submit to His lordship. I have benefited from instant healing in two areas with which I struggled. But that was after years of working on those issues. In no way did being delivered mean that I was through struggling with temptation or sin in general. But today, I can honestly say that the two areas I mentioned have never resurfaced.

As ministers we must understand that deliverance is a tool God can and does use, but it does not eliminate one’s need for accountability, remove the possibility of temptation, or lessen the ongoing relational needs of a person battling homosexuality. People in the church want the hard cases to be solved quicker so they do not need to bother with them long term. It is easier on us when someone simply gets saved or delivered. Then we do not need to fulfill our role to help them, which might be inconvenient for us. We need to get over it.

Understanding the Role of Genetics

The world has a simple answer for homosexuality: genetics. If we blame everything on our genes, we can justify living in any condition that we are thought to be born into. Rabbi Benzion Milecki, in his March 2000 article, “Loving Is Not Approving,” wrote: “For those who believe in One God, it is clear that our Maker was as aware of human frailties thousands of years ago as we are at the dawn of the 21st century. He certainly hasn’t been awaiting correction for thousands of years by an ‘enlightened’ science.”¹

Over the past 50 years numerous studies have been done to try to find a positive link to genetics. All of those studies, including the three most acclaimed in the early 1990s, have been refuted by the scientific community, gone unreplicated, and provided more evidence that homosexuality is mostly developmental in nature. (For an in-depth look at the relationship

between biology and human behavior as it relates to the development of homosexuality, see Dr. Christina Powell's summer 2007 Enrichment journal article, "Biology and Human Behavior: Do Genes Determine Destiny?" A video summary of her article is also available online at <http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200703/index.cfm>. Look for Powell's article in the column articles section.)

Change Is Possible

First Corinthians 6:11 is a verse I have clung to for 15 years. It says, in part, "And such were some of you" (KJV). This is a 2,000-year-old evidence that God has been changing and freeing those who are committed to a lifestyle of obedience to Christ and self-denial.

Homosexuality is changeable, but change is a process, not an event. If and when a same-sex-attracted person decides to leave homosexuality, do not place a time frame on him. A great deal goes into the journey toward wholeness. Simply stopping a behavior does not free someone from the chains of sin.

Also, remember that the opposite of homosexuality is not heterosexuality; it is holiness. Heterosexuality takes a few years and a developmental process to occur. It takes time for one to work through all that led him to develop a homosexual identity, and it will take time to develop heterosexually. This means he may not start dating or decide to get married. It may simply mean he learns to live as God intended.

Reaching Out Break the silence

Because sin hides in secrecy, one huge step in reaching out is learning to talk openly and honestly about homosexuality in your church and home. I love talking to youth about this issue in their youth groups or Sunday School classes because they often do not get biblically sound and culturally relevant information on homosexuality. They learn most of what they know from their friends, MTV, and movies.

Parents need to talk with their children about sex. Children and adults alike need to be getting more information on sex from church than from school or television. I am not talking about being inappropriate or explicit, but relevant, redemptive, and educational. Ask, *What will it hurt to talk about it? Who will it hurt if you don't?* I wish I had learned about homosexuality from those

who were surrendered to God rather than experiencing it firsthand. (See the article in this issue on page 144, "Your Church Should Be Into Sex Education" by Richard D. Dobbins.)

Ministers must stop talking so much about what is wrong with sex and how bad it is. When all we talk about is what we are against, then the best part — what God is for — is left out. Children are tired of hearing how bad sex is, and it simply makes them want to try it.

Have a plan

What are you going to do about homosexuality? What are you going to help your church do?

One of my favorite stories is about Church of the Open Door in San Rafael, California. We often refer to it as Church of the Open Sore because they attract so many hurting people. One of our oldest Exodus Member Ministries, New Hope — a yearlong residential program for men and women — is affiliated with this church.

Each year on the first Sunday when new residents of the live-in program arrive, Pastor Mike Riley asks them to come to the altar, line up, and then he says, "These are the men and women who are committing to leave homosexuality this year. What are you as a church going to do about it?" Then the congregation comes forward and prays for the brave men and women standing vulnerable before them and God.

Be vulnerable, develop a relationship

My pastor often says he wishes we could all walk into church with signs proclaiming our top 10 sins hanging around our necks so no one would be left to judge. People coming out of homosexuality and into the church already feel they are less of a person than those who are already attending. Moreover, they are sometimes made to feel that way. We need to create an atmosphere of transparency. People of all sin backgrounds (that is all of us) need to feel the freedom to share who they are and where they have been. Revelation 12:11 states, "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony" (KJV).

If we are going to model *wholeness* and *relationship* — both are needed — to those seeking freedom, we must be vulnerable. You must remember to communicate and live as if you were also once desperate and lost. No one can live up to perfection, and people need to know you are human, too. I used to tell those I ministered to, "Never trust someone who does not walk with a limp." We all have a story. Use



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*If you want
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that story to help others.

If you want to speak into someone's life, the best way is to be in relationship with him. Drive-by advice is fine, but a true relationship brings the ability to love and challenge. Knowing someone and developing a relationship with him is the key to helping someone come out of homosexuality.


Conclusion

I did not choose to have homosexual feelings and temptations. I did choose to act on them. Later, I chose to submit them to the lordship of Christ. Jesus' words to His disciples from Matthew 16:24 ring in my head daily, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Freedom is a daily choice for all of us. We all experience God's grace, and we must offer God's grace to those to whom we minister.

Ministering to those affected by homosexuality is specific, but it is not complicated. Whether you have struggled with this particular sin or another, you have everything it takes to make



an eternal difference in the life of someone trapped in bondage to sexual sin.

It is my sincere prayer that you will choose to pray for opportunities to reach out in grace, build relationships, and offer compassionate ministry to those who so desperately need, and want, freedom. 

NOTE

1. Benzoni Milecki, "Loving Is Not Approving," *Australian Jewish News*, March 2000.

Valuing the Beginning of Life: Bioethics and Premarital Counseling

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By helping newly engaged couples navigate potentially difficult family-planning issues, pastors have the privilege of laying the stones for the foundation of a Christian home.

One of the great joys of pastoral ministry is the privilege of guiding people through major life milestones such as joining two lives in matrimony. During premarital counseling, pastors have opportunity to educate young couples about many issues related to married life, including bioethical issues. Let's explore the bioethical issues that couples starting married life will face and ways that teaching about these issues can be integrated into premarital counseling.

Cultural Versus Biblical Perspectives On Childbearing

Couples approaching their wedding day are often wrapped up in the excitement of sharing life together as husband and wife. The thought of becoming parents and sharing life together as a family often feels like a distant possibility, an era of life that is yet to come. However, premarital counseling provides an ideal opportunity to

discuss issues related to childbearing. Such issues include choices regarding the timing of childbearing and the desired number of children as well as issues related to reproductive technologies.

The age of the couple being married will influence their views on the ideal timing of childbearing. A couple in their early to mid-20s may have goals they hope to accomplish before starting a family. For example, one or both may desire to complete schooling or establish a career and achieve a certain degree of financial stability before having children. Couples marrying in their 30s may have accomplished educational, career, and financial goals and be ready to have children.

While there is wisdom in a couple waiting to have children while they strengthen their relationship as a couple, children should never be viewed as a burden or impediment to achieving other goals. A biblical view of childbearing is that "sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him" (Psalm 127:3). One of God's first commands to mankind was to "be fruitful and increase in number" (Genesis 1:28). If we take the long view of life, the ability to have children who will touch the future after our days on earth have ended is one of God's great gifts to us. Children bring meaning to our lives that transcends the constraints of our limited life spans.

Unfortunately, the urgent often supersedes the important. The press of present goals can get in the way of achieving lifelong goals. The goal of raising godly children can be pushed aside by the concerns of the moment. Our culture places high value on outward appearances and career success. In such an environment, the sacrifices that motherhood demands from a woman,



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such as the physical changes that come during pregnancy and the diminished time available for career advancement that follow after a child is born, can persuade a woman to delay or avoid having children. Similarly, the high value our culture places on accumulating material wealth can dissuade a man from embracing fatherhood until he feels that he has sufficiently increased his earning potential.

For the Christian couple, every child is planned by God, even if his birth was unplanned by his parents (Psalm 139:15,16; Ephesians 1:4–14). While it may be advisable for a couple to take measures to attempt to control the number of children and the spacing between children, a Christian couple must be prepared to love and accept any child that comes along.

As a part of premarital preparation, couples can be encouraged to view children as blessings from God and counseled to take the responsibility of raising children seriously. Finally, couples can be advised to approach decisions about family planning with prayer (James 1:5), honest communication with each other (Ephesians 4:25), and respect for the sanctity of human life (Jeremiah 1:5).

What Makes Human Life Sacred?

When we speak of the sanctity of human life, we are affirming the fact human life is sacred. Sacred means belonging to God. Human life belongs to God. “For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord” (Romans 14:7,8). Human life is eternal (Matthew 25:46). Furthermore, human life is sacred because we are made in the likeness of God (Genesis 5:1). Human life is unique from all other life created by God in that Christ came down from heaven and became a man (John 1:14) to save us (1 Timothy 1:15). In turn, we have been given the freedom to choose to believe in Christ and be reconciled to God (John 3:16). The gospel underscores the sanctity of human life. Since the Bible is so clear on the sacredness of human life, the question we must ask is: When does life begin?

When Does Life Begin?

When did you, as a person, enter into existence? As a toddler taking your first wobbly steps, were you you? When you were a one-day-old infant? Did you exist while in your mother’s womb when your heart first started to beat in rhythm?

Did you exist when you were only a ball of cells containing the unique genetic code that defined your lifelong physical characteristics? As an unfertilized egg, had your life yet begun?

Human development is a continuum from conception to the end of life. A blastocyst (ball of cells that later form an embryo and a placenta) differs greatly from a toddler snacking on cereal and drinking apple juice at the family’s kitchen table. However, if we need to draw a line to mark the beginning of a new life, that line is most logically drawn at conception. An unfertilized egg does not yet possess the full complement of genetic code needed to define a unique individual. The moment an egg is fertilized, however, a new individual with a unique genetic code is formed. Given time and the proper nourishment, that single cell is capable of developing into an adult human being comprised of more than ten trillion specialized cells.

The Bible affirms that God’s presence and purpose for our lives are established while we are still in our mother’s womb (Psalm 139:12-16; Luke 1:39-44). Thus, we must conclude that God values unborn children.

Eve: Fearfully And Wonderfully Made

The Psalmist appreciated how the human body is “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14).

One dramatic example of the wonders of the human body is the cyclical rhythm of female fertility and the capacity of a woman’s body to protect and nurture new human life. A basic understanding of female biology is invaluable for the man preparing for marriage. While such an understanding can come from a science textbook, a pastor conducting premarital counseling can provide the moral guidance needed for making wise choices about reproductive issues. Aspects

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of female fertility that are important to understand in relation to family planning decisions include ovulation, alterations in the endometrial lining, and hormone regulation of fertility, pregnancy and breastfeeding. A healthy man is always fertile because sperm are continuously being produced within his body at the rate of about one thousand per second. A healthy female, however, is only fertile about one week out of every month, typically producing one egg per monthly cycle.

Ovulation is the process

by which an egg is produced and discharged from an ovarian follicle. An egg will die if it is not fertilized within 24 hours of ovulation. Conception occurs when the sperm fertilizes the egg. Ovulation occurs once a month, but a female is considered fertile when she has cervical fluid that can keep sperm alive as they wait for the mature egg to be released. Sperm can stay alive in a fertile woman's body for up to 5 days. Once ovulation has passed, conception is not possible for the remainder of a woman's cycle.

Hormone-based birth control methods primarily work by preventing ovulation, although they also have a secondary effect of inhibiting transport of sperm through the cervix by thickening cervical mucus, thus preventing fertilization of the egg. Barrier birth control methods prevent sperm from fertilizing the egg. Fertility awareness methods detect changes in basal body temperature and cervical mucus that signal ovulation. This information can be used to prevent or achieve pregnancy.

Ovulation is suppressed in a woman who is nourishing her baby exclusively by breastfeeding, making breastfeeding a method of naturally

spacing children. However, if a woman chooses to feed her baby on a schedule or offers bottles and pacifiers to her baby in addition to nursing, she may begin ovulating again soon after birth.

Once an egg is fertilized, the next discrete step in the journey from conception to birth is implantation. About a week after conception, the fertilized egg reaches the uterus after making the journey down the fallopian tube. The fertilized egg has now become a ball of cells known as a blastocyst. If the blastocyst can successfully implant in the endometrial lining of the uterus, then human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG) will be activated. This is the hormone detected by pregnancy tests. Normally, by this point in the woman's cycle, the endometrial lining has thickened so the embryo has a warm, nutrient-rich place in which to implant. Some birth control methods, such as the intrauterine device (IUD), sometimes work by impeding implantation, although their primary mechanism of action is preventing fertilization.

Making Informed Decisions About Family Planning

One of the most important principles of ethical medical care is informed consent. Informed consent means a patient accepts a proposed decision or medical intervention after first understanding the nature of the decision or medical intervention; the reasonable alternatives available; and the risks, benefits, and uncertainties related to the medical intervention; and any available alternatives. In keeping with the principle of informed consent, a couple making a choice about birth control should make sure they understand the risks and benefits of the type of birth control they are considering.

Instead of recommending or condemning a certain form of birth control, I prefer to suggest questions a couple should ask when making a decision about family planning. Technological advances may change the family planning options available to a couple in the future, but questions regarding the choice of birth control methods are timeless. If you teach a couple to ask the right questions as a part of premarital preparation, the couple will be capable of making wise choices both now and in the future as new options become available.

Good questions for a couple to ask their doctor about birth control methods include questions about a method's mechanisms of action. Does the method work by preventing

It is important that both husband and wife are at peace with whatever method of family planning, if any, the couple has chosen.

ovulation, by preventing fertilization, or by preventing implantation of a fertilized egg, or through combined mechanisms of action? Is the mechanism of action unclear or unknown? Can the mechanism of action vary depending on certain factors, such as how and when the method is employed or the presence of other health conditions? Other good questions to ask a doctor regarding a birth control method involve future health considerations. How effective is this method? Is the method easily reversible when pregnancy is desired? Can the method adversely affect future fertility? Does this method lead to a higher risk of ectopic pregnancy? What are potential side effects and health concerns for those who employ this method of birth control?

Good questions for a couple to ask themselves regarding a birth control method they are considering using include: Are we comfortable enough with this method to use it faithfully so the method will be effective for us? Do we understand how to correctly employ this method? Do we want to have children (or more children) in the future? Are we both happy with this choice? Does this choice present a health risk for either of us? Does this choice conflict with our beliefs concerning the sanctity of human life?

Respect For The Needs Of Each Spouse

Helping a couple learn how to make a wise choice regarding a family planning method fits into the broader category of counseling couples to respect the needs of one another when making decisions within their marriage. The apostle Paul reminds believers in 1 Corinthians 7:3–6 of the importance of meeting each other's needs for physical intimacy within the marriage. It is important that both husband and wife are at peace with whatever method of family planning, if any, the couple has chosen.

Similarly, health considerations should be part of the decision. In some cases, a woman may have a medical condition that would make a future pregnancy a risk. In other cases, certain birth control methods may place a woman at greater risk for blood clots, stroke, and heart attacks. The principle outlined by the apostle Paul should be applied within the marriage relationship: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3,4). Neither

spouse should feel pressured by the other to undergo a procedure or use a birth control method that is not in the best interests of his or her long-term health.

As a couple learns to work through the challenging topic of family planning while respecting each other and respecting the beginning of life, they will be taking an important step toward strengthening

their relationship. Someday their strong marital relationship may become the foundation on which a godly Christian family can be built. By helping newly engaged couples navigate these potentially difficult issues, pastors have the privilege of laying the stones for the foundation of a Christian home. Strong homes make for strong churches and an effective witness to the world around us. What great joy can come from building God's kingdom one couple at a time. 🍷



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Encourage engaged couples to view children as blessings from God and to take the responsibility of raising them seriously.





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Since the first century, the ransom theory was the reigning model used to describe how sin was forgiven.

Anselm, Abelard, and the Atonement

G.K. Chesterton is reputed to have said that no one is witty enough to invent a new heresy. Chesterton's theory helps us remember that today's battles are not new. What goes around comes around.



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A subject that continually haunts the church is the nature of the Atonement. This debate began in the 11th century and continues today. The protagonists were Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) and Peter Abelard (1079–1142).

Anselm of Canterbury

Anselm was one of history's great theologians. He was known and loved for his holiness. He "combined charm with firmness, gentleness with strength, sanctity with sagacity," notes church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette. "Humble in spirit, without ambition for personal power or preferment, he was painfully conscious of his unworthiness in the sight of God."¹

Anselm was born in Northwest Italy. At age 24, against his father's wishes, he traveled to France and settled at Bec monastery in Normandy. There he committed himself to theology, teaching, and writing. Because of his reputation, on three separate occasions, he was invited to cross the English Channel to preach and minister.

He was not ambitious for worldly fame or position. Instead, he sought a quiet life of prayer and reading. At age 60, however, he reluctantly answered a call to become England's Archbishop of Canterbury. Anselm "was so violently opposed to the move," notes D.O. Fuller, "that churchmen had to force him physically to receive the ordination."²

Anselm was reticent to receive ordination because his new position would put him in conflict with the English monarch. He was unsure who would control the English church. Anselm felt that the Pope, not the English sovereign, should control the English church. For these views he spent much time exiled in Europe.

His most important work, *Cur Deus Homo* — Why God Became Man or Why God-man? (1098) — deals with the reasons for the Incarnation and Atonement. *Cur Deus*

Homo describes *how* the Atonement effected the forgiveness of sin. It also explains why God needed to become man to secure our forgiveness. Could God have forgiven sin without the Atonement? If so, why did He become man and die? “With *Cur Deus Homo*, ‘Why God became Man,’ ” notes Phillip Schaff, “a new chapter opens in the development of the doctrine of the Atonement.”³ Anselm was the first theologian to tackle these questions.⁴

Prior to Anselm, Christians believed that Christ died to forgive sin. This is called the *ransom theory*. Since the first century, the ransom theory was the reigning model used to describe how sin was forgiven. Christ died to ransom us from the devil, and one result was the forgiveness of sin.

After careful examination of Scripture, Anselm concluded that the issue was more complicated. The Atonement secured forgiveness by *satisfying* the demands of God’s justice. Man is sinful, and God is just. Because God is just, He must punish sin. Because God is holy, He cannot forgive at the expense of justice. God must punish sin before He can forgive it. God would have compromised His moral perfections had He forgiven without satisfying justice. That is why Jesus needed to die on the cross His death satisfied the demands of God’s justice so sin could be forgiven.

Underneath Anselm’s theory is a radical view of sin. Latourette describes Anselm’s reasoning this way: “While none but man can make the satisfaction to compensate for man’s sin, only God can make that satisfaction, for the satisfaction must be greater than anything in the universe except God. That satisfaction, therefore, must be made by one who is both God and man.” That is how Anselm answered the question: Why did God need to become flesh and die?

Anselm’s *satisfaction theory* assumes that God is more than love. God is also justice. His justice is holy, inflexible, and its demands must be fully satisfied before He can forgive. Anselm’s theory also assumes that man is sinful, and his sin is so serious that only a divine sacrifice — one infinite in value — can satisfy the demands of God’s justice for sins infinite in their severity.

Anselm was a monumental thinker with a penetrating mind. He had great clarity of thought and was a precise writer. When he died, at age 75, he was wrestling with another theological issue — how to reconcile human freedom and God’s sovereignty.

Later, Aquinas (1225–1274) added to and refined Anselm’s theory. Anselm’s theory, however, reached its mature form under the preaching of the Protestant Reformers in the 16th and 17th century.

Peter Abelard

Peter Abelard, 35 years Anselm’s junior, was one of the most conspicuous people in Europe. He was Anselm’s moral, spiritual, and theological opposite. Anselm was a theologian; Abelard was a critic. Anselm was cautious and deliberate; Abelard was impulsive. Anselm sought seclusion; Abelard sought notoriety and fame. Anselm was famed for his holiness; Abelard earned his reputation from public teaching and preaching, at which he excelled. “A man of daring thought and restless disposition,” notes Schaff, “[Abelard] was unstable in his mental beliefs and morally unreliable. ... He was like the barren fig tree with the promise of leaves and nothing more.”⁵

In the 11th century, the Cathedral School at Paris was the center of European learning. Abelard, in his 30s, was appointed dean of the school. Bright and charismatic, he was at the top of the educational ladder.

“His dialectic powers were ripe,” notes Schaff. “Where arguments failed, the teacher’s imagination and rhetoric came to the rescue. His books were read not only in the schools and convents, but also in castles and guild houses. William of Thierry said they [his books] crossed the seas and overleaped the Alps. When he visited towns, the people crowded the streets and strained their necks to catch a glimpse of him. His remarkable influence over men and women must be explained not by his intellectual depth so much as by a certain daring and literary art and brilliance. He was attractive of person, and Bernard may have had this in mind when he says, Abelard was outwardly a John though he had the heart of a Herod.”⁶

Enter Heloise

Peter Abelard’s downfall came through his love affair with Heloise. The first lady of Paris, a reigning teen beauty, Heloise was one of his students. She lived in Paris with her uncle, Fulbert. Bright and precocious, she sought out Abelard for private tutoring. “The meetings between pupil and tutor became meetings of lovers. Over open books, as Abelard wrote, more words of love were passed than of discussion and more kisses than instruction.”⁷ Soon Heloise



**Anselm of Canterbury
(1033–1109)**

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discovered that she was pregnant, and the most famous theologian-philosopher of the age was the baby's father.

Fearing social reprisal, Abelard moved Heloise to his sister's home in Brittany where the baby was born. Later, he married Heloise in secret. In the 11th century theologian-philosophers were celibate. So, Abelard refused to openly acknowledge his marriage or live with Heloise. She joined a convent where Abelard came for secret nocturnal visits.

Abelard's relationship with Heloise angered Fulbert. Seeking to avenge the honor of his niece, he hired ruffians who broke into Abelard's apartment late one night and castrated him. Abelard was 38.

With his career ruined, and his life in shambles, Abelard retired to a monastery where he continued to write, teach, and lecture. Heloise continued to send him impassioned correspondence, but Abelard did not reciprocate her affection and ardor. He was a selfish man. His treatment of Heloise was shameful. Even in later life he showed no signs of repentance in his writings.

Abelard's Theology

Like Anselm, Abelard wrote extensively on the Atonement. Curiously, Abelard did not reference Anselm's work. Like Anselm, he also rejected the ransom theory. Instead, he presented a new theory that is the father of today's *moral influence* theory.

Schaff sums up Abelard's understanding of the Atonement this way: "Christ not only did not pay any price to the devil for man's redemption, he also did not make satisfaction to divine justice and appease God's wrath. ... In the life and death of the Redeemer, God's purpose was to manifest His love, and thus to stir up love in the breast of man, and to draw man by love back to Himself. God might have redeemed man by a word, but He chose to set before man an exhibition of His love in Christ. Christ's love constitutes the merit of Christ."⁸

Theologians agree that the love God revealed at the cross should have a profound influence on behavior. No one rejects this part of Abelard's theory. What orthodox theologians reject is the idea that this is the heart of the Atonement, a full explanation of the Atonement, or that it adequately explains how God forgives sin.

At the bottom of Abelard's theory is an unwillingness to grapple with the severity of

sin, the necessity of blood sacrifice, and the importance of the satisfaction of God's justice in the divine drama of redemption.

The Conflict

The Atonement debate did not end with Anselm and Abelard. In many ways, Abelard was the prototypical liberal while Anselm was the prototypical theological conservative. Today's Unitarians, and many liberal Christians, continue to side with Abelard.

"The views men take of the Atonement are largely determined by their fundamental feelings of need — what men most long to be saved from," observes B.B. Warfield.⁹ Abelard rejected Augustine's doctrine of original sin.¹⁰ Where there is little sin, there is little need to satisfy God's justice. By contrast, Anselm deeply felt his need and spiritual poverty. He not only saw the horrors of sin in Scripture, but he also felt it deep in his heart. The combination of clear biblical teaching and the inner testimony of his own need drove Anselm to the satisfaction theory of the Atonement.

Abelard was content to let God be love and nothing else, while Anselm's theory assumed the complex God revealed in the Bible. To Anselm, God was more than love. He was also justice, holiness, and righteous.

Like Abelard, Anselm believed that God is love. But unlike Abelard, he did not believe that love is God. He was not willing to deify love.

Lessons

The story of Anselm and Abelard offers many lessons for the modern pastor. First, in the 11th century, as today, other than the biblical text, the nature of man and the holiness of God are the issues on which the Atonement turns. "Nothing is more startling in the structure of recent theories of atonement," wrote B.B. Warfield, "than the apparently vanishing sense of sin that underlies them."¹¹ Without a clear and prescient understanding of the gravity of sin and its offense to God, the need to satisfy God's justice, as seen by Anselm in Scripture, will be unclear. But, when a believer sees sin through God's eyes, Anselm's satisfaction theory makes sense. Abelard's deficiency was in his unclear view of sin. Anselm's view of sin was more accurate, and it gave life to his theology of Atonement.

A second lesson is that faith must precede knowledge. Augustine taught that we believe to understand. Anselm, as a student of Augustine,



also believed to understand. The satisfaction theory is repugnant to reason because it suggests that we all deserve crucifixion. It also suggests that God's justice is as important to God as His love. These ideas do not go well with reason. Those who start with reason will have difficulties with the Atonement. Because Anselm saw satisfaction in Scripture, he believed it. Because he believed, he understood the doctrine.

By contrast, Abelard taught that we know to believe. He only believed what he could first understand. This is why he rejected the doctrine of original sin. To think that anyone should be guilty for the sin of another is against reason. This same thinking also led him to reject the satisfaction theory. How could God put such an emphasis on justice and still be love (1 John 4:16)? Why couldn't He just forgive?

Third, the condition of our heart influences our theology. Doctrinal precision proceeds from a pure heart. Scripture contains many unpleasant, unpopular, and counter-cultural truths. Divided hearts may compromise these teachings to obtain social acceptability. Anselm modeled holiness. By contrast, Abelard's life speaks of a divided heart before God. Ultimately, the condition of each man's heart affected his doctrinal conclusions.

Last, those who insist that God is love and nothing more, seldom experience the love of God that Paul said "surpasses knowledge" (Ephesians 3:19). Abelard's theory of the Atonement spoke much of God's love, but ended by obscuring it. The reason is that the door through which we experience God's love is the severity of

sin, the holiness of God's justice, the depravity of man, and the necessity of a substitutionary, blood sacrifice. He that has been forgiven much loves much.

As Martin Luther said, "God hides His power in weakness, His wisdom in folly, His goodness in severity, His justice in sins, and His mercy in His wrath."¹² God's love works the same way. We must go through these realities, not around them, to discover the riches of God's infinite love.¹³ "Apart from understanding God's wrath against evil," notes G.R. Lewis, "it is impossible to understand the extent of divine love in the incarnation, the extent of Christ's suffering on the Cross, [or] the propitiatory nature of His sacrifice."¹⁴

Almost 1,000 years have passed, but the debate has not. To many, God is still love and that is all. Others are constrained by biblical testimony: God is also light (1 John 1:5), a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29), jealous (Deuteronomy 4:24), and holy (Psalm 99:9). In the end, what we assume about God determines our understanding of the Atonement, and many other doctrines as well.

G.K. Chesterton was right. No one is smart enough to invent a new heresy. That is why it is important to understand the debate between Anselm and Abelard over the Atonement.

History is His Story. 

NOTES

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To many, God is still love and that is all. Others are constrained by biblical testimony: God is also light, a consuming fire, jealous, and holy. What we assume about God determines our understanding of the Atonement.

Organizational Development and the Church

Part One: The Church — A Living System

Both secular organizations and churches face a n urgency to connect with their spheres of influence without compromising their identity and integrity.

What can the church learn from the business arena? This question has dominated my mind for the past several years and holds crucial answers for pastors seeking to communicate and model an eternal gospel amid rapidly changing 21st-century wineskins.

In 2000, I graduated with a master of divinity degree from Kentucky's Asbury Theological Seminary and was commissioned as a United Methodist pastor. After serving churches in West Palm Beach and Fort Pierce, Florida, I was led into the marketplace to be a positive light and utilize my gifts, insights, and experiences to equip persons beyond the walls of the church.

My current work as an organizational development practitioner with a Melbourne, Florida-based health care organization, as well as my consulting services, hinges on the close cousins of *developing talent* and *leading change*. This involves practices and approaches including, but not limited to, systems thinking; leadership development such as small groups, coaching and mentoring; career development; skill-and-performance assessments; and team-building.

Many of these O.D. responsibilities dovetail

with the lessons I learned through seminary studies and pastoral ministry. They embrace many transferable skills and concepts that can impact business, nonprofit, and church contexts. Pastors and church leaders who grow savvy about their use can better unleash the talent in their staff and laity for the sake of the Kingdom, leading their congregations to be agents of change within the culture.

A Living System

My passion is to help shape organizational life in a manner that equips leaders to unleash the greatest potential in them and in those whom they lead. Amid a society of shrinking attention spans and expanding options, both secular organizations and churches face an urgency to connect with their spheres of influence without compromising their identity and integrity. While the mission and purpose of churches differ from most secular businesses or institutions, all entities must realize that their organization represents a living system where the parts and functions interrelate and have positive and negative effects on one another.

"I think it's the role of any good leader of a growing organization to connect the dots.



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That is what a system does," agrees Bob Buford, founder of Leadership Network and author of the popular book, *Half Time*, and its sequel, *Success to Significance*. "It is easy to go on autopilot with the liturgy or ritual, saying it is our work to maintain a venerable tradition. And people get busy in the *doing* of things. You can fill your day with doing things that are not hundredfold multipliers. Many pastors are not drawn to the responsibility of changing from *doer* to *leader*."

Both sacred and secular institutions are finding that leadership that connects the dots and intentionally develops the talent in the trenches makes all the difference. This *talent* represents the persons that churches and corporations are setting loose to impact their *customers*. O.D. is about facilitating an ongoing change process embraced by healthy entities who desire to remain ahead of the curve concerning their customers' needs; and such health is contingent on healthy leaders sporting both formal and informal titles.

"If we believe the message that we proclaim, then it is essential that we connect with people, whatever the culture and methodology," says B.G. Nevitt, senior pastor of Glad Tidings Assembly of God in Decatur, Illinois. "I deal with a biker culture and a corporate culture. If we're not connecting, we will not reach anybody."

Overcoming Inertia

At times an organization's successful past in facilitating such connections sets it up to struggle with facing the dynamics of the present age. Dan Betzer, senior pastor of First Assembly of God in Fort Myers, Florida, compares the challenges facing the Assemblies of God to that of "massive corporations that make bylaws to protect them-selves. Those very bylaws come back around to bite you and make it impossible to change."

Betzer, who feels the AG's 1 to 1 1/2 percent annual stateside growth is a snail's pace when compared to the growth taking place worldwide, cites an example of how middle management can take over any large organization. Serving on the Executive Presbytery for the AG, Betzer observes that "what happens on that board and what happens in the field are two different things. The anointing that comes out of that board, by the time it gets through to the field, has gone through all the bureaucracies that protect their own positions. Young pastors are saying, 'We don't want to go through all this

bureaucracy; let's get to the purpose, why we are here.' "

Maintaining a steady eye on such clear purpose that percolates through every layer of an organization — regardless of size — to mitigate bureaucratic drift and the grind of doing things begins with senior leadership. "We become like those we run with," says Dary Northrop, senior pastor of Timberline Assembly of God in Fort Collins, Colorado. "I want our leadership team to be informed, trained, encouraged, and nurtured. Many of the blunders in church life happen because we did not take time on the front end to prepare people for effective ministry."

O.D. principles, says Nancy Ortberg, a church and business consultant, are entirely relevant for churches who want to consistently avoid those ubiquitous blunders and offer excellent leadership.

"Churches are communities, and communities are organizations," says Ortberg, whose husband John is author of several popular Christian books and has served on staff at Saddleback Church and Willow Creek. "It's puzzling to me when people try to make a dichotomy between the two. A church needs to be run well; for the people in leadership, that is part of their calling. Things such as clarity of vision, the way we treat people, and the way we do our work together, are essential. I think churches ought to be the best run organizations in all of the community."

Al Winseman, a former United Methodist pastor who is now Gallup's global practice leader for faith communities, adds that O.D. principles "hit at the heart of what it means to be the church."

"The church is about transforming lives through the power of the gospel," says Winseman, whose book *Growing an Engaged Church* was released by Gallup this past spring. "I believe the church has a mandate to do that, using the best, most effective means possible. We must do everything we can to further the mission of Jesus Christ here on earth. If we do not bring the best of our learning, research, and methodologies to bear on this, we're failing."

Winseman reminds us how in Jesus' Parable of the Sower, some seeds fall along the path, thorns, rocky soil, and good soil. "It's our responsibility to create good soil," he believes. "For millennia, farmers have been using whatever science they can to improve the quality of the soil to grow better and bigger crops. That

Both sacred and secular institutions are finding that leadership that connects the dots and intentionally develops the talent in the trenches makes all the difference.





Developing a healthy church system with an eternal but culturally relevant focus requires the investment of a great deal of time and energy.

is what we ought to be doing. The church is the soil in which the Word of God is planted. We know there are good soil churches where fruit can be produced abundantly once seeds are sown. It is our responsibility as leaders to repair the soil. That is where the things we have learned about coaching, mentoring, and metrics come to bear."

Buford offers the concept of innovation as one example where churches and businesses face the same needs in continuing to connect with their customers.

"Does the church need to innovate? I submit that it needs to do it continuously. The customer and the external circumstances change all the time," he says.

Continuing, Buford defers to the late business speaker and author Peter Drucker and his proposition that religious organizations conceive of three domains: the eternal, the culture, and the tools.

"In the eternal domain, things do not change," Buford explains. "That is why a daily Bible study makes good sense 2,000 years after the Bible was written; there is truth that is eternal. The culture changes from one place to another place and from one time to another time; the mission of any business or organization is to create a customer, and to adapt whatever it is they do to meet the needs of individual customers. The third domain is the tools they use to meet those needs."

Passing on the DNA

An obvious fruit of First Assembly of Fort Myers' eternal focus — matched with the ability to respond to the current culture with the right tools — is the congregation's growth. Weekly worship attendance has skyrocketed from approx-

imately 600 when Betzer arrived 21 years ago to about 5,500 today, across six campuses. Betzer credits much of the growth to intentional development efforts toward the pastoral staff that have cemented a unified purpose.

"We are not all going off in different directions, and I think we maximize the talents of all of these people," he says. "If a team of six Clydesdales all pull in six different directions, it will not be good."

First Assembly's staff — at all levels — is passing on the core leadership's DNA to the congregation at large, Betzer continues. "Our music pastor, Dave Thomas, has been with me 19 years; he is more than a music director, he is the pastor of the choir. He has instilled into those precious people what we are about, and they are a praying, interceding band of believers who stand behind the pulpit and lift it up. It is contagious when leadership makes clear what is expected and how to bring it about."

For Nevitt at Glad Tidings, developing a healthy church system with an eternal but culturally relevant focus requires the investment of a great deal of time and energy.

"I take many people to lunch. I take them to breakfast," Nevitt notes. "I want to pour some passion and vision into someone's life, and let him know where we are wanting to go. What I see time and time again as I do this is people want to be a part of something bigger. I do not recruit to a job description, and I like heartbeat better than vision. I often say, 'I wish you could see my heart.'"

Similar to Betzer's leadership team, Nevitt's staff is highly relational and teeming with longevity. "My youth pastor, for example, has been with me for more than 15 years. For a youth guy that is an eternity. My minister of



Pontius Puddle



music, more than 14 years. They call me 'Dad,' their kids call me 'Poppy,' and my wife 'Nana.' Out of those relationships comes trust and loyalty. We can look at one another and almost know what the other person is thinking."

Most of Glad Tidings' lay leadership has been in place for many years as well. "They do not always agree on specific action steps, Nevitt admits, "but our hearts blend together because we pour into one another's lives. When our administrative deacons gather to deal with church business, it is as much relational as it is business. They stretch me; I stretch them. Some church boards have an adversarial dynamic. Here, we are collaborators."

Talent Leads to Treasure

Winseman says as churches develop their staff and lay leaders it is essential for pastors to drive home an understanding of vocational stewardship, or stewardship of all of life.

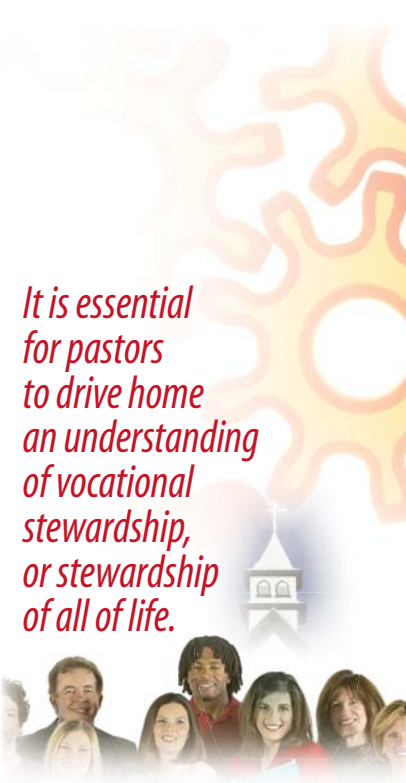
"Once one decides to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, stewardship is not an option," he asserts. "People often think of stewardship as

just money. It is about time, talent, *and* treasure. From our standpoint, if you get the time and talent right, the treasure takes care of itself."

In the remaining three parts of this series, I will focus on three distinct areas of O.D. that hold great value for churches seeking to maximize talent to help persons invest in eternal treasure by sharing additional perspectives from business and church leaders.

Part two will examine leadership development through clustering pockets of emerging leaders into *communities of practice*, a prevalent learning tool in the business field with great potential to resonate with a church's small-groups framework. The third article will look at how one-on-one coaching and mentoring play vital roles in developing individual leaders.

Finally, part four will examine the importance of leading change in a congregation, and how pastors and lay leaders can do this effectively by imitating history's ultimate Change Agent — who was passionately eternal in His earthly ministry, powerfully relevant, and knew which tool to apply at the right moment. 🌀



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Ministry Wives in the Workforce: Balancing Job, Family, and Church Responsibilities

The biggest challenge is internal. When you begin to feel resentful, it is a sign that the issue needs to be resolved in your heart.

Q: My husband and I pastor a church that is unable to support us financially. I work full-time to help with family expenses. I want to do my part, but I have become stressed out, overwhelmed, and disconnected from the church. We cannot make it without my income, but I am beginning to feel resentful of this obligation.

A: Even though your situation is challenging, you are in good company. Nearly 60 percent of ministers' wives are in the workforce and are trying to balance job, family, and church responsibilities.

Some pastors' wives desire to work outside the home. These women have made a choice to pursue their

passion and are more likely to report positive feelings and a sense of well-being. Others, like yourself, must work because of financial needs. Women in this group are more likely to struggle with time demands and the frustration that comes with unmet expectations. They may feel disconnected from other women who have more time to socialize. Assuming you are praying for God's direction and favor in your circumstances, revisit your employment situation with your husband and explore alternatives. Since your job is full time, would part time be a possibility? Would a different job give you more flexibility? Is working out of your home a possibility? Is telecommuting an option? Discouragement sets in when we assume we are stuck and without options. If you have difficulty coming up with choices, ask a trusted outside source for input. You may have missed an alternative.

Explore the possibility of your husband supplementing the family income. This would need to be discussed with the church leadership team. In most cases church boards are empathetic to financial needs and concerns. They may even have some ideas or solutions.

The biggest challenge for you will be internal. When you begin to feel resentful, it is a sign that the issue needs to be resolved in your heart. Discuss your feelings with a trusted friend or mentor. Pray with your spouse and others about your options and your future.

Use this situation to draw into a closer relationship with the Lord who is in charge of every area of your life.

Adjust your expectations. In addition to the fact you are



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limited in your humanity, keep in mind that time is fixed and finite. Prayerfully prioritize your goals, letting go of obligations that are beyond your capacity to fulfill. Turn your full attention to goals you can realistically accomplish under the circumstances. Turn the rest over to the loving Savior. Essentially, it is necessary to give up control and let some things go undone, and trust God to fill the void in His timing. For those of us who like to control things, this is a challenge (Job 37:14–22).

Along with adjusting your expectations, let others help you. As simplistic as this sounds, we often discount this solution. Self-reliance is overrated. Let others bless you with their time and resources and learn to receive these as gifts from God. In this season of your life, God may not completely deliver you from your work responsibilities, but He may send help in other ways — with children, household duties, prayer support. Even chocolate therapy should be received with gratitude.

If you are ministry oriented, find a way to express your calling in creative ways. Rethink the traditional ways of ministering to people. You may not be able to lead a Tuesday morning ladies Bible study, but perhaps you could mentor a young mom in the evenings after the children are in bed. You may not have time to lead the entire children's church program, but you can be an aide in a classroom without committing yourself to very much preparation time. You could even start a Bible study on your lunch hour at work.

Anyone who wears many hats must be diligent about personal stewardship. Stewardship extends beyond financial diligence and involves your physical and emotional health. In other words, take care of your body and your psyche. Healthy self-care and rest are important in developing stamina and resilience.

For whatever reason, God has you in this place for a season. Remember that the same One who calls you also equips you to do the task. Let your circumstances draw you closer to the Source of your strength and the answer to your dilemmas — your loving Heavenly Father. 🌀

If you have questions you would like Gabriele to answer, e-mail them to: enrichmentjournal@ag.org. You can also mail your questions to: Q&A for Pastors' Wives, *Enrichment* journal, 1445 N. Boonville Ave., Springfield, MO 65802-1894.



Lessons From the BRIDGE

Will we
spend money on
surface makeovers
— or invest in
fields that are
ripe unto harvest?

Tom Ruen

As a professor at North Central University, the news of the I-35 bridge collapse — just blocks from our Minneapolis, Minnesota, campus — kept me glued to the television. As the story unfolded, God spoke to my heart about a message He wanted to share — a lesson from this collapse. One cannot equate the fact God wants to speak to us with the causation of an event. But I am convinced He uses such opportunities to say volumes if we will listen.

During the weeks leading up to this tragedy, my heart was burdened concerning the vast

numbers of people in the United States who are into surface makeovers. The world spends more than \$25 billion for cosmetics and toiletries every year. More than 10 million people in the United States have cosmetic surgery, costing more than \$8.5 billion annually. This does not include expenditures on clothing, shoes, jewelry, hair, and other such *surface* touch-up. Looks seem to be everything, and one must be in style, even in sloppy leisure wear.

Finding the fountain of youth consumes the people of the United States. Baby boomers will not easily give up their youth and will spend



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a great deal of money to ward off all signs of aging. In spite of costly lotions and potions, tucks and liposuctions, fitness craze and leisure activities, people are growing older. The grim reaper still knows each person's address. And ultimately, all will also stand before God.

As a Christian, we should note what trends are occurring culturally and be cautious of not losing our Christian worldview. We are not of this world. Growing older is not something to be ashamed of or to run from. Instead, each birthday is one more mile marker on our way toward heaven, our ultimate destination.

Perhaps we have forgotten that we are "just a passin' through." We can spend the money we would have spent on surface makeovers by investing in fields that are ripe unto harvest. Though it could mean that the lines on my face

may look deeper to you because I do not get a facelift, I would rather spend my funds to see someone come to the Lord. That will last for eternity. I am trusting my lines will not.

Resurfacing the human body is a powerful craze in our culture. But what does this have to do with the I-35 bridge collapse? You might recall that a road crew was working on the bridge when it collapsed. What was it doing? Resurfacing. The workers were not dealing with the structural problems of the bridge; in fact, they were oblivious to these defects. The crew was only adding a layer of new asphalt. May we as Christian leaders not be involved in such shortsightedness regarding our churches or ourselves.

A trend also seems to be emerging regarding resurfacing in churches. I find it interesting that the students I work with at North Central University can see right through resurfacing activities. One student recently said, "Dr. T., why do churches make crazy changes? They light candles, or put out couches for us to sit on, or make coffee and put in coffee cup holders, or dress down. They think we like moving slides behind the worship music."

I was surprised. I thought this generation would appreciate these things. But then this student continued, "We do not want surface stuff. We need relationships. We need people who love and care for us. We are sick of programs and things that do not count. We want to see God in action and hear a good sermon that will keep us going into the next week."

As God speaks to us through the I-35 catastrophe, let's listen carefully. Cosmetic surgery will not make the church relevant to the world today. What makes it relevant is a living God whom people can meet for themselves. We need to think about what the Word of God has to say to our communities. Good communication with a changing society takes effort. Taking time with God and finding out what He wants to say is work. No chatting, blabbing, blogging, and lighting candles will cut it. People today want to know there is a living God who still heals, cares, and will change their lives. If God is alive, they want to see miracles. They long to be set free and to see a powerful God at work.

Let's not do resurfacing when peoples' lives and society have structural flaws. Only One can fix those flaws. Only One can lead this church into being all that our society needs right now. Let's follow closely. ☪



*Cosmetic surgery
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Your Church Should Be Into Sex Education

The church is doing little in a proactive way to help parents bring sex education into the home — where it belongs.

How can the church be morally responsible when it sends its children into the sexually threatening environment of our daily world without the information and biblical training they need to win the battle for their sexual purity? Our world is too sexually dangerous to subject our children to such risks.

I do not believe the church should offer sex education classes for children. That job belongs to parents. Even though most parents believe that they *should* be talking to their children about sex, many do not know how. Why? In most cases, their parents did not talk to them about sex either. So, where does this irresponsible cycle of sexual silence stop?

The church has a moral obligation to stop this cycle. The church must train parents to be the primary sex educators of their children. Historically, the church has been responsible for imposing much, if not most, of the shame and embarrassment attached to our sexuality. This shame and embarrassment make it difficult for us to talk about sex. It is time that we own this regrettable fact. We need to take the initiative in helping parents teach their children how to be responsible stewards of their sexuality.

Except for the reactive prophetic role of warning against the evils of sexual sins, the church is doing little in a proactive way to help parents bring sex education into the home — where it belongs. In past generations sexual ignorance may have encouraged sexual innocence. Today, no thinking pastor or parent believes this.

In today's society, the onset of puberty is happening at an earlier age. Marriage is being delayed 5 or more years than in previous generations. Young people must manage their sexuality for 15 to 20 years before marriage provides them with a biblical context in which they can safely and morally celebrate it. The church's reluctance to get involved with the sex education of our youth may be a major reason why many of them drop out of church between their 12th and 20th year.



RICHARD D. DOBBINS, PH.D., is a clinical psychologist and founder of EMERGE Ministries, Akron, Ohio. He lives in Naples, Florida.

Unfortunately, many parents are too busy trying to keep their heads above water financially to know how sexually dangerous our world is for children. Even though they read stories in the paper about the abduction of children or see television programs about sexual predators, they find it easier to believe that nothing like this will ever happen to their children.

Parents are aware of the moral deterioration in our society, but they want to believe that their children will somehow escape it. Nevertheless, almost weekly there is a television program informing us about the seductive skills of sexual predators who lie in wait to prey on our children. The church must awaken parents to deal with the sexual realities of the 21st century. The church must also train parents to be the primary sex educators of their children.

Disturbing Facts

How big is the sexual threat lurking daily in our children's world? Here are some facts¹ that will help pastors awaken parents to the urgency of this need:

- In 1998, 14 million pages of pornography were available on the Internet. In 2003, the number had grown to 260 million pages.
- The pornographic industry made \$12 billion in the United States in 2003. (This is more money than the earnings of all the major league baseball, football and basketball franchises in the United States. ABC, CBS, and NBC made less money than the porn industry in the same year.)
- Nine out of 10 8- to 16-year-old boys in our society have viewed some of the 260 million pages of pornography available on the Internet. Most of them discovered porn while doing their homework on a computer.
- Children are spending 65 percent more time on the Internet viewing pornography than they are on game sites.
- Twelve- to 17-year-old males comprise the largest market for Internet pornography.
- Telephone companies estimate that children use the information gained from porn sites to make 70 percent of the 500,000 daily dial-a-porn calls in the United States.
- In 2002, the Girl Scout Research Institute found that 30 percent of teenage girls had been sexually harassed while in a chat room. Only 7 percent shared that information with their parents.
- Children carry their sexual ignorance and

curiosity into chat rooms where they are at high risk for encountering sexual predators.

- The U.S. Department of Justice estimates 77 million of our children are on the Internet.
- Every year sexually transmitted diseases infect 3 million teenagers.

These are a few examples of the high costs our children and youth are paying because the church is negligent. We must remind our children that sex is sacred while also providing them with biblical and practical ways of dealing with their sexual urges before marriage.

Proactive Response

Most pastors are as uncomfortable with these facts as I am. They also know how tragically true they are. We can no longer afford to abdicate the sex education of children in our church to public schools, peers, and pornographers.

The parents in your church realize that the responsibility for the sexual education of their children belongs to them. Most of them, however, do not know how to approach the task — when they should start, what they should say, or how they should say it.

One of the most valuable ministries for children and youth in your church is having competent committed Christians who train parents — from a biblical viewpoint — to be the primary sex educators of their children. I wish my parents had been given this kind of help in their church. You probably wish your parents had, too.

Trying to educate children can be difficult if parents are not comfortable with their own sexuality. However, you can give your children a healthier view of their sexuality than you received from your parents. As you help your children, apply the same disciplines you are teaching them to your own life.

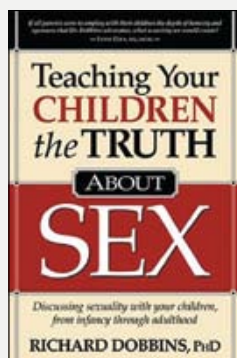
Having pastored for 26 years, I know how difficult it is for the church to deal with the subject of sexuality. Pastors may take some heat from people in their churches who do not think the church should be involved in sex education. Had their churches provided plain-spoken, practical help, however, much misery and pain from poor sexual judgments would not have driven hundreds of people to my office over the years. The stakes are too high for us to allow the lives of another generation to be complicated because we abdicated the sexual education of our children to public school teachers, peers, and pornographers.

You do not want these people to be the primary



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We can no longer afford to abdicate the sex education of children in our church to public schools, peers, and pornographers.



Teaching Your Children the Truth About Sex

RICHARD DOBBINS, Ph.D.
(Siloam Press, 242 pp., hardcover)

This life-changing resource provides a simple and practical approach to sexuality that you will comfortably and easily pass along to your children. Dr. Dobbins lays a solid foundation and explains:

- The human disposition for sexual pleasure — it starts before we are born.
- How you can help your children make sense of and embrace the sexual rules and guidelines you give them.
- How to protect your children from the growing Web-based porn industry and sexual predators
- When and what to say to your child before he/she says “I do.”
- What to teach your children to expect during pregnancy.
- The importance of setting a good example of marital intimacy well into your golden years.
- The spiritual mental and physical benefits of teaching your children the truth about sex.
- How to respond to the most commonly asked questions about delicate issues without stumbling for words.

sex educators of your church’s children. But right now, they are by default. How can a caring church allow these secular sources to take over the sacred task of providing sex education for our children?

God created us male and female. He chose to make us sexual beings. He ordained marriage between a man and a woman. God designed sexual orgasm to hold a husband and wife together in a growing bond of pleasure strong enough to keep them together for life. This bond is intended to be durable enough to give birth to children. It enables couples to stand up to the challenges of parenting and launching children into a future of their own. Your children will not be taught these truths about sex in public schools.

As much as the world is attempting to secularize the subject — sex is sacred. A sacred subject such as sex education should not be given to the public schools. Even though some schools do a better job than others, no public school can legally provide the moral context this sacred subject deserves. It sounds hollow, however, for Christians to criticize the job the public schools are doing when most of us are not doing anything to address this need for our children.

Good self-help books are available, but today’s parents need more than self-help books. They need a safe and sacred place where they can share their common concerns about the sexual future of their children. They need a place where they can find the answers to questions their children will ask once parents discuss the subject with them.

Where are our children raising these questions now? Some are asking their questions in public school sex education classes. Children probably direct most of their questions to their peers in awkward giggling moments when they are alone. Many of our children, however, are asking questions in chat rooms or looking for answers on pornographic sites on the Internet.

If you believe in the sacredness of sexuality, then it must be as upsetting for you as it is for me to see the world trying to secularize sex and turn it into another form of adult entertainment. What can we do about it?

We can limit ourselves to reactive measures such as crying out against the evils of pornography and the secularization of sex. Or, we can proactively offer parents an elective in

our Christian education programs. There a godly, qualified instructor can teach parents how to become the primary sex educators of their children from a biblical point of view.

Providing Resources

Who will teach parents how to teach their children? Select someone who has a deep commitment to Christ. Choose a doctor, nurse, coach, or physical education teacher — anyone who has the educational background to accurately explain sexual physiology to parents. Know the teacher you select well enough to have confidence in the depth of his spiritual commitment. Having confidence in your speaker helps you realize the subject is safe in his hands. Then, trust him with it.

As long as the class is *elective*, those who might find it offensive do not need to attend. Why should a few people who do not want to attend deny others the benefit they are bound to receive from it?

Parents cannot make sexual decisions for their children. They can, however, be sure their children’s decisions are not made out of sexual and biblical ignorance. Wise parents will open a dialog with their children about sex as soon as their children can talk. Through the years, they will accurately and adequately inform their children about this vital part of life. Parents need to help their children see the wisdom of using biblical guidelines for navigating their way through the stormy seas of adolescent sexuality.

Some pastors fear that an open approach to sex education in the church will meet with intense criticism from a few people. This may be true, but once you launch the class most parents in the church will come to your defense and strongly support your initiative. They are desperate. They are aware of the eroticism of our culture. They know they have neither the information nor the understanding they need to help their children.

As a pastor, when you offer a controversial class you put your neck on the line. It is true, the class may be controversial, but the children in your church are at sexual risk every day in our highly eroticized society. We can take the heat for them and their parents ... can’t we? ☺

NOTE

1. My recent book substantiates these statistics: Richard Dobbins, *Teaching Your Children the Truth About Sex* (Lake Mary, Fla.: Siloam, 2006).



■ The Christmas Story Is the Gospel Story

JOHN F. WALKER

TEXT: LUKE 2:8–20

MESSAGE

1. It is a story that must be heard (verse 8).
 - a. For those in the world “field” (see Romans 10:17).
 - b. For those in darkness “by night” (John 3:2,3).
2. It is a story of unusual characteristics (verse 10).
 - a. A message of peace: “Fear not” with God.
 - b. A message of good news: “Good tidings” — lasting.
 - c. A message of joy: “Great joy.”
 - d. A message universal: “To all people” (Romans 3:10,12,23; Isaiah 53:6).
3. It is a story about a certain person (verses 11,12).
 - a. A Savior promised (Micah 5:2).
 - b. A Savior miraculously born (Isaiah 7:14; John 1:14).
 - c. A Savior sent (John 3:16,17).
 - d. A Savior who is the Lord.
 - e. A Savior who is lowly (verse 12; see also 1 Peter 1:18,19; 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 John 1:7).
4. It is a story of heaven’s best for man’s worst (verses 13,14).
 - a. All heaven sang (Hebrews 1:5,6).
 - b. All everywhere shall “one day” bow their knees to Jesus (Philippians 2:9–11).
5. It is a story that must be received by faith (verses 15,16).
 - a. True faith is active faith: “Let us now go” (verse 15).
 - b. True faith is immediate faith: “Now” (verse 15).
 - c. True faith is responsive faith: “Even unto Bethlehem” (verse 15).
 - d. True faith is unhesitating faith: “With haste” (verse 16).
 - e. True faith finds its object in a person: “The Babe” (verse 16; see also John 6:37; Matthew 11:30).
6. It is a story that continues in the lives of those who believe (verses 17–20).
 - a. Such take the message to a needy world: “Made known” (verse 17).
 - b. Such make an impact on hearers: “Wondered” (verse 18).
 - c. Such praise and glorify God — at home, an acid test.
 - d. Such are responsive to the authority of God: “Which were told them” (verse 18).

NOTE

1. Scriptures are KJV.

■ In Search of the Wise Men

WARREN MCPHERSON, Springfield, Missouri

TEXT: MATTHEW 2:1–12

INTRODUCTION

A preacher’s kid came home and announced that he had a part in the Christmas pageant. He was to be one of the three wise guys.

All of us have a part in the most important drama of life; we can all have the role of wise men and wise women.

MESSAGE

1. “Behold, there came wise men” (verse 1).¹
 - a. Magi (our word magician).
 - (1) A title of honor.
 - (2) They possessed skills of science and medicine.
 - (3) Gradually came to mean lesser.
 - b. Seekers of truth. “Blessed are they which do hunger” (Matthew 5:6).
 - (1) They have sensitive hearts and souls.
 - (2) They prize spiritual truth rather than material possessions.
 - c. They sought knowledge, and it paid off. “Seek ye first” (Matthew 6:33).
2. “From the East” (verse 1).
 - a. They were Eastern astronomers who made vast discoveries.
 - (1) Unmistakable signs in the skies.
 - (2) An undeniable star.
 - b. Unusual expectations.
 - (1) A royal birth in Judea.
 - (2) He would rule the world.
 - c. They knew their purpose, and they kept looking up.
3. “To Jerusalem” (verse 1).
 - a. An arduous journey.
 - b. A logical destination.
 - (1) A capital city.
 - (2) A royal city.
 - c. They kept going in spite of obstacles.
4. “Saying, where is he?” (verse 2).
 - a. They shared their faith.
 - b. Their faith scared their hearers.
 - c. They kept telling their story.
5. “For we have seen his star in the east” (verse 2).
 - a. Where is your star?
 - (1) They put their faith to work.
 - (2) They clung to their faith.
 - b. “We have come to worship.”
 - c. They walked by faith, and their faith was rewarded.
6. “They departed into their own country” (verse 12).
 - a. Rejoicing and rewarded.
 - b. “Another way.”

CONCLUSION

Whenever a person has a genuine encounter with the Lord, he will never be the same.

NOTE

1. Scriptures are KJV.

■ Evolution of Prayer

NELSON BRENNER, Pocomoke City, Maryland

TEXT: MARK 11:24

MESSAGE

1. The conception: Desire.
 - a. Prioritize: It all begins with desire. Desire can be natural or spiritual. We must place the spiritual above the natural (Matthew 6:33).
 - b. Peril.
 - (1) Lack of desire causes failure. Desire is the soul of prayer.

Spiritual desire is necessary for growth and progress (1 Peter 2:2).

- (2) Wrong desire or motive will hinder prayer (James 4:3). Solomon's desire was right, and his prayer was answered (2 Chronicles 1:1–13).

2. The connection: Pray.

Prayer evolves from desire. Prayer may be defined as:

- Privilege (Matthew 7:7,8). Jesus made prayer available and access possible to every believer-priest.
- Priority (Luke 18:1). Pray, and do not faint. Prayer is necessary for spiritual growth and effective service.
- Personal (Matthew 6:5–8). Prayer is a matter of the heart and is private between a believer and God. Prayer should be private before public.

3. The condition: Believe.

- Power (Luke 8:41–56). The power of prayer is faith. Doubt and unbelief hinder prayer. "Nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matthew 17:20; see also John 14:12–14).
- Problem (John 20:25–29). No one wants to be a doubting Thomas, but we all struggle at times with doubt. Believing is receiving. It is God's spiritual law (John 11:40).

4. The confirmation: Ye shall have.

- Promise (His). God promises when we pray and believe we shall receive (Luke 11:9,10; 1 John 5:14,15).
- Possession (Our). Prayer should not be an exercise in futility, but a confident expectation. If the answer is delayed, do not give up. Your answer is on the way.

■ God's Call for Christian Service

JERRY R. ROBERTS, Phoenix, Arizona

TEXT: 1 SAMUEL 16:1–13

MESSAGE

1. God's process for this call.

- The call is divine, but God often uses human agencies to express the call (pastors, church leaders, official boards, missions organizations).
- In this Old Testament story, the process started with Samuel (verse 1).
- The first step was hearing God's voice. "The Lord said" (verses 1,2,7,12).
- The next step was obedience. "Samuel did what the Lord said" (verse 4).
- God also speaks through the Spirit (Romans 8:14; see also Acts 8:26–29, 9:10,11, 13:1,2).

2. God's person for this call.

- David was an unlikely candidate for the call of God.
- God looks on the heart, not one's outward appearance (verse 7).
- Wisdom, influence, and noble birth are not required (1 Corinthians 1:26).
- Moses was not eloquent, but slow of speech. God reminded Moses that He is sovereign. Human frailty is not an issue; see Exodus 4:10,11).
- God has a place for all of us based on our obedience and availability (note list of ministry gifts in Ephesians 4:11; Romans 12:3–8).

3. God's preparation for this call.

- David's job was "tending" sheep (verse 11). He lived in isolation.
- David was unaware that God was preparing him for a larger role.
- Paul recognized God's preparation through circumstances (Philippians 1:12).
- The stuff of life can be part of this preparation (Romans 8:28).
- Some preparation is formal in nature, such as academic study (2 Timothy 2:15).

4. God's power for this call.

- Samuel filled a "horn with oil" and "anointed" David (verses 1,13).
- Note the sequence: God calls, then empowers those He calls for the work (It is divine enablement, the *dunamis* of Acts 1:8).
- Ministry without power is not ministry, just an exercise of the flesh.
 - The religious authorities asked Peter and John, "By what power or what name did you do this?" (Acts 4:7).
 - Their detractors knew something from another world was at work.
- Like Paul, we need a "demonstration of the Spirit's power" (1 Corinthians 2:4).

For further study, see Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1984), an excellent treatment of the Spirit's role in church life and ministry.

■ Law or Gospel, the Choice Is Yours

JAMES T. MEADOWS, Kansas City, Missouri

TEXT: JAMES 2:8–13

INTRODUCTION

James discusses important information about a person's relationship to God and its involvement with the Law or the gospel. Believers must choose whether their relationship to God will be determined by the Law or by the gospel.

MESSAGE

1. The Law (James 2:8–11).

- The challenge of the Law (James 2:8; see also Galatians 5:14; Matthew 22:35–40).
- The conviction of the Law (James 2:9; see also Romans 7:7–11).
- The completeness of the Law (James 2:10,11).

2. The Gospel (James 2:12,13; see also Hebrews 10:1).

- The freedom of the gospel (James 2:12; see also Galatians 5:1; John 8:32,36; Matthew 27:50,51).
- The warning of the gospel (James 2:13; see also Proverbs 21:13; Matthew 5:7; 6:14,15; 18:21–35; Luke 6:36).
- The mercy of the gospel (James 2:13; see also Luke 1:50; Romans 8:1–4; Ephesians 2:4,5).

CONCLUSION

We choose whether we live under the Law or the gospel. Which will it be? If you do not choose the gospel, you choose the Law by default and will receive its judgment. I encourage you to choose the gospel and receive its mercy. You will be pleased with the decision today and forever.

Book Reviews

Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples

THOM S. RAINER and ERIC GEIGER (*Broadman and Holman, 272 pp., hardcover*).

The mission of the church is simple: make disciples (Matthew 28:19). Unfortunately, the discipleship process in many churches is anything but simple. How do you know if your church's discipleship process matches the simplicity of its mission?

Ask yourself the following four questions:

1. Is my church's discipleship process clearly stated and understood by all?
2. Does it move from unbelief toward mature belief?
3. Are the church's programs aligned with this process?
4. Is the church focused enough on discipleship to eliminate programs that do not align with it?

If you can answer yes to each of these questions, your church has a simple discipleship process.

If not, read *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples*. Using biblical teaching, true stories, and statistical analysis, this book shows the connection between the vibrancy of a church and the simplicity of its discipleship process. Rainer and Geiger drive home the importance of four basic concepts: clarity, movement, alignment, and focus. They provide suggestions for using these concepts to design and evaluate effective church programs.

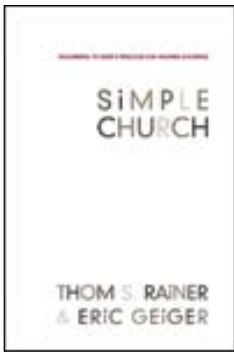
As a new senior pastor, I found *Simple Church* helpful for diagnosing what was and was not working at my church, and why. As I work with my church's leaders to develop a new discipleship process, I will undoubtedly return to *Simple Church* regularly for good advice.

— Reviewed by George P. Wood, senior pastor, Living Faith Center, Santa Barbara, California.



Rainer

Geiger



*Simple Church:
Returning to God's Process
for Making Disciples*



... In the midst
of complexity,
people want
to find simplicity.
They long for it,
pay for it,
even dream of it.



Growing Leaders: Cultivating Discipleship for Yourself and Others

JAMES LAWRENCE (*Hendrickson, 260 pp., paperback*)

It appears in the Assemblies of God that the category of ordained leaders is shrinking and our replacement pool is rather shallow. Therefore, James Lawrence's book, *Growing Leaders*, may prove to be a timely addition to pastoral libraries. *Growing Leaders* functions as a primer for nurturing a fresh generation of aspirant Pentecostal leaders, especially in the framework of local churches. As Bishop Graham Cray states in the Foreword, "A church that does not invest in developing leaders is incapable of responding to a changing culture."

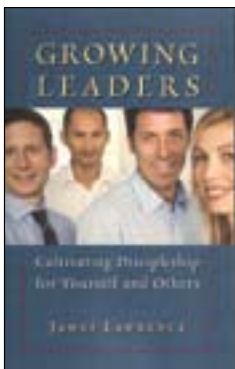
Lawrence is an Anglican minister living in the United Kingdom and writes from outside our general context as Pentecostals; his position on beverage alcohol being the most notable difference. However, as one works through

the six major topics covered in 12 chapters, it becomes obvious that Lawrence has a capacity to help teachable people. His thoughts will assist leaders in their formative years and seasoned leaders willing to revisit and strengthen foundational leadership issues.

Some may perceive this book as simplistic because it addresses familiar themes, such as first love, integrity, authenticity, and accountability. Do not mistake simple and familiar as simplistic rehash. *Growing Leaders* is a Great Commission tool that can help us to "be those who are led more by Jesus, lead more like Jesus, and lead more to Jesus."

James Lawrence's book is not tantalizing, but it is practical, useful, and worthy of our attention.

— Reviewed by Terry Yancey, superintendent, Kansas District Council, Wichita, Kansas.



*Growing Leaders:
Cultivating Discipleship
for Yourself and Others*

Church Marketing 101: Preparing Your Church For Greater Growth

RICHARD L. REISING (*Baker, 208 pp., paperback*)

Say “church marketing” in a room filled with believers, and some will think: *Pastor is going to start sugar-coating the message.* Others will believe the church they know will be altered to meet the needs of a demanding, self-consumed generation.

The term *marketing* is accepted in the secular world. But some in the religious world believe that when it is placed after the word *church*, it creates an unholy union. This is not the case in *Church Marketing 101*. Reising’s philosophy is that church marketing is not about watering down the gospel or misrepresenting the church. It is about effectively communicating and representing Christ to a lost world. Church marketing requires organizing as a body, and then putting our best foot forward.

Reising helps pastors relive their first impressions of the church and the faith. The book provides the lens they need to see how visitors, attendees, and members look and feel as they walk through the church process. The author provides insight on how to take individuals from disconnection, to evaluation, to commitment, and finally to dedication.

Pastors can easily get caught up in the day-to-day tasks and operations of a church and lose focus of the big picture. This book challenges pastors to step outside of their routines and regain the perspective, commitment, and dedication required to effectively represent Christ through their churches. This book ignites a renewed passion to do it right, do it well, and do it smart.

— Reviewed by Tina Green, assimilation coordinator,
Central Assembly of God, Springfield, Missouri.

The Unwanted Gift of Grief: A Ministry Approach

TIM P. VANDUIVENDYK (*Haworth Pastoral Press, 210 pp., paperback*)

The author serves as a hospital chaplain, a licensed therapist, and a marriage and family therapist. The integration of these disciplines and his personal grief experiences enable him to address the topic of grief. The book resonates with the heart of a fellow sojourner.

The book is not laden with technical jargon. The author presents a systematic theological foundation that reflects a compassionate understanding of grief. The book provides a comprehensive view of the grief process and

provides practical ministry tips.

From his experiences, he uses the words *gift* and *grief* in the title. This may appear paradoxical. The *gift* is revealed in the healing/transformation of one’s life. He describes the process as “the need to feel through, [to] think through, and [to] talk through our dark grief to find the light again.” This occurs over time. The transformation results in the celebration of the life of the loved one.

The caregiver who experiences grief becomes more effective and empathic in his ministry. Thus, the book is an invaluable resource to one on the grief journey and to caregivers, such as pastors, chaplains, professionals, pastoral care volunteers, and friends of the griever.

— Reviewed by Larry D. Cooper, D.Min., hospital chaplain, Cox South Hospital, Springfield, Missouri.

Direct Hit: Aiming Real Leaders at the Mission Field

PAUL D. BORDEN (*Abingdon Press, 159 pp., paperback*)

“The majority of congregations in wealthy nations are in decline or on a plateau.”

Borden was on the team involved in the miracle that saw 50 percent of American Baptist Churches in the West go from stagnation to growth in 5 years. In his first book, *Hit the Bullseye*, he detailed the big picture of district and church change.

In this book Borden’s focus is more toward church leaders who want to see their congregations develop fresh teamwork, renewed vision and passion for the mission. The tone is more pastoral and practical. He asserts that “leadership refers to the employment of disciplines that people can develop regardless of their talents or mix of spiritual gifts.” There is hope in these pages.

Borden’s success makes this an important read. Because of the special strengths of his leadership and style, readers will want to ponder and apply his directives with sensitivity.

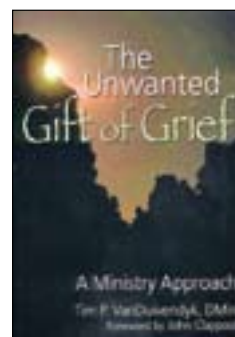
Not a quick fix — “in many cases a leader may spend 3 to 5 years implementing a change strategy.” Borden offers no simple solutions. He calls for strong leadership and passion. “Our first recommendation in this type of situation is a day of prayer in which clergy and lay leaders alike lead the congregation to confess the sin of complacency (no urgency).”

This is a worthwhile book — important for us all at this juncture as a Fellowship.

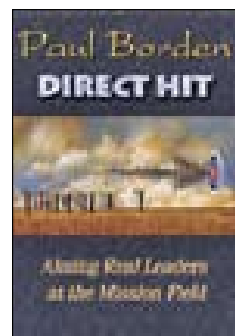
— Reviewed by Dave Argue, director of Church Development,
Rocky Mountain District of the Assemblies of God,
Colorado Springs, Colorado.



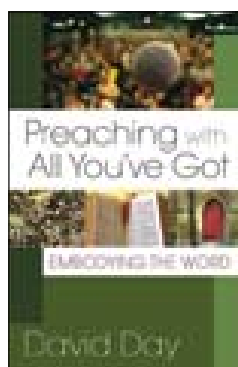
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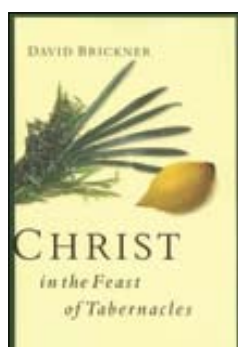
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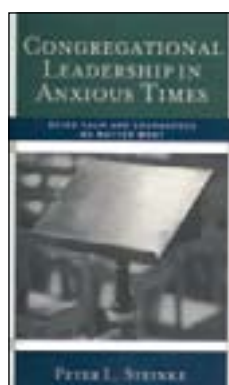
*Direct Hit:
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*Preaching
With All You've Got*



*Christ in the
Feast of Tabernacles*



*Congregational Leadership
in Anxious Times:
Being Calm and Courageous
No Matter What*

Preaching With All You've Got

DAVID DAY (Hendrickson, 186 pp., paperback)

Every preacher needs to read at least two books a year on preaching: one on fresh ideas to develop one's message, the other on new ways to develop the messenger. Day's book fits into the second category.

A few key words stand out in *Preaching With All You've Got* that make it a worthwhile read. One word is *transparency*. Day rightly argues that people need to sense and see the gospel in their preacher. Preaching is far more than a political speech or a college lecture; it is God's truth flowing through human personality. (To explore this concept more fully, see *The Joy of Preaching* by Phillips Brooks.)

A second key word is *love*. "Preachers must love their congregations. ... They have to realize: I am part of them, and I want to share with them what I have received from God. It will not help to speak with the tongues of either men or angels if this love is missing."

The author also urges preachers to develop the anointing of God in their preaching. Chapter five presents fresh ideas on how to bring sermon notes to life. Chapter 11, "Preaching a Narrative Sermon," and chapter 12, "Preaching From the Parables of Jesus," are worth the cost of the book.

Many preachers construct their message well, but are weak on delivery. Read this book. The result will be fewer sleepers in church, fewer wandering eyes, and more eager attention.

— Reviewed by Thomas H. Lindberg, D.Min., pastor of Memphis First Assembly of God, Cordova, Tennessee

Christ in the Feast of Tabernacles

DAVID BRICKNER (Moody, 176 pp., paperback)

David Brickner wrote *Christ in the Feast of Tabernacles* from the vantage point of a fifth-generation Jewish believer in Jesus and as director of Jews for Jesus for 10 years. I found Brickner to insightfully expound the biblical text and appropriately point out the helpfulness as well as the weaknesses of the traditional practices.

I did not find any significant weaknesses if I kept a certain purpose in mind — to help Christians find meaning and inspiration in the feast, not as a scholarly study of the feast. For this purpose, I highly recommend it. Brickner does not go beyond legitimate exposition of the text. Helpful charts and summary boxes are found throughout. At the end, there are helpful appendices for Christians who want to observe the feast.

My study of the laws of the Pentateuch has resulted in many of the same conclusions as Brickner. He says the Feast of Tabernacles is about celebrating God's presence and provisions with joy and thanksgiving. He has a good understanding of the harvest background along with the wilderness journey connection. The significance of Old Testament names, such as those for this feast, is often over interpreted, but Brickner takes a levelheaded, helpful approach. This is true of his dealings with the symbolism within later Judaism as well.

The New Testament references to the feast are handled well, especially Jesus' claims to be God in the context of the feast, its archetypal use, and its eschatological significance looking forward to the coming Kingdom. Brickner even makes a valid connection to a concern for the environment.

He seems to summarize rabbinic tradition well, and his description of the observance of the feast in joyful abandon sounds Pentecostal. His understanding of the theological shift in Judaism from the Old Testament and in contrast to the Christian faith is accurate. Finally, I was happy with his nonlegalistic approach to Christians' relationship to the observance of the feast.

— Reviewed by Roger D. Cotton, Th.D., professor of Old Testament, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri.

Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What

PETER L. STEINKE

The pastor's response to conflict and stress within the church sets the stage for problems or peace for the entire congregation. Steinke helps pastors understand that having an awareness of the issues that create church conflict must be followed by actions and suggestions that decrease anxiety among people and provide means for reconciliation and peace.

A major factor to having peace is the response of the leader. The author suggests pastors "focus on your own behavior and its modification rather than being preoccupied with how others function." The leader functions to set boundaries, clarify issues, and give opportunity for learning and growth. The challenge may be to function consistently during the emotional highs and lows faced in ministry. Care should be given to emotionally weak individuals without catering to their personal whims. Otherwise, the weakest, most dependent, and emotionally driven members will control the congregation.

The leader must have the ability to tolerate personal pain for others to tolerate their own pain and use it for growth.

Steinke illustrates a leader controlled by a follower's emotional state using Aaron during the time Moses received the revelation from God on the mountain. Aaron gave them the golden calf rather than the leadership they needed. When Moses arrived, he set boundaries, created a healthy spiritual environment for future growth, while managing his own emotional response as seen by his intercession to God for the people. Steinke provides excellent insight for leaders who are facing conflict in the ministry, and helpful information on understanding systems relationships in the church.

— Reviewed by Stephen R. Tourville, superintendent,
Pennsylvania-Delaware District of the Assemblies of God,
Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania.

God Still Heals: Answers to Your Questions About Divine Healing

JAMES L. and CAROL GARLOW

(Wesleyan Publishing House, 252 pp., paperback)

Are you hungry for healing in your life or ministry? Do you have questions regarding divine healing? In *God Still Heals*, each chapter poses tough questions concerning healing. In addition to dealing with these questions, the book encourages personal faith, stimulates earnestly seeking God, and helps one to more effectively pray. The Garlows believe that an effective way to pray for healing is praying the words of Scripture. Appendix A, written by Carol, gives scriptural paraphrases as examples of prayers for healing.

Probably the most common question is: "If God still heals, then why isn't everyone healed?" Eighteen blockages to healing are examined and summarized in appendix B. This list is not a formula, but a guideline. The authors list six nonnegotiable imperatives that apply to prayer for healing.

The section, "What the Bible Says About Healing," deals mainly with the New Testament and presents a basic biblical foundation for Christ's continuing healing ministry in His church through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The authors also discuss five types of power encounters relating to healing, deliverance, evangelism, nature, and resurrection.

The largest section, "Experiencing Healing," is practical, personal, and powerful. The last section, "How To Pray for the Sick" includes incidents of physical healing in the lives of Carol, Jim, and others. When healing does not occur

at a given time, "We must accept by faith that which we do not understand."

God Still Heals is an excellent book for pastors and anyone interested in divine healing.

— Reviewed by John C. Katter, D.Min., retired pastor
and former professor of practical theology, Assemblies of
God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri.

Science and Grace: God's Reign in the Natural Sciences

TIM MORRIS and DON PETCHER

(Crossway Books, 368 pp., paperback)

Tim Morris and Don Petcher address the interplay between Christian faith and the natural sciences (physics, chemistry, biology). As the title suggests, Morris and Petcher write from the Reformed tradition. Conservative Christians from other traditions, however, will rarely have difficulty with their arguments, in part because the authors hold a high view of Scripture.

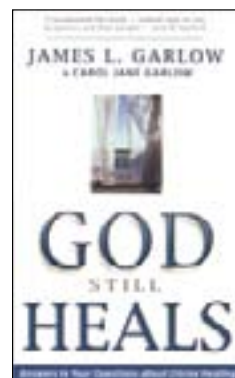
The authors trace the development of modern science from the Medieval period through the Enlightenment, and from modernity to post-modernity. To their credit, they do not suggest that the best Christian response to the challenges of postmodernism is a return to modernity.

While little space is devoted to the debate over origins, much of the book is relevant to a person's approach to that controversy. The authors avoid reducing the struggle between Christian faith and the natural sciences to the creation-evolution controversy. Instead, they deal with the overarching issues of worldview and theories of knowledge (epistemology).

Although nothing in the book is particularly Pentecostal, the authors recognize that the Holy Spirit "ultimately creates and controls human knowledge" — including scientific knowledge. In their discussion of epistemology, they attempt to identify "faithful ways of knowing for Christians."

Science and Grace is aimed at college students, but these professors (Covenant College) suggest it can help anyone learn much about "life before God." This book will be especially useful to Christian leaders who minister in a college setting. Students majoring in the natural sciences should find it valuable since the authors encourage believing scientists to integrate their scientific knowledge with their Christian faith.

— Reviewed by Steve Badger, Ph.D.,
professor of science and technology,
Evangel University, Springfield, Missouri.



God Still Heals: Answers to Your Questions About Divine Healing



Science and Grace: God's Reign in the Natural Sciences

NOTE:

Enrichment reviews books we feel our readers would like to know about. These books are not always in accord with our point of view, and the reviews do not constitute a recommendation of the books.

World Health Sunday

Honoring health-care professionals in the church and community

HealthCare Ministries, the international medical missions outreach of Assemblies of God World Missions, invites churches to honor their health-care professionals by celebrating World Health Sunday on April 27, 2008. HCM is asking churches not only to dedicate a Sunday to their health-care professionals, but to also celebrate the contributions they make to the community throughout the year.

HCM believes Christian medical professionals have unique opportunities to minister to their

patients through their medical skills. The care medical professionals give impacts a person's life, but an even greater impact is made when they share the gospel. HCM is asking churches to encourage their health care professionals to realize the influence they have on hurting people in their community when they offer their faith along with medical treatment.

An HCM resource packet is available to help churches celebrate World Health Sunday. It includes ways to devote a church service to health-care professionals as well as church activities that honor them throughout the year. For a World Health Sunday resource packet, contact HealthCare Ministries at 417-866-6311, or e-mail cstewart@hcmdfm.org.

Network211

Changing the Way the World Thinks About Missions

Network211 is an Assemblies of God World Missions Internet media ministry dedicated to providing the Bible online to people living in places where it is illegal to distribute Bibles.

Network211 intends to present the gospel to 10 million people using the Internet during the next decade — a task called Project 10million. Learn more at <http://www.project10million.com/coalition>.

Individuals, ministries, and local churches are invited to partner with Project 10Million at <http://www.project10million.com/team-signup>. Project 10Million uses four methods:

First, *evangelizing*, using 21st-century media tools in multiformat presentations. Journey Answers Web sites and a CD for mass distribution are being created. In addition, Network211 is working with partners who use the evangelism content from <http://www.network211source.com>. For information, e-mail frontdesk@network211.com, or visit <http://www.journeyanswers.com>.

Second, *engaging* mentors with seekers. Network211 is developing a network of mentors, called Team 10million, who are engaged with 1-2-1 Connections in the evangelism, discipleship, and mentoring process. These mentors interact with people who come to Christ or are studying the discipleship courses. For more information, visit <http://www.project10million.com/1-2-1>.

Third, *empowering* — knowledge empowers people. The <http://www.network211source.com> site provides content for use on any ministry Web site. Network211/Source includes 190 subjects, more than 11,700 content items, is accessed by responders from 160 countries, and used by 185 ministry organizations. Local churches can use this material on their Web sites for evangelism and discipleship.

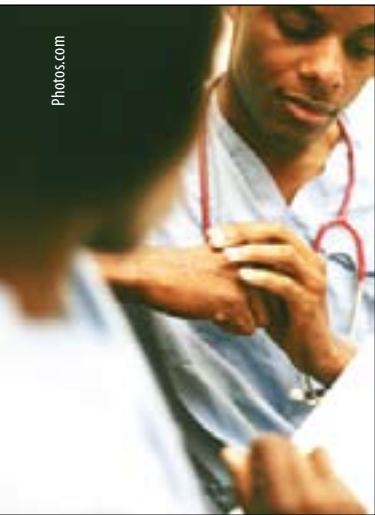
Last, *equipping* — enabling reproduction that is energized by the Holy Spirit.

Network211 offers workshops to equip pastors and their staffs to use 21st century Internet media to communicate the gospel.

Mission Teams are also being organized to go to strategic nations to help train nationals in Internet evangelism and Journey Answers CD distribution. To join a Network211 Missions Team, e-mail frontdesk@network211.com.

Streaming and Podcast Options: We also help churches stay up on new technology including streaming messages and podcasting. Visit <http://www.network211.com/podcasting> and <http://www.network211.com/streaming> for more information.

You can help NETWORK211 change the way the world thinks about missions. Visit <http://www.network211.com> today.



Photos.com



Project 10Million uses four methods: evangelizing, engaging, empowering, and equipping.



Sunlight Kids

Sunlight Kids is a new toddlers-and-tuos program developed by Gospel Publishing House in cooperation with national Girls' Ministries (Missionettes). The yearlong curriculum is ideal for teaching basic Bible stories to young children. Each month, Sunlight Kids focuses on a single Bible story because repetition is key to helping children remember, especially at early ages. Guided play, fun crafts, and music engage children's senses and allow them to experience the lesson.

Julie Horner, director of Research and Development, is excited about Sunlight Kids' potential for impacting young children: "So often these kids are overlooked, but they can learn about the Bible, even when they are 2 years old. The active lessons keep kids moving, and that is important for keeping their attention and making sure they absorb the material."

The program was created with input from national Girls' Ministries. Churches and leaders have wanted a resource to use with their pre-Rainbows age children. Following a year in Sunlight Kids, girls and boys are ready to transition into the Rainbows preschool ministry with a good background of basic Bible stories.

In addition to being used in a club ministry setting, Sunlight Kids works well on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, or at other times when the schedule needs to be more flexible.

The Sunlight Kids starter kit includes the basic pieces needed to begin. Some items included are monthly lesson books, a CD-ROM with reproducible resources, visuals, music CD, sample T-shirt, Beamer the Duck puppet, and a 13-pocket portfolio to keep everything organized.

Sunlight Kids was developed by a team of specialists with many years of practical experience in ministering to toddlers. Horner adds, "The author, Kathy Flower Ringer, developed this material after teaching kids for 20 years.

We field-tested Sunlight Kids in multiple churches, so we are confident the program works. Young children will love it, as will parents and leaders."

For more information, visit <http://www.GospelPublishing.com> or call 1-800-641-4310.



E-LIFE Kids: A New Generation of Missionaries

"E-LIFE Kids want their friends to be E-LIFE Kids — because E-LIFE Kids have eternal life."

Children across the nation are being challenged to become a new generation of

missionaries to their schools and communities. You can become a vital part of this national momentum by challenging the children in your church to become E-LIFE Kids.

An E-LIFE Kid tells his friends about Jesus, mentors other children by investing his life in them, and demonstrates the five commitments of an E-LIFE Kid: seek, show, share, invite, and invest.

Dozens of theme activities and support graphics, video clips, and PowerPoint presentations are offered free on the E-LIFE Web site at <http://www.elife.ag.org>. These resources provide fun and exciting 5-minute activities for use in any children's ministries setting.

Children's ministry leaders can serve as coaches, teaching E-LIFE Kids how to live out the five commitments of an E-LIFE Kid and how to become E-LIFE Kid missionaries.

As a coach, children's ministry leaders mentor E-LIFE Kids and monitor their progress throughout the year. The coach utilizes the theme activities in any given ministry to children to help the students grow spiritually and to learn more about being E-LIFE Kids.

Help the students in your church be E-LIFE Kids and to live out these five commitments:

- Seek the Spirit's help to help others.
- Show kindness and friendship.
- Share the story of Jesus.
- Invite others to church and to know Christ.
- Invest in the lives of others.

For more information, visit <http://www.elife.ag.org> or call national Children's Ministries Agency at 417-848-2192, ext. 4009.



An E-LIFE Kid tells his friends about Jesus, mentors other children, and demonstrates five commitments: seek, show, share, invite, and invest.



Captivating Testimonies at the Heart of Church Media Plan

The *Nothing's Too Hard for God* media plan uses extraordinary testimonies to change lives in your community and draw people to your church. Eight compelling true stories show how God's power can make a difference in forgiveness, loneliness, relationships, illness, fear, financial need, loss, and addiction. Whether people catch a glimpse of these stories on television, radio, billboards, yard signs, postcards, or the Web, they will learn how:

- Eric, a former drug runner, had his life transformed.
- Halima's loneliness led to her salvation.
- Brad and Denise's relationship survived divorce.
- Larry was once blind, but now can see.
- Stanley's faith in God sustained him in the World Trade Center on 9/11.
- Mayline and Nate's desperate financial needs were met.

- Lee survived the loss of his family.
- Jason's addiction to drugs was replaced by a relationship with Christ.

The *Nothing's Too Hard for God* media plan compels people to visit <http://www.nothingstoohardforGod.org>. Online visitors will be inspired by these captivating testimonies from Assemblies of God men and women. In addition, visitors can view a video invitation to accept Christ and find resources to begin their walk with God. A link also provides help in finding a local Assemblies of God church.

These life-changing stories are woven into television and radio spots, print ads, postcards, a small-group discussion DVD, as well as being the focus of the media plan and ministry Web site. They will also be incorporated into service themes and sermon helps.

For more information about changing your community for Christ, visit <http://www.nothingsstoohardforGodcampaign.ag.org>.

Serving Women Ministers Through Web Resources

The Women in Ministry Web site exists to serve women ministers. Whatever your ministry calling might be, you will find support, advice, and valuable resources at <http://www.womeninministry.ag.org>.

The site features articles, interviews, book reviews, polls, audio files, and other resources, all created by women ministers.

A free biweekly e-newsletter is also available for those involved or interested in pastoral and mission ministries.

To subscribe or to receive notice each time site content is updated or special event information is posted, go to the top of the home page at <http://www.womeninministry.ag.org>. Look for subscribe link.



Commission on Christian Higher Education Adopts New Name, Expanded Mission

For 12 years, the Commission on Christian Higher Education was responsible for developing educational, spiritual, and theological standards for endorsed colleges and universities of the Assemblies of God.

However, action by the General Presbytery in August 2006 established a new vision for Assemblies of God higher education. Effective January 1, 2007, the **Alliance for Assemblies of God Higher Education** is giving direction to endorsed Assemblies of God colleges and universities.

George O. Wood, chair of the Task Force for Transforming Assemblies of God Higher Education, made the recommendation to the General Presbytery: "This change has come in response to the fact between one-half to two-thirds of Christian young people who attend a secular college or university drop out of the faith within 4 years.

The change in structure, focus, and emphasis will bring heightened attention and effort to conserving vast numbers of Assemblies of God young people for the faith by promoting the excellent educational opportunities available in our 19 endorsed schools of higher education."

Possible new initiatives for the Alliance for Assemblies of God Higher Education include conferences for college students, faculty, and administrators, as well as board members. In addition, further research is being planned to find ways to encourage Assemblies of God young people to attend our colleges and universities and to provide more services for our endorsed schools.

The Executive Presbytery appointed the new members of the board in January 2007. The board includes all college presidents and board chairs of schools with enrollment of 250 students or more, in addition to four at-large members and those serving by virtue of office.

For more information about the Alliance for Assemblies of God Higher Education, visit <http://www.colleges.ag.org>.



Vicente A. Acevedo
Hormigueros, Puerto Rico

James P. Allen
Sugar Land, Texas

Brenda K. Berry
Athens, Texas

James D. Brankel
El Cajon, California

Kenneth J. Brown
Conway, Arkansas

Gabriel Buena
Newark, Ohio

David L. Campbell
Ankeny, Iowa

John K. Campbell, Sr.
Salem, Indiana

Daena Cargnel
Lakeland, Florida

Pauline V. Carter
Duncan, Oklahoma

Nina E. Cayton
Dale, Texas

Elias Chymiak
Broken Arrow, Oklahoma

A. Lucille Clark
Windham, Connecticut

Duane H. Clevenger
Mobile, Alabama

Beulah R. Clutter
Lakeland, Florida

Evelyn Cockrell
Lindale, Texas

Wallace E. Comstock
Spring, Texas

Charles H. Cookman
Dunn, North Carolina

Orville Cornelius
Ashland City, Tennessee

Thomas D. Creek
Belleville, Illinois

Claud H. Davis
Lawton, Oklahoma

Hoyt A. Foster
Caldwell, Idaho

Howard K. Gandy
Walterville, Oregon

David A. Garrett
Mayflower, Arkansas

Lydia H. Graner
Placentia, California

Audrey F. Green
Eufaula, Oklahoma

Clinton J. Green
Anson, Texas

Harold J. Hansen
Spokane, Washington

Autry M. Harvill
Saraland, Alabama

E. Gerald Hayes
Russellville, Arkansas

Wilbur W. Hoak
Jeannette, Pennsylvania

Kathaleen Huber
Manahawkin, New Jersey

R. Austin Jolliff
Ada, Oklahoma

Robert A. Jones
Jonesville, Michigan

Jeong Soon Jun
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Vida J. Killion
Round Top, Texas

Marvin M. Long
Yuba City, California

Zoyla D. Lopez
Simi Valley, California

Paul M. Malm
Springfield, Oregon

Louis S. Mattea
Carlinville, Illinois

George W. Morton
Washington, New Jersey

Wilbur H. Rudnik
Marysville, Washington

Donald J. Smith
Palmer, Alaska

Glenn E. Strickland
Ladson, South Carolina

Alpha D. Swaim
Pasadena, Texas

Thode B. Thodeson
Manchester, Michigan

Bernie Ulibarri
Wheat Ridge, Colorado

Victor Vargas
Bronx, New York

Robert L. Vass
Burleson, Texas

Christopher Vollrath
Round Rock, Texas

Fred A. Williams
Lakeland, Florida

Joseph Willis
Indianapolis, Indiana

Passionate About Discipleship



*Jesus didn't say,
"Make converts."
He said, "Make
disciples."
Salvation is the
entryway into
spiritual growth.*



As I step into the role of assistant general superintendent and commissioner on discipleship, I believe God has given me a vision and a plan to inspire, resource, and equip people to help them see what they can become. Equipping people for ministry — discipleship — is the command of the Great Commission. Jesus didn't say, "Make converts." He said, "Make disciples." Salvation is the first step, but it's not the last step. Salvation is the entryway into spiritual growth.

The more people become like Jesus, the more they are prepared for ministry. The more people are involved in ministry, the more committed they become, the more passionate they become, the more generous they become, and the more productive they become.

As a pastor, I was intentional about discipleship because the church revolves around the priesthood of believers. Ten people doing 20 jobs are less productive than 20 people doing 20 jobs. To have effective Great Commission churches, pastors need to equip, empower, and release their people into ministry.

Some pastors have difficulty releasing gifted and talented people into areas of ministry where these pastors are not as gifted. But leaders must be secure and learn to trust others with responsibility. If leaders do not release their people into areas of ministry responsibility, the people will not feel empowered, and they will become discouraged.

An effective way to release people is to teach them the Word and leadership principles, give them tools to accomplish ministry, and then monitor them through accountability. After you have unleashed people for productivity, encourage them through continual love and affirmation.

I also desire that the people in the pew will become passionate about studying the Word and become passionate about behavioral change. Statistics show that Christians and non-Christians are acting too similarly. We must get back to the place where we are doers of the Word, not just hearers only. This is why discipleship must be intentional and sequential. But to accomplish this pastors and laity who are in leadership must be equipped.

Discipleship must begin with leaders. As district superintendent, I developed monthly mentoring sessions with pastors and spouses. The district took several churches through a 2-year cohort that provided church training. My goal as assistant general superintendent and as commissioner on discipleship is to take pastors, churches, and leadership teams through a 1-year cohort to help their productivity.

Discipleship is a collaborative effort. Everything we do needs to pull pastors and people toward discipleship. I want to network to help people develop tools and desire. The proof of desire is *pursuit* — to continually teach and model. Effective ministry flows when church ministries join together with discipleship as their primary purpose.

Leaders rally people toward the future. When people have a compelling vision, it changes the way they pray and act, and it changes their relationships. Big dreams require you to trust God.

When Moses sent the 12 spies on reconnaissance through the Promised Land, 10 spies said that Israel was not able to possess the land. But the other two spies said that with God's help they could possess the land. The difference between these two groups was their focus.

Moses could have asked Caleb and Joshua, "Didn't you see the giants?"

Caleb and Joshua might have responded, "Didn't you see the size of those grapes?"

The minority was grape conscious; the majority was giant conscious. The minority did not deny the existence of the giants, but they believed with God's help they could possess the land. They had a dream — possession.

Pastors, you must have big dreams and become passionate about discipleship. Without this passion, you will never reach the next generation and help them become more like Jesus.

Discipleship must be owned, promoted, and taught at every level. Churches and pastors need to embrace people despite their gender or ethnic background. God's kingdom is diverse, but we are all one body. If we share a common vision, we can all walk together.

I invite pastors to pray together and walk together in a relationship, and come alongside to help each other equip our congregations. The commission on discipleship is also here to partner with you and help you equip your congregation for effective discipleship. ☪

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