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# Facing Death, Finding Life: Discipleship and Focus Change in the Church

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

FACING DEATH, FINDING LIFE: DISCIPLESHIP AND FOCUS CHANGE  
IN THE CHURCH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
DAVID JASON TURBEVILLE

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2020

Portland Seminary  
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on February 18, 2020  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Global Perspectives

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## DEDICATION

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28:18-19

To my wife, Susan:

You have always seen better in me than I have seen in myself.

To my mother, Marian:

Without you none of what I have accomplished is possible.

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First, I would like to say thank you to my wife, Susan. You have always supported me in my endeavors and been the rock for our family. Without your love and support all I do is impossible. Next, to my sons, Matthew, Christian, and Joshua: You three are an inspiration for me to always be better. God has amazing plans for you guys, and I cannot wait to watch you soar.

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation addresses the lack of focus on “others” within the Western Church and too much focus on “me.” The explosion of seeker-sensitive churches and the attractional model of church fuels churches feeling the need to be attractional to keep members happy. The attractional model would appear to be others-focused, but it seems to have had the opposite effect of creating a focus on “me and what I want” within the church. I believe that this has led to a decline in church membership. Field research and literature review support submitting recommendations on how a pastor in a Southern Baptist church can change the culture of the church from being inwardly-focused to focusing on others.

Chapter 1 looks closely at the perceived lack of concern for others outside the church. I address focus change in the church and what leadership encounters while moving a church from an inward to an others focus. Additionally, the lack of discipleship within the church is explored.

Chapter 2 reveals the biblical background of discipleship and how it was viewed in the Early Church. The Scriptural basis for discipleship is seen in how Jesus trained his disciples, as well as in the epistles where the focus on discipleship never wavers.

Chapter 3 considers the different approaches taken in discipleship in Church history. The theological implications of a seeker versus discipleship model are also reviewed.

Chapter 4 offers the results of field research with a group of pastors and leaders. I then review research from Pew and Barna, highlighted the problems existing within the Western church.

Chapter 5 addresses the changes pastors can initiate to help their churches move toward discipleship and the ways pushback can be addressed. The pace at which these changes can happen, and what happens if a leader moves too quickly are also explained.

Chapter 6 reviews the unintended negative impact of the attractional model versus the benefits of changing to the discipleship model.

## CHAPTER 1:

### THE PROBLEM OF CONCERN FOR OTHERS

First Baptist Church Texas has been in existence for 150 years. From the beginning it wanted to help reach the lost for Jesus. However, over the past number of years, the church has lost members, and has become stagnant in growth both numerically and spiritually. A closer look reveals the congregations may have become too worried about minor issues rather than the main focus on The Great Commission. Issues such as their appearance from an aesthetic point of view have arisen. The decoration committee and the building committee seemed to be driving the leadership of the church. People are more concerned with how they wanted to do church, such as the style of music they wanted and the preaching they preferred. They like an attractional model, which tries to attract others by focusing on what attracts me. For some, this perspective meant they even saw new ideas and outreach as a personal attack on how they liked their church to run. As a result, this church began to fall off in influence in the community and their ability to help others. This is repeated in many churches. Some pastors fall into these traps in trying to grow their church. Other pastors and leaders do not like what they see, but wonder at how they can best introduce changes so the church can once again regain its focus on reaching the world.

The description above is indicative of many churches within the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and their reality. The SBC has been in decline for over a decade now, and with few exceptions it does not look to reverse this trend anytime soon. According to its Annual Church Profile (ACP), membership has fallen to 14.8 million—its first time

below 15 million since 1989 and its lowest since 1987.<sup>1</sup> There are upticks in larger churches, but the average SBC church attendance is 145 and the median church size is 70.<sup>2</sup> These numbers are a sign of churches who have lost the ability to have an influence within their communities, much less the world.

While the description of the church above is a conglomeration of churches I have served in, the issues are real. The discussion of a denomination in decline, the Southern Baptist Convention, is what has informed much of the desire to see a change in focus. The church I serve is one that had come to a difficult conclusion before. We had a tipping point. If we continued on the path we were on, the church could have ceased to operate. The church's congregation was an older one, more died than joined in the three years prior to my calling to the church. The tithes and offerings had reached a point of treading water and there were months where they barely were able to pay the bills. The congregation was a sweet group but without making changes the doors would have been closed within a year. The church needed to make difficult changes. They were comfortable with where they were before I was called, but they had shrunk to a size that almost caused the doors to close.

Like the church in Laodicea, we had to make a change. Jesus, in addressing the church in Laodicea states "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth." (Rev. 3:15-16 ESV) Like the church in Laodicea this church was

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Shellnut, "Southern Baptists Down to Lowest in 30 Years," Christianity Today, May 24, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/may/southern-baptists-acp-membership-baptism-decline-2018.html>.

<sup>2</sup> William Thornton, "The Strange World of SBC 'Small' Churches," SBC Voices, March 6, 2017, <https://sbcvoices.com/the-strange-world-of-sbc-small-churches/>.

not doing anything wrong in particular, they just were not striving to reach outside of their door. They ~~had~~ seemed to have a bunker mentality and happy to rest in their comfort. This comfort in what they were and had, rather than what God desires His church to be and do, prompted His sober warning for the Church in Laodicea to make a change. Jesus' serious warning is still very relevant for the Church today and worth taking heed. It does prompt two questions;

1. How is a church today like the Church of Laodicea?
2. How can a church successfully change?

### **Why Are They Leaving?**

The North American Church is losing members. This is not in dispute. Not only is the SBC losing membership, but as a whole, Christianity is losing ground in the public square today. There are many articles about why churches lose members. A quick Google search returned over 100,000 hits. The one thing that seems to play out consistently is the desire for my needs to be met, which is not happening. In an article by Thom Rainer, the following list is telling:

- The worship leader refused to listen to me about the songs and music I wanted.
- The pastor did not feed me.
- No one from my church visited me.
- I was not about to support the building program they wanted.
- I was out two weeks, and no one called me.
- They moved the times of the worship service and it messed up my schedule.
- I told the pastor to go visit my cousin and he never did.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Thom Rainer, "The Main Reason People Leave a Church," ThomRainer.com, January 21, 2013, <https://thomrainer.com/2013/01/the-main-reason-people-leave-a-church/>.

This list is by no means exhaustive; however, it portrays the mindset of the worshipers in the church today. If there is one thing that seems to resonate it is this: *me*. There is the idea of church existing for my needs. This attitude is actually pervasive in the culture of our society today. The pandering to the consumer drives the world of business and it seems to drive the world of church as well.

The subject of those leaving the church is not just a subject for Christian websites either. The search also brings up secular discussion as well. The following list comes from Fox News. It is Fox's compiled list of why people are leaving the church.

1. We tell people the Bible is the basis for Christianity (author argues it is Jesus alone).
2. They believe suffering disproves God exists.
3. They had a bad church experience.
4. We are bad at making people feel welcome.
5. We made *ekklesia* (the church) the building.<sup>4</sup>

Again, the common theme is *my wants and needs*. This article was written by a pastor but published broadly. Research shows the church has slowly been losing footing in the world for quite some time. The idea of God seems to be a joke to many; a crutch for the weak minded. Daniel Dennett writes "Sometimes I wonder if even 10% of the people who proclaim their belief in God actually do believe in God."<sup>5</sup> Dennett is an atheist who, although says he believes in belief, says "That is, we no more need to preserve the myth of God in order to preserve a just and stable society than we needed to cling to the gold standard to keep our currency sound. It was a useful crutch, but we've

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<sup>4</sup> Andy Stanley, "Five Reasons People Leave the Church," Fox News, September 23, 2018, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/five-reasons-people-leave-the-church>.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Dennett, "Comment & Debate: This Folly of Belief in Belief: We No Longer Need to Preserve the Myth of God - It Was a Useful Crutch, but We've Outgrown It.(Guardian Comment and Debate Pages)," *The Guardian* (London, England), 2009.



outgrown it.”<sup>6</sup> The very idea of a God, much less one who cares for you, is seen as a waste of time.

The church can come across today as very consumeristic, seeker sensitive, and wanting to be another main attraction in the list of many. As such, there should be no surprise an atheist would look at Christianity as just another crutch for the weak, or a distraction from the world’s woes. The idea of having bigger worship services, with albums sold by the stars of that service is an example of the American Dream. Churches which seem to be the most popular are led by rock star pastors who have books on the bestseller lists. They are wanted for interviews by not only Christian media, but secular as well. Scott Hagley, in a seminar from 2014, said “people have come to ‘imagine God in economic-consumeristic terms.’”<sup>7</sup> He goes on to talk about how church shopping feeds into this mentality. A person can hop from church to church looking for what feeds them, not for God’s will in their life. The moment something negative happens at their new church they are gone looking for another new church.

However, it would be wrong to blame all of the church’s difficulties on consumerism alone. Pastors and leaders must take some of the responsibility for this as well. Hagley calls the issue “juvenile Christianity”<sup>8</sup>. Any discussion concerning types of Christians usually presents two options: a baby Christian or a mature Christian. The problem with this line of thinking is most Christians who have been going to church for more than a year would never consider themselves a baby. The term is reserved for an

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<sup>6</sup> Dennett, “Comment & Debate: This Folly of Belief in Belief.”

<sup>7</sup> Amy Deuckman, “Discovering Faith in a Consumer Age,” *Canadian Mennonite* 18, no. 10 (May 12, 2014): 23. ProQuest.

<sup>8</sup> Deuckman.

individual who cannot do anything for themselves. Hagley talks of juvenile Christianity as the big problem, “with its prevailing attitude of entertainment and avoidance of suffering. ‘We say it’s a sin to bore anyone, but learning involves boredom,’ he exclaimed. ‘We’ve let go of the reality of suffering; to follow Jesus means submitting to Christ.’”<sup>9</sup> Some have called it easy believeism, but whatever it is called, there is a preponderance of Christians who have not been truly disciplined.

This is what prompted the focus of this Dissertation. If the church is producing juvenile Christians, and thereby a juvenile Christianity in our churches today, then there is no wonder why church attendance is diminishing. If our churches are mostly filled with people who are more concerned with their own needs being met rather than finding life and meaning with God, and living it out as disciples of Christ before others, what is the solution? How can we change the focus?

### **What is Focus Change in the Church?**

It is this author’s position that while focus change can encompass several issues, the key issue to be addressed is how to change from an inward or *me* focus to an others focus. For the purposes of this paper, an inward focus will be defined as being more concerned with how church is done. For example, it may include the style of music, the decorations in the church, and programs that are not considered as outreach as its main function. Conversely, others focus will be defined as a ministry or program whose main focus is reaching out to others, ultimately introducing them to Christ through effective church discipleship training & practices. Examples may include food pantries, mechanic

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<sup>9</sup> Dueckman, 23.

ministry, free or scaled fee counseling, home repair, bill assistance, orphanages, and support of missionaries.

In changing the focus of the church, a pastor or leader is facilitating a church to change how it goes about its daily life. Humans are creature of habits who are most comfortable in surroundings and programs they are familiar with. As such, when a leader comes in and realizes there is a need for change, they must be ready to address conflict.<sup>10</sup> This is because “change does not happen without conflict”<sup>11</sup> The surest way to fail in implementation of change is to not anticipate pushback and conflict. A leader must realize the church is full of members who have history. Some have been there ten, twenty, thirty, or even forty years. It is hard to move people out of their comfort zones, and even harder if it happens to them without any research and preparation, forewarning, and strategies for implementation. In their book on changing a church’s culture, Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken describe the pains and difficulties in changing an attractional church’s culture into one of focused on others. They write, “We went back to the basics and essentially started all over. We did it in our teaching. We did it in conversations with our staff. We did it on the elder board. And we did it in various meetings we had with individuals and ministry teams.”<sup>12</sup> This topic will be delved into deeper in Chapter 5.

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<sup>10</sup> John Lee Skinkle, “An Examination of Leadership Readiness for Change Scores across the Variables of Church Size and Age,” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 33.

<sup>11</sup> Ken Godevenos, “Implement Change in Your Church,” Church Solutions Magazine, August 1, 2002, <http://www.churchsolutionsmag.com/articles/281staff.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Kent Carlson and Mike Leuken, *Renovation of the Church : What Happens When a Seeker Church Discovers Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 39, ProQuest Ebook Central.

## Defining Discipleship

This focus change prompts the question; “What is discipleship”? The discussion of discipleship, its definition, and effective practices can be a minefield, with a plethora of perspectives. Most Christians believe they are a mature believer. Many may allude to the Apostle Paul to defend their position where he writes in I Corinthians “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways” (I Cor. 13:11 ESV). They would argue that since they have been Christians for many years, they are mature Christians. However, the writer of Hebrews says,

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child (Heb. 5:12-13 ESV).

So, what is a disciple? The short answer in defining a disciple, would be a Christian is a disciple who makes disciples. Geiger, Kelly, and Nation write “Disciples who are transformed are still overwhelmed with the truth of God’s love; they are continually in awe that Jesus loves them.”<sup>13</sup>

## Are Programs Effective for Discipleship?

If one looks at the Southern Baptist website for buying church materials, Lifeway.com, the amount of discipleship materials can be overwhelming. A quick search on the website shows 1,200 different materials to be purchased on Discipleship.<sup>14</sup> There

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<sup>13</sup> Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> “Discipleship,” LifeWay, accessed April 22, 2019, <https://www.lifeway.com/en/searchpage.html?searchTerms=Discipleship>.

are even more if the search is expanded to include learning materials on discipleship.

There are more than enough resources for a church to start a discipleship program. So why do so many churches struggle in this area?

The research shows that churches can be resistant to change, especially if they do not understand the change or see the need for change. When a church is forced to change the way discipleship is done in the modern church it can often require getting rid of some 'sacred cows'. A sacred cow can be a program the church has participated in for many years. It is beloved by the members and to take it away would cause consternation. For example, Sunday School is a sacred cow. It is a great time to get together, to talk about how life is going with your church friends and pray for each other. Unfortunately, in personal experience, it can be a great time for fellowship, but not effective in creating disciples.

It is this author's contention that effective discipleship occurs within a very focused and intentional time spent with a group of no more than 12, and strengthened in smaller groups of 2-3. Consider Jesus' approach with the twelve disciples, and also the times he spent with a few of them, as recorded in Mark. "And after six days Jesus took with Him Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain by themselves" (Mark 9:2 ESV). In Luke, Jesus sends out the twelve, "And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal" (Luke 9:1-2 ESV).

So how does a church change how and what they are doing when they can be so resistant to change? And how can a pastor or leader recognize such a resistance? Cary Nieuwhof gives a list of seven signs a church won't change. The first issue is they keep

having the same conversations over and over again<sup>15</sup>. There often is much talk about the need to change but rarely anything done about it. It is like a person who is in debt and tells themselves they must stop spending what they do not have, but then go out and buy a new car.

The second issue is every time a new idea is brought up, three reasons are given why it won't work.<sup>16</sup> Change is a difficult proposition for a church. Nieuwhof gives a great example of this in the story of Alexander Bell trying to sell the telephone to Western Union. They rejected it and gave this as the reason: the telegraph was good enough and the telephone was an absurd toy.<sup>17</sup>

The third problem is people have a fondness for the past that exceeds a passion for the future.<sup>18</sup> It is natural for people to resist change, especially if they have fond memories of the things that will be changed.

Fourth, small items become big issues.<sup>19</sup> For example, a decision on decorations can stall any change and go on for so long that nothing is done. There are times when a decision just needs to be made and acted on.

The fifth in Nieuwhof's list is that people are still complaining about the last change they experienced.<sup>20</sup> Someone did not like the new lighting fixtures and so every business

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<sup>15</sup> Carey Nieuwhof, "7 Signs Your Church Will Never Change," CareyNieuwhof.com. December 14, 2015, <https://careynieuwhof.com/7-signs-your-church-will-never-change/>.

<sup>16</sup> Nieuwhof.

<sup>17</sup> Nieuwhof.

<sup>18</sup> Nieuwhof.

<sup>19</sup> Nieuwhof.

<sup>20</sup> Nieuwhof.

meeting where a new change is brought up it is shot down because no one wants to hear the anticipated complaints.

Sixth, the theme song for the church is often “we’ve never done it that way before.”<sup>21</sup> This may seem cliché, but this is an issue talked among Southern Baptist pastors who have heard this at least once in their ministry.

The last issue is one that dovetails into the main problem with lack of growth. The leaders simply do not bring their unchurched friends to church.<sup>22</sup> They do not see or feel the need to create disciples. They do not see it as something that is urgent, or a priority.

Jim Putnam writes,

American Churches are not on a mission. They look far more like the world than they should. They live the same way and chase the same things. Their marriages and families look the same. They are biblically illiterate and care little about sharing their faith with others. Churches are producing people who do not and cannot share the Gospel.<sup>23</sup>

The argument Putnam is making is this: even though there are plenty of programs they are not effective, because they are not designed with actual discipleship in mind.

### **What Programs Exist**

There are many programs than would fit in this discussion. The biggest seller of these programs in Southern Baptist life is Lifeway Book Stores. As mentioned earlier, a quick search of their website showed over 1,200 available products for discipleship. When drilled down further to include only products for adults, one comes away with a

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<sup>21</sup> Nieuwhof.

<sup>22</sup> Nieuwhof.

<sup>23</sup> Jim Putman, *Church Is A Team Sport: A Championship Strategy For Doing Ministry Together* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008).

good idea of why this is a daunting task. A few examples include *Kingdom Disciples* by Tony Evans, *Knowing God By Name* by Mary Kassian, *Beloved Disciple* by Beth Moore, *A Gospel Above All* by J. D. Greer, and many more. The descriptions for these programs all promise a fresh perspective or the promise that God wants to cover you in His love, or promising to leave the reader awestruck, but they do not address the key issue, which is truly understanding and desiring discipleship. Most come with companion products such as videos and workbooks, extras for the church to buy and implement. However, these products or programs have not proven to be very effective in the long term with no sense of need or desire to change.

### **Do These Programs Work?**

In his paper on church culture and discipleship, Kevin Michael Brosius discusses discipleship from a different point of view. He first talks about the computer industry and the plethora of different computers. In discussing the myriad of options, he writes “Regardless of whether a computer is considered basic or high-end, computers all have one important thing in common: computers are designed with software systems to run programs.”<sup>24</sup> Brosius then compares the church to the computer industry, “In the same manner, churches have been notorious for creating a plethora of programs but often fail to install an effective system to manage all of the programs. For the church, discipleship is the system that runs its programs.”<sup>25</sup> If a program alone can fix this issue, it should

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<sup>24</sup> Kevin Michael Brosius, “Culture and the Church's Discipleship Strategy,” *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 21, no. 2 (September 2017): 123-57. [https://www.clarkssummitu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/JMAT\\_Fall-2017.pdf](https://www.clarkssummitu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/JMAT_Fall-2017.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Brosius, “Culture and the Church's Discipleship Strategy.”



have been fixed years ago. Yet, the North American church still struggles with effective discipleship. The conclusion is two-fold for consideration: either the programs which are available for discipleship are ineffective or the way the church conducts the programs is ineffective. Either way something needs to be fixed.

### **How Church Change Will Affect a Disciple**

The argument being made in this dissertation is the lack of true discipleship in the North American church specifically Southern Baptist churches has led to the inward focus of most congregations. Having a shallow relationship with Christ facilitates a me, attractional focus in the church programs and prevents an others discipleship focus. In his book, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*, Thom Rainer points out that the budgets of dying churches were reflective of their slow death. He noticed that the budgets reflected an inward focus, “in most cases, cuts were made to ministries and programs with outward foci.”<sup>26</sup> The budgets reflect those things that make the church comfortable, such as staff, buildings and grounds, electricity, and water.<sup>27</sup> Rainer compares the dying churches to the Rich Young Ruler in Scripture. Jesus said to Him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Matt. 19:21 ESV). The thing that held the young man back was his love of money and comfort. It had become his idol; so to with a church with an inward focus. Rainer describes these churches as “Preference Driven

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<sup>26</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2014), 32.

<sup>27</sup> Rainer, 33.

Churches.”<sup>28</sup> The decisions are based on my preferences instead of what the church needs to do to reach the lost. Whether it is music style, when church starts, activities and programs, it always starts with the same word, me. The Great Commission takes a backseat to what the members believe will make the members comfortable.

### **Description of Highly Effective Churches**

For the purpose of this paper, a highly effective church will be defined by George Barna’s book, *Habits of Highly Effective Churches*. An effective church can be so defined when “lives are transformed such that people are constantly enabled to become more Christ-like. Effective ministries foster significant and continual changes in how people live.”<sup>29</sup> The book is a challenge to many churches to change how they do things and unfortunately, the challenges are still present.

The first on Barna’s list of habits is that a church needs to ensure that leaders are directing the church. Barna argues that an effective church will allow the pastor to not be in charge of every little decision that has to be made. In other words, it is ok for the pastor to delegate.<sup>30</sup>

The second habit is to minimize paid staff so that the church does not depend solely on the staff to do ministry. It forces the members into understanding that they too must be a part of the ministries<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Rainer, 47

<sup>29</sup> George Barna, *Habits of Highly Effective Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000), 41.

<sup>30</sup> Barna, 41.

<sup>31</sup> Barna, 42.

Third, an effective church understands that to be effective in reaching the lost, members have to build relationships. An effective leader will help the congregation understand they can build intentional relationships outside of the church. Doing so will afford them an opportunity to share who Christ is, and it allows them to invite those who they are intentional with into church.<sup>32</sup>

The fourth habit is one that can be controversial: facilitating genuine worship. According to Barna, most Christians, on a yearly basis, do not experience the presence of God during worship.<sup>33</sup> For most churches the starting point is the style of music, however, the style of music should not matter. One may have a preference, but God shows up regardless of our preferences. An effective church should provide a compelling reason to engage in worship, understanding it is both an attitude and an action regardless of the style, and facilitate the ability to become intimate with God.<sup>34</sup>

The fifth habit is helping the congregation to engage in evangelism. For too long, Christians have believed it is the job of the ministerial staff to engage the outside world and bring the message of salvation through Christ. A recent study shows sixty-four percent of Christians believe sharing their testimony is optional.<sup>35</sup> Pastors can help their congregations understand that it is all Christians' job to share their faith, and there should be no fear of failure in doing so. It is just as much a heart issue as it is a training issue.

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<sup>32</sup> Barna, 75-77.

<sup>33</sup> Barna, 84.

<sup>34</sup> Barna, 93-94.

<sup>35</sup> Veronica Neffinger, "Study: 64 Percent of Christians Today Believe Evangelizing Is Optional," Young Adults - Trending Topics, May 16, 2018, <https://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/study-64-percent-of-christians-today-believe-evangelizing-is-optional.html>.

Habit seven is holistic stewardship, not just of money but of time and the gifts God has given. Whether it is musical talent, carpentry, or prayer, all Christians have been given a gift from God. The effective church will help its congregation to discover, develop, and utilize their gifts, thereby facilitating discipleship and helping the church to grow.<sup>36</sup>

The eighth habit is serving the community. An effective church can be known by how it serves those in its midst. Not just members, but those in need in the community. This is the part of church that can be difficult and discouraging. If a pastor or leader does not regularly see movement in people's lives when the church is helping those who need it the most it can lead to burn out.<sup>37</sup> You may never see the homeless that you help and that single mom who needs help with formula and diapers may be too embarrassed to come to church, but the one thing they all have in common is they need the church to help. It can be argued that if the universal church would stop focusing on materialistic things and focus on what Christ calls it to do, which is taking care of the least of society, then there should be no need for government hand-outs. In many cases this may be an example where the church has dropped this responsibility and missed opportunities for effective ministry.

The last habit is really where the change needs to start, equipping the family.<sup>38</sup> A family who is equipped for ministry will lead the church into effectiveness. A church full of equipped families can be an instrument of change within society.

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<sup>36</sup> Barna, 149-151.

<sup>37</sup> Barna, 161-162.

<sup>38</sup> George Barna, 167.

## Description of Ineffective Churches

There is more written about being an effective church than describing an ineffective church. A noteworthy observation is that an ineffective church for God and discipleship may still look like an effective church to the world. If an effective church is making disciples who make disciples, then an ineffective church can be described as a church that does not make disciples. This reality can apply to large and small churches and really anything in between. A church can be vibrant to attend; big lights, big production, and lots of members, but if the leadership of the church is more concerned with numbers and how they look and sound on stage, then discipleship is often left behind.

This ineffectiveness is not limited to Sunday services or larger gatherings; it can occur in the smaller settings as well. For example, small group meetings instead of Sunday School, may be a creative way to replace or update the Sunday School concept. However, they can be a time of gathering together for fellowship and learning, which takes on the properties of a clique (closed to outsiders) and with an agenda or focus other than discipleship.

Further research reveals other hallmarks of an ineffective church. Anthony Robinson, in *Congregations Magazine* lists seven habits of highly ineffective churches. The first is they elevate mediocrity to a spiritual discipline.<sup>39</sup> This means accepting as good something that is not your best. This does not imply churches need to over hire for

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<sup>39</sup> Anthony B Robinson, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective and Highly Ineffective Churches," *Congregations Magazine* (July 3, 2008), <https://alban.org/archive/the-seven-habits-of-highly-effective-and-highly-ineffective-churches/>.

every position by hiring only those with the most experience, but they do need to put forth their best effort. The people in the pews need to be stretched out of their comfort zones.

The second habit is to take no risks.<sup>40</sup> As Friedman points out in his book *Failure of Nerve*, churches can become gridlocked. They try harder to look for answers rather than reframing the question and therefore create false dichotomies.<sup>41</sup> A church should be unafraid to fail; try something and if it does not work, scrap it and come at the problem in a different way. Most great inventions were preceded by multiple failures; leadership should be empowered to fail.

The third habit can be called “If you build it, they will come”<sup>42</sup>, or “they know where to find us.”<sup>43</sup> After building a new sanctuary it is not uncommon for leadership to hear that “we built a nice building so why are we not getting new members?” Just because a church has a shiny new facility, it should not expect to attract new visitors. Usually when it first opens there will be those who just want to see inside, but that rarely leads to new members. There needs to be a strategy for utilizing the facilities toward effective discipleship, which produces the desired growth.

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<sup>40</sup> Robinson.

<sup>41</sup> Edwin H Friedman, *Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*. (S.I.: Church Publishing, 2017).

<sup>42</sup> *Field of Dreams*, directed by Phil Alden Robinson, performed by Kevin Costner, James Earl Jones (United States: Universal Pictures, 1989).

<sup>43</sup> Robinson.

The fourth habit is to “blame early and often”.<sup>44</sup> The response is, “It must be someone else’s fault; I have not done anything different.” Generally, when humans fail, they tend to blame others. History shows it is human nature; “The man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate’. . . . The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate’” (Gen. 3:12-13 ESV). Humans have been deflecting since the beginning of time.

The fifth habit is the one most people seem to have: excuses. Always be prepared with an excuse.<sup>45</sup> If a person is unable to blame someone else, the next option is to come up with an excuse to defend their actions or attitude.

Habit six can create a great deal of frustration for the pastor. Make sure the church knows it is the pastor’s job to make everyone happy.<sup>46</sup> Sometimes it can seem like members want to hire a feel-good life coach who will tell them what they want to hear instead of coaching them through difficult decisions with a pastor. Churches that have this attitude can suck the life out of their staff and are ineffective.

The last habit can be seen, from two perspectives. “Spend as little money as possible”,<sup>47</sup> can happen under the guise of a church wanting to be good stewards, so they invest in nothing new in capital or ministry expenditures. The second is, I don’t want to spend the money on anything that doesn’t matter to me.” Both can make the church ineffective.

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<sup>44</sup> Robinson.

<sup>45</sup> Robinson.

<sup>46</sup> Robinson.

<sup>47</sup> Robinson.

## Pushback

In Vincent Miller's book, *Consuming Religion*, he writes in the chapter on "Popular Religion in Consumer Culture" "As theologians from Thomas Aquinas to Gustavo Gutierrez have made clear, the encounter with God always takes place within the structures of human social and political existence."<sup>48</sup> In Miller's opinion, the Western Church has experienced a cultural shift. Western culture is a consumer culture at its core. Soong-Chan Rah writes "From Hellenistic philosophy to medieval thought to the Enlightenment and postmodernity, each phase of Western philosophy has put forth as its central tenet the primacy of the individual."<sup>49</sup>

This cultural milieu is in direct opposition to Jesus' first command "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mark 12:30-31 ESV). This command of Jesus does not leave room for the primacy of oneself. It removes the self and inserts God and others as the primacy.

The culture of self over others pushes back on the commands of Christ. In doing so, the Western Church has come to look like the Western culture it is supposed to impact for Christ. The reverse has occurred. Rah continues,

The American church, in taking its cues from Western, white culture, has placed at the center of its theology and ecclesiology the primacy of the individual. The cultural captivity of the church has meant that the church is more likely to reflect the individualism of Western philosophy than the value of community found in Scripture.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Vincent J. Millar, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Religion*. (New York: Continuum, 2009), 164.

<sup>49</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2009), ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>50</sup> Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*, 29.



With this consideration it is no wonder congregations push back on any change which requires them to let go of a me-first attitude. Interestingly, the culture of me-first in the SBC and the Western church is generally not found in many other cultures globally. Consider the Indigenous people (First Nations) in the USA, as an example. The culture found within the First Nations are not reflected in the cultural norm of the Western Society, or the Western church. Sadly, history reveals the church's evangelization efforts, beginning with the new landed European immigrants and evidenced to date, have been married with the idea of civilizing a conquered people, rather than introducing them to Christ. This type of evangelism is not biblical, and has had a detrimental impact on the First Nations people. Biblical discipleship is not a call to change the culture of indigenous peoples, or any culture, but to model Jesus Christ. This is discussed further in Chapter 6.

For the sake of this paper, any reference to a 'Biblical model' of discipleship is the example of discipleship that Jesus modeled with the Apostles. A small group within a group of followers who Jesus spent more time with and gives instruction through Scripture and examples of ministry.

Jesus' model of discipleship differed from other rabbi's models. "Whereas rabbinic discipleship was primarily concerned with the study and obedience to scriptures, Jesus' discipleship was more concerned with demonstrating and communicating his relationship with the father."<sup>51</sup> This is the 'Biblical' model focus for this work.

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<sup>51</sup> David A. Toth, "In His Disciple Making Ministry, How Did Jesus Christ Determine What to Say and/or Do?" (DMin dissertation, Portland Seminary, 2015), <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/94>.

Southern Baptist churches have to vote on everything they do. It is in the constitution of the church and the by-laws of the church. Though not the intent, this ideology can support a culture of “if I do not like something, I will get others to vote my way attitude toward church”. Not knowing how to move the congregation from a ‘me’ to an ‘others’ focus has seen pastors lose the battles for change before they even start.

In contrast to Western Churches, churches in many other parts of the world have no concept of putting self before others. In countries that are closed to the Gospel there is an even greater disconnect with the Western consumeristic church. In a country where a different religion is the dominant culture a Christian church has to abide by the rules set by that culture. It is hard to imagine a church in the Sudan splitting over an argument about music or carpet. Yet, these very issues have split countless churches in North America.

Bringing up the subject of change in a church setting can prove to be very different than bringing it up in most other contexts. Meredith Gould writes, “Change? No, thank you. It’s too challenging and scary, although we grudgingly accept changes in work and family life. But at church? Not so much.”<sup>52</sup> In fact, for most, we like what has made us comfortable and do not even think about changing.

### **The Why**

So, the feeling for many pastors and leaders is why push against the flow of the culture in Western churches? Ultimately this can be such a painful process that many

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<sup>52</sup> Meredith Gould, *Transcending Generations : A Field Guide to Collaboration in Parishes*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017), ProQuest Ebook Central.

young pastors would rather start a new church where they make the rules. The preponderance of new churches is seen in a 2014 report by Lifeway which found 4,000 new churches had launched during the year, and 3,700 had closed their doors.<sup>53</sup> However, the decision to plant a new church and let the old one die does not really address the core issue. There are many Christians who will simply move to the new churches and start working toward influencing the church toward how they want it to look. Planting a new church does not fix the problem. If new churches had the desired influence over culture, it would have started to outweigh the established churches long before now. The reality is both the new and established churches are still struggling with the same issue: no growth and minimal impact in their respective communities.

The ultimate goal of this dissertation is to help pastors lead their congregations to a point of clarity concerning the very real threat of their church's death, and choose life through making the difficult but necessary changes toward true discipleship, resulting in the desired shift from a me to an others focus. It is the opinion of this author that if just a quarter of churches embrace the others focus Christians are called to live, dynamic change will happen in the culture surrounding those churches. Instead of working to start a new church, pastors and leaders become change agents in an established church helping those congregations to move toward a discipleship lifestyle in the church and the community.

Just like any lifestyle change, this can be a difficult and often daunting task. For example, the lifestyle change needed for drastic weight loss is painful at best. The

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<sup>53</sup> Lisa Canon, "Study: Thousands of Churches Closing Every Year, but There Is a Silver Lining," Charisma News, December 9, 2015, <https://www.charismanews.com/us/53715-study-thousands-of-churches-closing-every-year-but-there-is-a-silver-lining>.

individual has to change their way of thinking about how they consume food and how they exercise. If the supposed easy road is taken, such as gastric bypass surgery for example, the failure rate ranges is from twenty-five percent to seventy percent depending on the study.<sup>54</sup> The reason for most of the failures is lack of compliance with the program. It is difficult and causes much angst to change a lifestyle. The greater weight loss long- term success comes from those who decide to do the hard work.

For a cultural change within Christianity the same attitude and process is required. Planting a new church does not alleviate the cultural consumerism within the church. Helping congregations move from seeing their needs as the most important issue, to seeing others' needs met first will have a greater success rate within the overall landscape of Christianity. The hard work pays off with greater understanding of discipleship and the call on a disciple's life.

The question then becomes how do we institute the necessary changes and stay faithful to the core tenets of the church? The answer lies in what is the initial foundation and purpose of the church. The book of Matthew has a consistent theme of change from Judaism to Christianity and the Early Church.

In her book, *Constancy, Change, and Discipleship*, Mary Spina writes that Matthew includes five women in his ancestry of Christ, and each of the five "acts contrary to the social norms of her culture and yet accomplishes God's will in stunning ways."<sup>55</sup> This change continues to be observed in how Joseph treats Mary, as well as how

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<sup>54</sup> Ted Bosworth, "Weight Recidivism after Bariatric Surgery: What Constitutes Failure?" Diabetes Hub, January 18, 2019, <https://www.mdedge.com/diabeteshub/article/150969/obesity/weight-recidivism-after-bariatric-surgery-what-constitutes>.

<sup>55</sup> Mary Spina, "Constancy, Change and Discipleship," *St. Anthony Messenger* 118, no. 8 (2011): 12-17.

they both react in Luke 2:41-51 to Jesus when he leaves them at the age of 12 to continue to question the scribes in the temple. The Church today needs to be open to change in the same way to see God's will being accomplished in equally stunning ways.

Change is inevitable within God's work throughout history. God not only allows change, but in many cases initiates and facilitates it so that we may know Him better. This truth should render the words "we have never done it that way" as an irrelevant response or resistance to change in the church.

Jesus calls his followers to be disciples, and this meant to forge ahead no matter the cost for the first disciples. They knew and experienced the difficulties and challenges of change daily. Even after three of the disciples glimpsed Jesus' resurrected glory in the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8), they later struggled. Jesus even described all his disciples as having "little faith" at one point. (Matt. 17:20) Yet their faithful discipleship in the midst of the challenges of change was foundational to the establishment of the Early Church. Encouragingly, even a little faith can accomplish much, as is shown in the parable of the mustard seed.<sup>56</sup>

As the world continues to change, new challenges arise for the Church, producing many unique responses. For example, some churches have developed what can be an unhealthy desire to focus exclusively on the second coming of Christ. There is so much time devoted to, studying eschatology, trying to understand signs that may point to the second coming, to the detriment of understanding and practicing discipleship. This is not to say that eschatology is unimportant. Trevin Wax writes: "Divorced from eschatology, discipleship may lead us to adopt personal interior-focused practices but fail to give

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<sup>56</sup> Spina.

sufficient attention to the kind of spiritual formation that helps us recognize the present context and our role in it.”<sup>57</sup> The opposite can happen as well, too much focus on eschatology leaves no room for discipleship.

World history shows that change is a part of growth and relevance in each age and era. It is no different for the church today. As society shifts, and so must the church in order to be relevant and have impact, but not at the expense of a genuine growing relationship with God, and being a true discipleship of Jesus Christ. It is the belief of this author that the church needs to return to the basics of true discipleship, which will facilitate the desired shift from a me to an others focus. We must move away from the attractional model to discipleship as modeled by Jesus Christ.

Why? To allow God’s will to be accomplished in stunning fashion and see the fulfillment of the Great Commission today. With this being the ultimate goal, a disciple of Christ can welcome and embrace changes. There is no fear in change or the unknown for the active and engaged disciple of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>57</sup> Trevin Wax, *Eschatological Discipleship : Leading Christians to Understand Their Historical and Cultural Context* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018).

## CHAPTER 2:

### BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

In discussions with many pastors and lay people in the Southern Baptist denomination, the majority will say they go to a Bible-based church. The basis of church for them is Scripture. Yet, when attending a church in the SBC, the lack of focus on those outside the church is shocking. The churches have plenty of ministries such as food pantries, diaper ministry, feeding kids during the summer, supporting mission trips, and giving to the cooperative program, being just a few. The problem lies in where most of their money is spent. Jesus tells his followers in Matthew 6:21 (ESV). “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” In Jewish terms the word used, καρδία, is defined as “the seat and center of all physical and spiritual life; and the vigor and sense of physical life”<sup>1</sup> This means when Jesus is teaching this to those around Him, he is calling them to not focus on fulfilling their own desires but to take care of those who need it.

In the North American church, especially in Southern Baptist life, all major financial decisions are made in business meetings. These meetings generally focus on how much the church is paying staff, pastoral or otherwise, or how much they are spending on building and grounds. Rarely, if ever, does the subject of outreach enter into the conversation.

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<sup>1</sup> Strong’s Greek, s.v. “καρδία (kardia) – Heart,” accessed July 9, 2019.  
<https://Biblehub.com/greek/2588.htm>.

In the SBC church, a specific percentage is given to the Cooperative Program and within this realm is missionary spending. The Cooperative Program is run by the SBC and is the way Southern Baptist churches pool their money for international missions, national missions, and local missions. It also is responsible for many other programs within Southern Baptist life. It seems the idea of every member being responsible for making disciples is a foreign idea.

This idea is prominent in David Platt's book *Radical*. Platt relays the story of preaching in a church and laying out the opportunities to make a difference for God in the world. The head pastor of the church said, "We promise that we will continue to send you a check so we don't have to go there ourselves. . . . I remember a time at my last congregation when a missionary from Japan came to speak, I told that church that if they didn't give financial support . . . I was going to pray that God would send their kids to Japan to serve"<sup>2</sup> It is this attitude that evangelism is the job of those who are missionaries and possibly pastors that perpetuates the idea of sharing Christianity and its tenets is the responsibility of those who are professionally called.

The second issue that needs to be addressed is the fact of declining discipleship that measures up to a biblical standard. The contention in this argument is simply the lack of discipleship being the main cause for an inward focus of most Christians and thus the churches they attend. One of the last commands given to the Apostles of Jesus before he ascended into heaven is known as the Great Commission. In it, Jesus tells his followers to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father,

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<sup>2</sup> David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2010), 63.



and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20 ESV). There are very few, if any, who would argue against the idea that Jesus’ direction here is two-fold. The first is to baptize. To be baptized one has to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. In church-speak, “Invite Jesus into your heart.” The second part of this Scripture is to teach “all that I have commanded you.” This is where the idea of discipleship is born. The word discipleship does not appear in Scripture, but the idea is there. John Piper writes. “*helping others* — does have a verb in New Testament Greek: *mathēteuō*, to make disciples. It can mean preach the Gospel so that people get converted to Christ and become Christians and, thus, disciples.”<sup>3</sup>

### **What Does Scripture Say?**

If the church is to regain its calling to the lost, it has to look to Jesus as to what was important. Jesus called those who wanted to follow Him to a different level of commitment than what was common for the average Jewish person of his day. The Scriptures provide many examples, such as when Jesus was questioned by a rich man as to how to gain access to heaven. Jesus replies “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Matt. 19:21 ESV). The young man had allowed his money and possessions to rule his life.

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<sup>3</sup> John Piper, “What Is Discipleship and How Is It Done?” Desiring God, July 9, 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-discipleship-and-how-is-it-done>.

Another example is when Jesus is asked to tell one brother to split the inheritance with the other brother and he responds with the parable of the rich fool. The fool stores up all his riches in a newly built barn, settles in for the night and is confronted with the end of his life, “But God said to Him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for Himself and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:20-21 ESV). The hoarding of possessions removes the focus on what God expects from our lives and puts it on ourselves.

The point of all this is that money becomes an idol in the life of a Christian if they are not careful. In an article about the inward focus of churches Joe McKeever writes, “ ‘*What’s in it for us?*’ is the prevailing principle of decision-making for too many churches. Denominational leaders and professional fundraisers know that to be successful in their promotions, they have to convince churches that this project will reap great rewards for them personally.”<sup>4</sup> The servant attitude seems to have left the church. The focus has shifted from God to self during times of worship. The servant is not to be glorified in relation to God. Luke 17 gives the true nature of a servant, “Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to Him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at the table?’” (Luke 17:7 ESV). Jesus goes on to speak of a servant’s expectations to serve the master. This is the type of relationship with God a Christian is supposed to mirror. Many times, in the New Testament Paul, introduced Himself as a servant. Examples are “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus” (Rom. 1:1 ESV), and “Paul, a servant of God” (Titus 1:1 ESV).

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<sup>4</sup> Joe McKeever, “Is This Mentality Killing Your Church?” OutreachMagazine.com. July 17, 2017, <http://outreachmagazine.com/features/21777-selfish-church.html>.

### What Is In It For Us?

*“What’s in it for us?”* seems to be the prevailing principle of decision-making for too many churches. Denominational leaders and professional fundraisers know that to be successful in their promotions, they have to convince churches that this project will reap great rewards for them personally.<sup>5</sup> Sadly, the church now seems to look exactly like the world when it comes to a me-first consumer attitude.

Vincent Miller speaks to the consumer culture movement when he writes, “When industrial laborers, post-industrial service workers, and white-collar office workers pour their lives into alienated labor, they will be inclined to seek just the sorts of fulfillments that consumerism provides.”<sup>6</sup> So what is alienation? According to Miller it removes men and women from their creative power as human beings.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the industrial revolution and its subsequent moving of the labor force from an agrarian focus and community focus, to one where the skilled labor force is, for lack of a better description, dumbed down to button-pushers, has caused a loss in creative ability. This causes people to search out other means to quench the inner desire for more and at a certain point a consumer mindset occurs. Instead of a person finding fulfillment in creating while they work, whether it is food, handmade tools., etcetera, they look for fulfillment in things they own or purchase. In his review of Miller’s work, Darryl McKee postulates, “In this postmodern consumer culture, practices that at one time had their own rules and

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<sup>5</sup> McKeever.

<sup>6</sup> Vincent Jude Miller, *Consuming Religion Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Religion* (New York: Continuum, 2013), 35.

<sup>7</sup> Miller, 34.

standards of consumption, (e.g. religion, friendship, art) are instead subsumed under the rules and standards of consumption. This consumption approach to all practices assumes a seed of dissatisfaction with the present and a continuing search for something better.”<sup>8</sup>

A closer look within the church, shows this consumption approach also seems to have pervaded their thinking and practices. Congregations compare themselves to other churches and what they have, feel inadequate, and decide they must spend more on a new sanctuary, a new sound system, a new lighting show. etc. They feel this will make their church a place where more people will come. In a way they are right. Aaron Earls writes in his article, “They want the church with the best preacher, with the best worship, closest to their house that makes them feel welcomed when they decide to show up.”<sup>9</sup>

Pew research was quoted in the same article with these statistics: When asked what factors played a role in their choosing their new church home, Americans overwhelmingly pointed to four main concerns: quality of the sermons (83%), feeling welcomed by the leaders (79%), style of worship (74%), and location (70%).<sup>10</sup>

People change churches looking for the latest and greatest, looking to consume what they feel can fill them up the best. This focus is more on attracting other believers, and as such there is a lost focus on reaching out and finding people who are not believers and who really need to hear the Gospel. The church seems to pay lip-service to reaching others by giving to a cooperative program and sending people on short term mission trips,

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<sup>8</sup> Terry Clark, “Book Review: ‘Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture,’” *Journal of Marketing* 69, no. 4 (2005): 264.

<sup>9</sup> Aaron Earls “Why Do Americans Change Churches?” The Wardrobe Door, August 24, 2016, <http://thewardrobedoor.com/2016/08/americans-change-churches.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Earls.

but their budget and spending reveals where the focus truly is. When a church has a green room for the talent to relax before their performance, it can look and feel like a show, and perpetuate that perspective, rather than being a place of worship and ministry.

Scripture encourages the Christian to be satisfied with whatever situation they find themselves in at any particular moment. Not only satisfied, but to find joy in difficulties. James says “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness (James 1:2-3 ESV). If this same concept is applied to a church and it learns to find joy no matter what it has or does not have, it would be reasonable to conclude it will also be more effective in reaching out and affecting the community it serves.

### **Discipleship and Scripture**

Discipleship is a difficult issue to navigate within the SBC. The majority of churches in the denomination have some form of Sunday School before or after worship. The idea of small groups meeting in homes as discipleship is also gaining ground within the SBC as Sunday School attendance is declining, with a little more than half of church attendees attending Sunday School.<sup>11</sup> According to an article in 2015, in Evangelical Lutheran churches, Sunday School attendance dropped 40% from 2004 to 2010 and during the same time Baptists declined 8%.<sup>12</sup> While the number is smaller for the SBC it is still in a fairly significant decline. The below table gives an example of declining attendance in Southern Baptist Churches.

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Gary, “Worship Attendance Rises, Baptisms Decline in SBC,” *Facts & Trends*, June 1, 2018, <https://factsandtrends.net/2018/06/01/worship-attendance-rises-baptisms-decline-in-sbc/>.

<sup>12</sup> Melissa Pandika, “Has the Sun Set on Sunday School?” *USA Today*, March 22, 2015, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/03/22/ozy-has-sun-set-on-sunday-school/25080073/>.

Table 1: Worship attendance rises, baptisms decline in the SBC.<sup>13</sup>

Annual Church Profile Statistical Summary				
2017 Southern Baptist Convention Statistical Summary				
Item/Statistic	2017	2016	2017-2016 Numeric Change	2017-2016 Percent Change
State Conventions	42	42	0	0.00%
Associations	1,131	1,136	-5	-0.44%
Churches	47,544	47,273	272	0.58%
Church-type Missions <sup>(1)</sup>	4,376	4,492	-116	-2.58%
Total Members	15,005,638	15,216,978	-211,340	-1.39%
Total Baptisms	254,122	280,773	-26,651	-9.49%
Ratio of Baptisms: Total Members	1:59	1:54	—	—
Weekly Worship Average Attendance	5,320,488	5,200,716	119,772	2.30%
Cooperative Program <sup>(2)</sup>	<a href="http://www.sbc.net/gp/statistics.asp">www.sbc.net/gp/statistics.asp</a>	<a href="http://www.sbc.net/gp/statistics.asp">www.sbc.net/gp/statistics.asp</a>	—	—

NOTES:

1. Some state conventions no longer use the designation of church-type missions to categorize congregations which are not self-determining, self-sustaining, and self-propagating. This practice has impacted the number of churches and church-type missions.

2. Cooperative Program as reported on the Annual Church Profile is not included in this table. CP based on the actual amount given through the state convention, is provided in the SBC Annual in the Executive Committee Annual Report.

If the average Christian is only going to church two times a month,<sup>14</sup> as a 2015 Pew Research report shows, then add in the attendance in a Sunday School or small group, then the average Christian is not being discipled. A closer look in Scripture, reveals discipleship happened in a one-on-one or one-on-two setting. It is for this reason, not being properly discipled, that the average Western Church does not focus on others but focuses on doing what it can to keep those who are attending and to try and get more Christians to attend.

According to a Lifeway research from 2015, church plants are made up of approximately 42% of new believers and 43% being previously from a different church.<sup>15</sup> It is no wonder church planting is so attractive to pastors. The draw of planting a new church and setting it up exactly as desired usually means no resistance to try a new

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<sup>13</sup> Gary.

<sup>14</sup> “Attendance at Religious Services - Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics,” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, May 11, 2015, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/attendance-at-religious-services/>.

<sup>15</sup> Lisa Cannon Green, “New Churches Draw Those Who Previously Didn’t Attend,” LifeWay Research, December 8, 2015, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2015/12/08/new-churches-draw-those-who-previously-didnt-attend/>.

outreach program. The pull to starting a discipleship emphasis with new members is very strong.

However, the key problem still remains for the established churches and their leadership. How can a pastor convince and move their church into a discipleship focus that will be effective, and prevent new church plants from losing their others focus?

### **Money**

The rapid spending of money in the North American church has much to do with the inward focus as well. In 2013 a church in Dallas spent \$130,000,000.00 on a new campus. The well-appointed new building was necessary; it was justified as necessary to do the work of God. The interesting observation is the SBC will often criticize other denominations for outlandish spending, but when it is one of their own, it is either defended as necessary or articles are written claiming “Not being familiar enough with the situation, I cannot judge First Baptist Dallas.”<sup>16</sup> This same reaction could be applied to a plethora of different issues but it would not be accepted. For example, one could withhold judgment of a bank robber because you were not there and do not know all of the issues facing said thief.

In addition to the amount of buildings built, the amount spent for the worship experience can be staggering. With the prices for a sound board, speakers, monitors (both floor and in ear), projection system for words, lighting and video production, the costs skyrocket. A quick review on the [www.sweetwater.com](http://www.sweetwater.com) site shows the price for a small

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<sup>16</sup> Jared Moore, “Is \$130,000,000 Too Much to Spend on a Church Building?” SBC Voices, November 12, 2013, <https://sbcvoices.com/is-130000000-too-much-to-spend-on-a-church-building/>.

to medium size set-up for live sound and basic lighting will run \$10,000.00.<sup>17</sup> This search did not include cabling, necessary wiring for lighting, and other required items. It is not unusual for a church to spend upwards of six figures to set up the worship experience for the edification of the crowd. When looking at churches in the same line of Hillsong Church, which is seeker sensitive in nature, the worship experience feels more like a concert than a time of reverent worship. Spending the money on all these environmental worship additions makes it easy to disappear in church.

Churches in Scripture are called on to take care of those who cannot take care of themselves. When a church spends over 75% of its budget (no matter how big or small that budget is) on its own needs and desires, it is reasonable to conclude that the focus is imbalanced. This is not to say the Scriptures call everyone to poverty. When Ananias and Sapphira sell their land in Acts and then hold back some for themselves, it is not the holding back of funds which results in punishment, but the lying to God that results in the punishment. “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God” (Acts 5:4 ESV). God did not expect them to give everything they had, he expected them to be honest about what they were doing. Their goal was to bring glory to themselves not to God.

Research shows the money spent on others-focused ministry in many churches is the smallest part of their budgets. The largest is usually payroll, then building, and maintenance. Worship and Creative Arts get a large portion and then the remaining

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<sup>17</sup> Sweetwater, accessed December 30, 2019, <https://www.sweetwater.com/store/cart.php>.



portion is portioned out to ministries. A search on Google will provide many church budgets to compare. A quick comparison revealed some interesting insight into their focus. The first church has \$21000.00 out of \$360,000.00 earmarked for outward ministries<sup>18</sup>. The second church has \$665,000.00 out of \$7,600,000.00 set aside for outward use<sup>19</sup>. The largest church found \$3,400,000. out of \$20,500,000.00 for ministries outside the walls of the church<sup>20</sup>. It is important to note that not all churches are like this. The fourth church reviewed had an operating budget of \$500,000.00 with \$210,000.00 going to missionaries alone<sup>21</sup>. However, research shows this kind of church is rare. The majority of churches surveyed have proportionally the same breakdown in budget as the first three mentioned above. If a church is to be a beacon of light for the world, a city on a hill, then it must have others as its focus. This focus is reflected in its budget.

This is not a diatribe against money, just a question of how it is used best to serve the kingdom of God. There is an understanding of the need for money for ministry. It is almost impossible in the world to do ministry without the aid of money. That being said, the flow of money in US churches would overwhelm churches around the world. The idea of a church budget of over twenty million US dollars is almost obscene when viewed in the light of the churches throughout the world.

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<sup>18</sup> The Village Church, “Lead Pastors Annual Report,” January 31, 2018, [https://www.thevillagechurch.net/Content/ExternalSite/Giving/Lead Pastors - 2018 - Annual Report - Lores \(1\).pdf](https://www.thevillagechurch.net/Content/ExternalSite/Giving/Lead Pastors - 2018 - Annual Report - Lores (1).pdf).

<sup>19</sup> [www.broadmoor.org](https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2407/2019_budget_final_draft.pdf?1548000753918), February 3, 2019, [https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2407/2019\\_budget\\_final\\_draft.pdf?1548000753918](https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2407/2019_budget_final_draft.pdf?1548000753918).

<sup>20</sup> “Lead Pastors Annual Report.”

<sup>21</sup> This church does not publish their budget but I was able to view it because they are a sister church to the church I serve.

In one sense this should not come as a surprise, as the average US citizen is in the top half of wealth in the world. According to a Pew research “More than half (56%) of Americans were high income by global standard, living on more than \$50.00 per day. . . . Another 32% were upper-middle income. In other words, nine-in-ten Americans had a standard of living that was above the global middle-income standard”<sup>22</sup> If this is extrapolated out to church giving and money available within US churches, they then should expect to be the richest churches in the world. From this author’s first-hand experience in churches around the world, such as Serbia, Thailand, Venezuela, and Canada, as well as second-hand knowledge of churches and ministries on the African Continent and South American Continent, most of the churches around the world struggle just to meet ministry needs of their communities. The idea of an affluent, full-time paid staff in most of their churches or ministries is unheard of. Most, if not all, pastors are bi-vocational, if they even take a salary of any kind from the church where they serve.

### **Scriptural Call to Be Different**

When God chose Abraham in Genesis, he told him “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing . . . in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:2-3 ESV). With this call to Abraham, God begins the process of making a new nation that would come to be known as Israel. Abraham was not any more special than others around him, rather God chose Abraham because through his lineage, he would bring the Messiah to save the

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<sup>22</sup> Rakesh Kochhar, “How Americans Compare with the Global Middle Class,” Pew Research Center, July 9, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/09/how-americans-compare-with-the-global-middle-class/>.

world. This was the express purpose for God creating this new nation. Scripture in the Old Testament consistently reiterates this theme. Isaiah reiterates this, saying “I will make you a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isa. 49:6 ESV). God’s intention for Israel was for it to be a light to the world. God intended them to be different from all the nations surrounding them.

The original intent was for Israel to be a theocracy, a nation ruled by God. However, the people of Israel desired a king, precisely what God did not intend. There is some argument that they desired a king because of the failure of Samuel’s sons. They were corrupt just as the sons of Eli were corrupt. It is against this backdrop that they demanded a king. In I Samuel, God’s opinion is given, “Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them” (I Sam. 8:7 ESV). Samuel warns the people what a king will do. He tells them their sons and daughters will be taken by the king to do his bidding, to take care of his chariots and to cook for his palace. He warns them a king will take a tenth of all of their grain and wine and livestock for his own use. He ends with this statement, “In that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day” (I Sam. 8:18 ESV).

Cristiano Grottanelli writes “In spite of this dark warning, the people insist on having a king to govern them and lead them into battle just as other peoples do.”<sup>23</sup> One might suggest the people of Israel just wanted to be like those who around them; kings were seen as divine gifts. Grottanelli continues, “As in the Mesopotamian world, also in

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<sup>23</sup> Cristiano Grottanelli, *Kings and Prophets: Monarchic Power, Inspired Leadership, and Sacred Text in Biblical Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 89.

Israel, kingship has a divine sanction. In the Mesopotamian world, however, kingship descends from heaven in a mythical time, whereas, in the case of Israel, the kingship is requested by human beings in ‘historical time.’”<sup>24</sup> This requesting of a king is a throwback to what they had experienced in Egypt under a Pharaoh. Even after leaving Egypt, the Israelites, on more than one occasion, had begged Moses to take them back. They had grown accustomed to being ruled over by a king. God’s intention was for them to be different, to be set apart from the rest of the world so through this he would be glorified.

The same call to be different is upon Christians in the New Testament as well. Christians are told they are not of the world but citizens of heaven. “The world has hated them because they are not of this world, just as I am not of this world” (John 17:14 ESV). Scripture reminds the Christian to “Set your minds on the things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Col. 3:2 ESV). The early Christians understood this call to mean they were different than those around them. They worshiped God from a much different point of view than those did with Jewish roots.

In Paul’s letter to the Roman Church, he encourages them to “Bless those who persecute [you]—bless and do not curse them” (Rom. 12:14 ESV). Paul calls the believers in Rome to be different, he “speaks of the justice and mercy that characterize both the believers’ relationships with one another within the fellowship of Christ and their relationships with those who are outside the fellowship”.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Grottanelli. 89.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher Bryan, *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 78.

In the Jewish tradition, there was a separation between Jews and gentiles. Even if some would become proselytes of Judaism, they were still unable to leave the court of the gentiles in the Temple at Jerusalem. In Christianity Paul argues there is “no Jew and no Greek” (Gal. 3:28 ESV), thus both groups could worship together in the church. This is a complete reversal of how Jewish people had thought since the time of Moses. They are the chosen people; thus, they are to be set apart in all things, especially worship of the living God. Just like Jewish converts to Christianity had to change their way of thinking about who would be allowed into God’s kingdom, a change in ministry perspective has to happen in today’s church.

Believers in the Early Church certainly were different than those around them in the Roman Empire. They worshiped a single God rather than the pantheon of the gods of Rome. This made the early church stand out and it brought persecution, but through this persecution they clung even tighter to God and reached out with a fervent expectation of Jesus imminent return. They evangelized to those around them even if it meant death, or at the very least being an outcast. They took the commands to “take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth” to heart. The opposite seems to happen in the church today.

In reading Kets De Vries book on leadership, the chapter “The Mussel Syndrome” draws comparisons to our churches today. De Vries begins the discussion with the illustration of a mussel, and how one can learn about the inability for some to change is mirrored in the life of the mussel. “The mollusk has to make only one major existential decision in life, and that’s where it’s going to settle down. After making that decision, the

mussel cements its head against a rock and stays put for the rest of its life”.<sup>26</sup> De Vries goes on to write about the evidence and consequences of the mussel syndrome in the world today. The Fortune magazine’s “hit parade” as Kets De Vries calls it, is a list of companies that are the most admired.<sup>27</sup> He lists the qualities and then talks about the initial list in 1983, which had IBM at the very top; by 1997 it had fallen to 102. A precipitous drop, but not as bad as Digital Equipment Company (DEC). It dropped from number 7 to number 386. It ended up being bought by Compaq, which was subsequently bought by Hewlett Packard.<sup>28</sup>

Churches can act the same way when they are comfortable in doing things the way they always have done them. Some churches want to continue without change, in part because the way they did things did reach many people for Christ. However, just like companies like DEC, who assumed doing things the same way would always work, churches have fallen into the same trap. The need to reinvent one’s church does not mean letting go of who God is, but it can feel like it for those who have been through times where God has moved in a mighty way. Unfortunately, the need for change often brings misunderstanding and conflict. Too many times, people who see the need for change-can be very judgmental of those who do not want to change, and visa-versa. The same challenge remains: the focus needs to change from what someone wants in a church, to what is the most effective way to meet the needs of the community and reach people for God.

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<sup>26</sup> Manfred F. R. Kets De Vries *The Leadership Mystique: Leading Behavior in the Human Enterprise* (Harlow, England: Prentice Hall/Financial Times, 2006), 48.

<sup>27</sup> Kets De Vries, 48.

<sup>28</sup> Kets De Vries, 50.

## Discipleship in Scripture

Any discussion on discipleship in Scripture best starts with Matthew chapter 28, where it is recorded:

And Jesus came to them and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you’ (Matt. 28:18-20 ESV).

The Great Commission, as this section of Scripture is called, is very explicit. A Christian’s responsibility is to make disciples, which includes baptism in water and the teaching of Scripture. All too often in SBC churches the “make disciples” directive stops after water baptism. As such, most new Christians are never biblically discipled and as a result become culturally Christian but never to the point of making disciples themselves.

What is involved in making a disciple? Studying the manner with which Jesus discipled the twelve would be the first step in beginning to understand the process. The first observation is what Jesus did not do is to put them into a classroom and lecture them. He took them with Him, did ministry to show them examples, and gave them opportunity to do it themselves. During times when they were not directly involved in ministry, they were taught the Scriptures and the meanings behind the Scriptures. Jim Putnam writes “Discipleship is so much more than just sharing the news about Jesus, it is also teaching people to obey the commands Jesus gave.”<sup>29</sup>

Next, one must consider the whole of the New Testament to see what a true disciple looks like. A place worth settling in is Hebrews chapter 12. It begins,

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<sup>29</sup> Jim Putman, *Real-life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010), 21.

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such hostility against Himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart (Heb. 12:1-3 ESV).

Putnam writes “That is the picture of Jesus which Hebrews offers us; it is the Jesus who will guide us through life, the Jesus who meets us today as we feast at his table, the Jesus who summons us gently but clearly to follow Him”<sup>30</sup>

In his book *The Biblical Principles of Discipleship*, Allen Coppedge lists what characteristics are present in those whom Jesus chose as his disciples. “When Jesus came, though hundreds listened to Him, only several dozen followed after Him to the end of His life. Out of that group He picked twelve to be His disciples . . . . Why did He select this particular band of men over all others?”<sup>31</sup> The twelve were not chosen without forethought, they were chosen because they had already displayed some of the characteristics necessary to be a follower of the Messiah.

The first characteristic Coppedge lists is a hunger for God. He gives the example of John and James who were already disciples of John the Baptist. He says, “they have a heart hunger for God.”<sup>32</sup> This is a desire to follow God no matter the cost. Those who followed John the Baptist knew he was seen as being against the Pharisees. When the Pharisees came to see what he was saying he had a harsh message for them, “But when

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<sup>30</sup> N. T Wright, *Following Jesus : Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*, new ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> Allan Coppedge, *The Biblical Principles of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1989), 54.

<sup>32</sup> Coppedge, 54.



he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?’ (Matt. 3:7 ESV). This meant to be a follower of John, one had to stand against the establishment. Today a disciple must have the same attitude. Christians must hunger for who God is and what he has called them into, whatever the cost may be.

The next characteristic Coppedge lists is availability. Coppedge writes, “They were available to be with Him; available to enjoy His presence.”<sup>33</sup> This meant leaving their jobs as fishermen. There has been no change in what God does today. He is looking for those who like Isaiah says, “Here I am! Send me!” (Isa. 6:8 ESV). God desires obedience in those who follow Him. He has put a call on every believer’s life; a disciple says yes to God, no matter the cost. Coppedge connects this with a call not only to be present with the Lord, but to be present with other believers. “Christians must not only cultivate their relationship with the Lord, they must cultivate their relationships with other disciples in order to let the others have a proper influence on them.”<sup>34</sup> Reading Scripture and spending time in prayer are necessary, but so is allowing oneself to be taught by those who are mature in their walk. A good analogy would be a physician. Someone pursuing the life of a doctor may learn many things by pouring over medical textbooks and journals of medicine, but if they are never taught by those who have done it and had success, if they never learn to practice medicine, then they are useless. In the same way, Christians who just read their Bible and what others have written and are never taught and led to practice being a follower of Christ, are useless as well.

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<sup>33</sup> Coppedge, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Coppedge, 57.

The next qualification is faithfulness. The examples given are the disciples being faithful in their call and bringing others who would also become disciples to meet Jesus. “Andrew went after Peter. . . . John sought out his brother James. . . . Philip looked for Nathanel.”<sup>35</sup>

Of note is an interesting part of being faithful; someone can “begin to be faithful with Him and then can go back on their commitment.”<sup>36</sup> Coppedge gives the example of Judas. He followed Jesus for three years, was considered a disciple and did the things all the other disciples would do, yet he failed in being faithful to the end. A follower of Christ must persevere no matter what situation they find themselves in. A good modern example comes from the shootings at Columbine High School. One of the victims, either Cassie Bernall or Rachel Scott, was asked before she was shot, “do you still believe in God?” She responded, “you know I do” and was subsequently shot and killed.<sup>37</sup> Whether in good times or difficult ones, even life-threatening ones, the believer is called to stand for God.

The last trait Coppedge covers is teachability. When the John the Baptist says, “behold the Lamb of God” (John 1:29 ESV), the disciples are described as going immediately to Jesus and addressing Him as Rabbi or teacher. They sought out what they could and went away thinking they may have encountered the Messiah. They are willing to be convinced. They are not tricked easily into believing, but by listening and

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<sup>35</sup> Coppedge, 57.

<sup>36</sup> Coppedge, 57.

<sup>37</sup> The reason both are listed is because depending on the publication, the quote is attributed to both girls. There are reports that the question was asked many times and it did not affect the outcome of being shot, it still stands as an example for Christians to stand for God.

understanding what is said to them, they learn and follow. Coppedge argues, “teachability is not related so much to temperament as it is to a choice of the will. We can choose to be open, not closed to what God has to say.”<sup>38</sup> Teachability is being open to what is said to you and then studying what was given.

In Acts Paul says of the Bereans “Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were true” (Acts 17:11 ESV). There is a difference in following blindly and being teachable. A blind follower does not examine what is given; they act on orders without the thought of questioning and proving the statement. This is acceptable and understandable if one is building a military unit; some level of unquestioning is required. However, if one is bringing about a new way to understand God, as Jesus was, then it would be best to have followers who understand and engage in their faith and know how to articulate and argue for the tenets of that belief.

A separate but equally critical part of biblical discipleship lies within the ability to live life together. Jesus did not simply instruct the disciples and send them home. He spent three years living and teaching with them. Coppedge defines this as “The Principle of Life Transference”<sup>39</sup> There is a deeper relationship than just teacher and student in teaching discipleship. The idea behind life transference is “some things are better caught than taught”<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Coppedge, 59.

<sup>39</sup> Coppedge, 61.

<sup>40</sup> Coppedge, 61.

This concept is also called intentionality. Having a relationship with the purpose of discipling is much more than just creating a friendship. In a friendship the goal is to have someone who you like, and they like you and life happens in the way it usually happens. In an intentional relationship, there is a deeper reason for the time spent together. It has some of the same characteristics, such as getting to know each other, and learning likes and dislikes. But the time is spent focused on the master pouring into the student as well. This time is based on the concept of modeling.<sup>41</sup> Jesus spent time modeling what he expected of the disciples. He did not just teach concepts; time was spent doing hands on ministry. He did not just tell them the kingdom of God was present, he showed them. Jesus did not just tell them to love others, he modeled that love in his interactions with those around Him.

Two of Jesus' strongest teaching moments came with his interaction with women. The first was the woman at the well in the Gospel of John, Chapter 4. Jesus treats the Samaritan woman differently than other Jewish men would have treated her. He speaks with her, he asks for water, he answers her questions, and then he teaches her truth. Secondly, this is again modeled with the woman brought to Jesus to be stoned in the Gospel of John, Chapter 8. Jesus does not go along with the crowd. He calls them to repentance, then when they leave, he treats the woman as a child of God, not as the Pharisees would have treated her. Jesus again speaks with her and gives her hope in the truth of who God is, then forgives her and sends her away. This is a much different outcome than she must have expected.

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<sup>41</sup> Coppedge, 61.

These situations, along with many more would have more impact on Jesus' disciples than spending time in a classroom would ever have had. He teaches, then shows, then gives opportunity for his followers to do the same. Luke, Chapter 10 gives the example of sending out his disciples, so they can put to use what has been modeled for them.

Along with the modeling of life as a follower of Christ, there are also spiritual disciplines that must be taught as well. Jesus did not just take his disciples around teaching about how to love others and showing them, he also spent much time teaching and revealing God through the Old Testament Scriptures. He reminded those who would listen, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt. 5:17-18 ESV). The primacy of Scripture is not laid to the side to be forgotten when Jesus comes; it is brought to the forefront. In telling those who were listening he had not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it he was telling them "His words are to be treated with authority equal to that of the Old Testament."<sup>42</sup> It is impossible to take what Jesus says about Himself separate from what the Old Testament says about Him.

The spiritual discipline of God's word occupying a preeminent position in a disciple's life is not only important, it is required. "Living under His authority as expressed in His Word enables disciples to cultivate their relationship with Him, be shaped like Him in their character, and be trained for His service."<sup>43</sup> This also includes

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<sup>42</sup> Coppedge, 67.

<sup>43</sup> Coppedge, 67.

the ability to say to God “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11 ESV). Memorization of God’s Word helps a disciple. When faced with a difficult situation or question, to know what God’s Word and will is vital in any situation. Jesus exemplified this when He responded to the temptations of Satan as recorded in Chapter 4 of the Gospel of Matthew.

Coppedge then gives the example of biblical discipleship having a component of giving, praying, fasting, and public worship. The Gospels contain many teachings for the follower of Christ, including giving. In one instance, Jesus is calling out the Pharisees for making a show of their giving but not practicing the weightier things of God. “You tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law; justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you should have done, without neglecting the others” (Matt. 23:23 ESV). He points out their hypocrisy in making a show of their giving, while holding back from helping others. Giving is an important part of discipleship but it should not overshadow or eclipse the other principles taught by Jesus, including the motive for giving. The research reveals far too many examples of the church in North America allowing big giving to supersede the importance of discipleship as being the primary motivation.

Praying is also an incredibly important part of discipleship to Jesus, as he constantly left His disciples to spend time with His Father. Jesus modeled prayer and specifically taught the disciples how to pray with the Lord’s Prayer. Gary Millar points out when Jesus uses the Father imagery in his model prayer, he is beginning something new. “The very use of ‘Father’ language is both unique and suggestive of a new intimacy,

which only the new covenant can bring.”<sup>44</sup> He then argues the rest of the Lord’s Prayer is eschatological. He writes not only is “Your Kingdom come Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10 ESV) “to be understood as the ultimate fulfillment of all God’s promises and creative purposes”<sup>45</sup>, but in the following verses, the asking for daily bread, the forgiveness of trespasses, the removing of temptations are all “eschatological prayers”.<sup>46</sup> So not only is Jesus modeling a life spent with God in prayer but also is looking forward to a time when God’s purposes on earth have been fulfilled.

Jesus models the importance of communion with the Father even up to the time of the crucifixion. He spent time in the Garden of Gethsemane in prayer leading up to his arrest. Jesus even prayed while on the cross. As a Christian, if one does not have primacy of prayer in his or her life, then it would be hard to call this person a disciple. Coppedge reminds the reader “Jesus began by teaching His disciples to communicate with their Father their whole hearts and minds”.<sup>47</sup> This is not just about asking for things, put in your coin, and receive your prize; this is communication with the Creator of all things. A mature, effective disciple must spend time talking to God.

Finally, Coppedge rounds out the discussion on prayer by addressing the question of “why pray”? He points out, “Many think that because God knows all things prayer is unnecessary. If God knows what disciples need, why should they ask Him?”<sup>48</sup> From a

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<sup>44</sup> Gary J. Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord : A Biblical Theology of Prayer*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 172.

<sup>45</sup> Millar, 172-173.

<sup>46</sup> Millar, 173.

<sup>47</sup> Coppedge, 71.

<sup>48</sup> Coppedge, 72.

myopic view of prayer this question makes sense. If the only reason for prayer is to ask for things such as money, healing, job betterment, etc., and if God is an omniscient God, one should not have to voice these things. Coppedge explains the real reason behind prayer is not to voice needs and wants, but to “develop a relationship with God.”<sup>49</sup> He explains a relationship should be based on communication between two people. This is the very essence of prayer; the disciple participating in a conversation with his Master. As a marriage with no real communication is doomed to fail, so too a disciple of Christ will fail if there is no communication with God.

What does this mean for the life of a Christian today? If Scripture calls the believer to “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances” (I Thess. 5:16-18 ESV) then the expectation would be for this to be the norm for the church and any believer. According to Pew research 55% of Americans say they pray daily.<sup>50</sup> However, when broken down by age, the disparity starts to become clear. Only 16% of 18-29 years old pray daily; 30-49 yrs. are at 34%; 50-64 yrs. clock in at 29%; and 65+ yrs. are at 21%.<sup>51</sup> These numbers help shed light on why discipleship is so lacking within the church.

The argument is that our relationship with God is strengthened through prayer. And it is our relationship with God that strengthens us as disciples. If the number of believers who say they pray once a day are at the frequency shown above, this would

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<sup>49</sup> Coppedge, 72.

<sup>50</sup> “Frequency of Prayer - Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics,” Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, May 11, 2015, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/frequency-of-prayer/>.

<sup>51</sup> “Frequency of Prayer - Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics.”



help explain why the church is more concerned about themselves, and the focus on others has become minimal, or secondary at best. When the numbers for those who actually attend church are compared with the low percentages of prayer on a daily basis, then it is no wonder the church for the most part seems to have lost its focus. The evidence suggests the Church in North America needs to return to its Biblical foundation and practices and once again embrace a discipleship mode of ministry rather than the attractional model which is so prevalent.

## CHAPTER 3:

### THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### **What Is the Purpose of the Church?**

If the argument made in this work is that the Western church is failing to reach those who are outside of the faith because it is preoccupied with satisfying its own needs and wants, then the historical foundation of the church must be examined. If the church has always focused solely on itself and those who are already within its membership, then the argument would lose its validity. Therefore, it must be proved, from its beginnings, that the purpose of the church was to reach the lost and bring them into fellowship, so they could be discipled and reproduce organically.

Steve McKinion, in his book *Life and Practice in the Early Church: A Documentary Reader*, brings clarity to the church's early success. "The extraordinary growth of the church from humble beginnings to the dominant religion in the empire after Constantine's conversion was the result of its desire to include others by preaching its message, which the Christians called the Gospel."<sup>1</sup> There are many reasons for Christianity's growth, with one of the most important being the instructions from Christ. The command Jesus gave his followers before his ascension is the instruction given for the spreading of the Gospel, which builds the church. When posed the question of the timing of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, Jesus begins with the statement "It is

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<sup>1</sup> Steve McKinion, *Life and Practice in the Early Church: A Documentary Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 115, AProQuest Ebook Central.

not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority” (Acts 1:7 ESV). The disciples were still focused on the restoration of the Jewish kingdom at this time. Jesus then follows up with what has become, in essence, the Christian’s marching orders. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8-9 ESV). The Early Church made it a priority to tell others about God. They were persecuted by those around them who either did not understand or condoned what they were doing. They faced accusations of cannibalism, of instigation of rebellion against authorities, and other atrocities.

The example the Early Church gives history is one of loving others rather than loving one’s own comforts. McKinion points to the growth of the church during these times as he writes,

The increase was due to the influence of martyrs’ faith had on witnesses to their deaths. Rather than frightening those who saw the suffering and convincing them to either abandon or to reject the faith, oppression caused many to take up the cause. This caused Tertullian to conclude that the blood of the martyrs, was the seed of the church.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of putting their faith on display, no matter the cost, is what drew others to actually listen to what they were saying. There have been many martyrs for many different reasons throughout history. Martyrdom is not confined to Christianity. The rarity of Christian martyrdom is the way in which it is received and the peace of martyrs in their moment. In describing martyrdom, Saint Gregory of Nazianus states, “It is mere

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<sup>2</sup> McKinion, 116.

rashness to seek death, but it is cowardly to refuse it.”<sup>3</sup> His statement basically remarks that Christians, while not seeking out death and thus martyrdom, if need be, they will accept the death of a martyr.

The martyrs of other faiths are usually in conjunction with causing the death or maiming of others. Donald Demarco explains this concept in writing about the differences between Christian and Islamic martyrs. “The concept of martyrdom (*shahada*) in Islam is to be understood in light of the Islamic concept of the Holy Struggle (*jihad*).”<sup>4</sup> This is not to argue there have not been Christians who have killed or maimed in the name of Christ. The difference is Christians are not called to kill others to become a martyr; they are called to love others even if it means their own death. This focus is different than any other religion. Christ calls his followers to love their enemies and to pray for them.

Another example of the purpose of the church can be seen from this perspective, “The core identity of the church is this: the people of God are an extension of Christ, loving God and each other whole-heartedly, acting as a sign of the reign of God, both now and in the coming Kingdom.”<sup>5</sup> The church’s involvement with those outside its walls can be the catalyst for change inside its walls.

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<sup>3</sup> Donald Demarco, “The Meaning of Martyrdom for Christians and Muslims,” Catholic Education Resource Center, 2002, <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/the-meaning-of-martyrdom-for-christians-and-muslims.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Demarco.

<sup>5</sup> Jimmy Dorrell, *Dead Church Walking: Giving Life to the Church That Is Dying to Survive*, (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 59-60, ProQuest Ebook Central.

The command Christ gives his followers is simple. They were commanded to make disciples, baptize them, and to teach them all they had been taught (Matt. 28:18-20). This command is not steeped in a mysterious ceremony that only adherents to Christianity would know and participate in with other Christians. Jesus did not restrict who they were to carry out this message to, nor did he specify a single group to whom it should be taken. This was a radical shift, and still is today. Christianity is predicated on having love for others, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples; if you have love for one another” (John 13:35 ESV). Conversely, if people reject the message Christians are told to brush the dirt off their feet and move to the next opportunity to share (Luke 10:10-12). This command is what motivated the Early Church. McKinnon notes, “Members of the community (of Christ) were expected to long for and attempt to produce the conversions of all classes and races to Christianity”<sup>6</sup>

### **Making Disciples**

Some have put forth the argument that Christ calls the believer to make disciples, not to be disciples.<sup>7</sup> The question becomes what exactly a disciple is in light of Scripture. Discipleship is not solely the property of Christianity. The idea already existed in the Greco-Roman world. In the writings of Herodotus, the story is told of a Scythian who was taught by a Greek teacher and the word μαθητής is used, which is translated as

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<sup>6</sup> McKinnon.

<sup>7</sup> Carey Nieuwhof, “How the Church Today Is Getting Discipleship Wrong,” CareyNieuwhof.com, February 3, 2014, <https://careynieuwhof.com/how-the-church-today-is-getting-discipleship-wrong/>.

student or disciple.<sup>8</sup> A disciple is, therefore, someone who follows the teachings of a master or teacher. The reason Christians are called to make disciples is so that they can teach all Christ has taught. If, as argued by Nieuwhof, a Christian is to make, not just “be” a disciple then what are those implications? He writes, “Could it be that in the act of making disciples, we actually become more of who Christ designed us to be? It was in the act of sharing faith that thousands of early Christians were transformed into new creations.”<sup>9</sup> This may just be semantics, but there is a possibility Nieuwhof has grasped something to be wrestled with and thought through. A disciple must be a learner. If Christians are called to make disciples, they are actively engaging with not only the disciple, but, by extension, are engaging with the Scriptures for the purpose of teaching. When a disciple spends time in Scripture for the purpose of teaching it, they begin to have a better grasp onto what they are teaching. In the call to make disciples the call is also to engage with the deeper things of God. If a disciple makes other disciples, they are exponentially growing into a better, more complete reflection of Christ.

In a discussion of how one senses God’s presence, Francis Chan makes an argument about discipleship. He puts forth the idea that we are not specifically called to be disciples, but in the Great Commission of Matthew 28 Christians are called to make disciples, the same as Nieuwhof. He argues Christians should be more interested in making a disciple of Christ rather than spending the majority of their time being a disciple.<sup>10</sup> The idea is an argument against being a sedentary Christian. Being in a small

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<sup>8</sup> David A Toth, “In his Disciple Making Ministry, How Did Jesus Christ Determine What to Say and/or Do?” (DMin dissertation, Portland Seminary, 2015), <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/94>.

<sup>9</sup> Nieuwhof.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Chan, “Sensing God’s Presence,” *Churchleaders.com*(blog), Church Leaders via Spotify, July 18, 2018.

group or Sunday School, sitting in church service and listening to a sermon, or just doing a Bible study on one's own are parts of being a disciple, but this is not where discipleship ends. These are steps in the process of becoming a disciple.

In the Jewish ancient near east the initiating of the master/student relationship would have been much different than how Jesus initiated his relationship with his disciples. Toth says, “The rabbi did not call a prospective follower into his circle. Instead, a prospective pupil would seek out a rabbi that reflected desired interests and the pupil would ask if the rabbi would accept him as a pupil.”<sup>11</sup> Jesus did not use this same process. He chose his disciples, he initiated the relationship, and sought out those who would be his followers. This was in direct opposition to the Jewish way of life. This way of seeking those who would be followers is what Christians are now commanded to do in the Great Commission.

When statistics are then brought under the lens of this directive, the results are much easier to understand. When Barna Research looked at the percentage of Christians who say it is their job, not the church's job, to share their faith, one thing was clear:

The most dramatic divergence over time is on the statement, ‘Every Christian has a responsibility to share their faith.’ In 1993, nine out of 10 Christians who had shared their faith agreed (89%). Today, just two-thirds say it is important to share their faith, (64%)—a 25-point drop.<sup>12</sup>

If a disciple of Jesus is someone who makes disciples, and part of making disciples is increasingly seen as the church's job, not the job of the average Christian, then leaders within the faith should not be surprised at the resulting me-first attitude so

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<sup>11</sup> Toth.

<sup>12</sup> “Sharing Faith Is Increasingly Optional to Christians,” Barna Group, May 15, 2019, <https://www.barna.com/research/sharing-faith-increasingly-optional-christians/>.

prevalent in the Western church. A part of the issue is that most Christians do not seek out the opportunity to share their faith today. This is true over the last 25 years as well. The same report states, “Most conversations today (61%), as in 1993 (75%), happen unexpectedly. Yet compared to 25 years ago, Christians today are more likely to say they are proactive about looking for or trying to create faith-sharing opportunities with non-Christians (19% vs. 11% in 1993).”<sup>13</sup> These percentages are still low. Jesus is clear that Christians are to share their faith. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8 ESV)

Somewhere along the line it was decided that polite society did not discuss politics and religion. Whether it was Emily Post or Mark Twain who said it, the idea has been seen as polite for quite some time. With the advent of social media, the idea of not discussing politics has been thrown out the window. The opposite is true for religion. The idea of sharing one’s faith with the intent of convincing another to follow a new belief system is talked about in an almost antagonistic fashion.

Historically speaking, the church has moved away from a view of doing everything it can do to bring non-believers to belief in Christ. Christianity being a part of everyday life and sharing Christ is now optional. In the beginning of the early church, not much could stop those who knew Christ from sharing their testimony. Even if it meant their death and the death of those whom they loved. The first example of this is seen in

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<sup>13</sup> “Sharing Faith Is Increasingly Optional to Christians,” Barna Group, May 15, 2019, <https://www.barna.com/research/sharing-faith-increasingly-optional-christians/>.



the martyrdom of Stephen. In Acts chapter seven the recounting of Stephen's death for his testimony is given as the example for all Christians who follow.

It is not hard to read throughout history in a book like *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* for stories similar to Stephen's and see persecution resulting in the death of Christians. "In 313 A.D., the Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which accepted Christianity: 10 years later, it had become the official religion of the Roman Empire"<sup>14</sup>. In *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, the number of recorded martyrs started to trail off. This trend is mostly a Western church phenomenon. There are still many of the Christian faith martyred for their belief in Christ on a yearly basis. In the West though, it is a rare thing indeed.

Luke Muelhauser, writing for the website "Common Sense Atheism," asks a compelling question for all Christians. He gives a scenario of living in Poland at the start of World War II, and having, on impeccable authority, information of the atrocities of the Jewish Holocaust that was coming and having the ability to save those who would be swept up in the Nazi regimes, asks the following questions. "Would you just go on about your life? Would you just mention this to your friends and family in passing, and send them an occasional tract with information of the threat of the Nazis? Would you merely pray for them to see the threat and save themselves?"<sup>15</sup> Muelhauser continues, "Or would you do everything you could to save your friends and family?"<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "The Roman Empire: In the First Century. The Roman Empire. Early Christians," PBS, 2006, <https://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/christians.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Luke Meulhauser. "Do Christians Really Believe?" Common Sense Atheism, April 8, 2011, <http://commonsenseatheism.com/?p=1852>.

<sup>16</sup> Meulhauser.

Penn Jillette, a magician and comedian, makes a similar argument in a video he made to talk about the gift of a Bible given to him after a show. Jillette, an atheist, states, “How much do you hate somebody, to not proselytize, how much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that.”<sup>17</sup> The command to Christians has always been, “love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34 ESV).

If Christians are to love as Christ has loved them, this means sacrifice. Sacrifice is defined as “to suffer loss of, give up, renounce, injure, or destroy especially for an ideal, belief, or end”<sup>18</sup> The idea of sacrifice in the Western Church has been put on the shelf, only to be brought out to make the church feel good about itself when it gives money to a certain cause. There are stories about the church worldwide available online containing many stories of sacrificial love for the church, for the cause of Christ, and for those who are brothers and sisters in Christ. While the average churchgoer in the US feels persecuted because some comedian on a show makes fun of Jesus and those who follow Him, in other parts of the world men, women, and children are murdered and maimed for their belief. Yet, those in the church with the most to give financially can seem to be worried about the color of a carpet, or the style of music, or did the pastor speak to me while I was leaving. Jesus is not a God who promises prosperity and peace to those who follow Him.

Luke 9 gives a brief picture of the seriousness with which Jesus calls his followers. A man approached Jesus as he was walking and told Jesus he wanted to

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<sup>17</sup> Penn Jillette. “A Gift of a Bible.” YouTube video, 5:11, July 8, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6md638smQd8>.

<sup>18</sup> Merriam-Webster, s.v. “Sacrifice,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sacrifice>.

follow Him but first needed to go bury his father. Jesus responds with what today's pastors would rarely say, "And Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury the dead. But as for you go and proclaim the Kingdom of God.' Yet another said 'I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to those at my home. Jesus said to him 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'" (Luke 9:60-62 ESV).

David Platt writes, "Plainly put, a relationship with Jesus requires total, superior, and exclusive devotion. Become homeless. Let someone else bury your dad. Don't even say good-bye to your family. Is it surprising that, from all we can tell in Luke 9, Jesus was successful in persuading these men not to follow Him?"<sup>19</sup> Jesus stated to his followers, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." (Luke 9: 24-24 ESV). This command is just as true today as it was when he spoke it.

### **What is Important to the Church Today?**

There is an old saying attributed to Martin Luther, although he may or may not have written it, that says, show me where a man spends his time and money and I'll show you his god.<sup>20</sup> This combined with what Jesus said in Matthew, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21 ESV) is a compelling reason to

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<sup>19</sup> Platt. *Radical*, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Adam Jeremiah Levitin, *Consumer Finance: Markets and Regulation* (New York: Wolters Kluwer, 2018).

make others a priority. Jesus was teaching his followers not to store up money or treasures while on earth but to do so in heaven.

Does the church today reflect this teaching? The budgets of many churches in the SBC dwarf the budgets of churches worldwide. The same thing can be said for the living conditions for most who live in the West versus the majority of those who live though out the rest of the world. When standards of living are compared, the disparity is quite large. Most Quality of Life indexes have Scandinavian countries at the top of the list followed by most European and North American countries. At the bottom of the list are countries on the African continent, Southeast Asia, and South America. Some Asian countries make the list as well at the bottom of the list. The churches in these two areas mirror these indexes as well. The churches in the more well-to-do countries are on the decline, as seen in the U. S., and the countries that fall on the lower end of the indexes have thriving communities of faith despite harsh conditions.

The job of pastors and leaders is to help congregations who have lost their focus on others change their focus. If Jesus' statements about our treasure being where our heart is hold true, the heart of the church is reaching the world for Christ. This is not something to be undertaken lightly but with enough of the members pushing in the same direction, a church can change what it treasures.

### **How Did the Church Change Over Time and Lose Focus?**

When discussing the Biblical background of the church and the call to make disciples in Chapter 2, it was clear the mandate given to Christians was to “go and make disciples.”

It is the argument of this work that the church has lost its focus on making disciples and thus the focus has shifted from being concerned about others to being more concerned with one's own comforts. If an answer to this problem is to be found, then the beginnings of the loss of focus need to be understood. Scripturally speaking, Paul speaks to many issues within his letters to various churches that comprise the New Testament. In I Corinthians alone he addresses a plethora. The list includes arguing over leadership, incest, celibacy in marriage, and divorce from believers and non-believers. He also writes about lawsuits, idolatry, and immodesty in teaching and worship. Others include the chaos that can happen with speaking in tongues during worship, inequality during shared meals, and denials of Christ's bodily resurrection. Paul responds to these issues with a reminder of the love Christians should show one another and the world. The love chapter (I Cor. 13) is a capstone to this argument. "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." (I Cor. 13:7-8b ESV). With this statement Paul reminds the church that love for Christ and one another can overcome the issues.

Douglas Campbell argues "When we take a step back from all the ins and outs of the issues of the letter, we can see Paul is urging something simple to the Corinthians."<sup>21</sup> He is urging those who are in the church to be different than those outside the church. Campbell continues, "A great deal of what he says can be summed up in the phrase, 'appropriate relating.' Chapter 13 describes at length the principal

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<sup>21</sup> Douglas A Campbell, "Paul Wrote 1 Corinthians to a Community in the Middle of a Culture War," *The Christian Century*, December 22, 2017, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/critical-essay/paul-wrote-1-corinthians-community-middle-culture-war>.

Christian way of relating, which is love.”<sup>22</sup> The church in Corinth was already turning its attention away from others and having problems within its own walls and had to be reminded that it was through the love of Christ that it could love each other and move toward reaching outward to those who did not know Christ as savior.

If the church was already losing its focus in the first century then this is not a new problem. If it is not a new problem, why then is it still a problem 2000+ years later? It is the heart of the church and its members that is at the center of the issue. The authors of *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics: Issues and Challenges for the Twenty-First Century*, specifically Peter Van Nuffelen, make a strong point of this when they quote Jerome and Lactantius while discussing the ethics and morality of giving through charity. “Every other form of giving is pure vanity. One gives for Christ, not for one’s own glory.”<sup>23</sup> Again, the patristic writers were addressing issues of the heart. What is the motivation for the church’s action? The members of the church will pull or push the church into the direction the majority decides. Van Nuffelen points out:

The care for the poor became a public virtue, part of the classical *liberalitas*. A new and unified discourse was formed, integrating *caritas* and *liberalitas*, to become the ideal to which emperors, governors, and bishops alike had to conform. As such, it is a good example of how an ecclesiastical discourse came to dominate the entire society.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Campbell.

<sup>23</sup> Johan Leemans, Brian J. Matz, and Johan Verstraeten, *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics: Issues and Challenges for Twenty-First-Century Christian Social Thought* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 48, EBSCOhost.

<sup>24</sup> Leemans, Matz, and Verstraeten, 48.

The Church can make inroads for the Gospel through its actions. This has been the truth since its inception. Issues arise when the focus departs from the good of the world and centers on the good of me. Not only do these issues arise when the focus is on self, but the idea of the church as a stable pillar of a community has changed. David Boshart writes, “Mainline Protestant and evangelical groups are for the first time trying to understand what it means to be the church in a North American society where the church’s power is marginalized.”<sup>25</sup>

The church begins to be an institution in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century. While it is still under immense pressure from persecution, it begins to put roots down to become not only a path for followers to walk, but a monolithic institution with interests that overreach its call. While some would argue the Council of Jerusalem should be seen as the beginnings of the institutionalization of Christianity, there was still no central controlling thought within the church. The council was called because “some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, ‘unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1 ESV). This caused Paul and Barnabas to be at odds over whether this should be the case, along with others in the church it was decided they would go to Jerusalem and work through the problem. The issue was decided, and letters would be sent to the churches, but this by no means institutional control. In fact, those in the Roman Empire’s religions

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<sup>25</sup> David Boshart, “Revisioning Mission in Post Christendom: Story, Hospitality and New Humanity,” *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 4, no. 2 (2010): 16-31.

“considered Christianity a minor heretical Jewish sect, and rightly so. There was very little cohesion among Christians of this early era.”<sup>26</sup>

The Church would finally begin becoming centralized in 325 A.D. when Emperor Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea. The council’s goal was “to consolidate what would be considered the true views of Christianity to properly brand all other views as officially heretical. This Constantinian shift marked the true beginning of the institutionalization of the Early Church”<sup>27</sup>. Until this point there were many different views of Christianity and all of them competed for preeminence. Whether it was Gnostics, Judaizers, or other offshoots, there was not a centralized system. There were even disputes on what was Scripture and what was not Scripture, which was also discussed and agreed upon at the Council of Nicaea. The 27 books of the New Testament were compiled for the first time by Athanasius in his Festal Letter. This letter was an annual letter to all the churches in Egypt to set the date of Easter and the beginning of Lent and thus the entirety of the Christian calendar of festivals for the year.<sup>28</sup> Athanasius, in his letter of 367 writes:

Continuing, I must without hesitation mention the Scriptures of the New Testament; they are following: the four Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, after them the Acts of the Apostles and the seven so-called catholic epistles of the apostles – namely, one of James, two of Peter, then three of John and after these one of Jude. In addition there are fourteen epistles of the Apostle Paul written in the following order: the first to the Romans, then two to the Corinthians and then after these the one to the Galatians, following it one to the Ephesians, thereafter the one to the Philippians and the one to the

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<sup>26</sup> Eric Herboso, “The Institutionalization of the Early Christian Church,” The Classroom, January 10, 2019, <https://www.theclassroom.com/the-institutionalization-of-the-early-christian-church-12086352.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Herboso.

<sup>28</sup> Glen Davis, “The Development of the Canon of the New Testament,” Athanasius, July 25, 2008, <http://www.ntcanon.org/Athanasius.shtml>.



Colossians and the two to the Thessalonians and the epistle to the Hebrews, then immediately two to Timothy one to Titus and lastly the one to Philemon. Yet further the Revelation of John.<sup>29</sup>

It is through this process and, of course, many other councils and discussions that Christianity becomes an institution. The man-made system of the universal church seems to fly in the face of what Jesus was doing while walking the earth. There are others who would argue the establishment of the universal church is what allowed the theological arguments and differences to be agreed upon and heretical beliefs to be identified as such. If not for these discussions, heresies, such as that of Arius who argued that Jesus was created by God, the Father and thus not of the same substance or self-existent,<sup>30</sup> would have not been cast out of the teachings of the church. The universal church has its origins in settling controversy. The Church begins to set the beliefs of theology and of those who would be allowed to teach the theology, leading to the creation of the Catholic Church. It could be argued the need for the institution was driven by the need to have a correct understanding of God and his word. The church loses its focus when it begins to run the day-to-day business of being an institution.

The focus of churches then, as it is today, is not only to teach the word of God, but also to have programs for those who are professing Christians. The early Catholic Church served to help the poor and to feed the hungry. It also was about its business of owning land, building church buildings, training new ministers, and unfortunately,

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<sup>29</sup> Davis.

<sup>30</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica, s.v. "Arianism," July 23, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Arianism>.

running programs like the Inquisition. When the goal becomes to hurt those who do not believe exactly as they are told to believe, the church has lost its focus.

The present-day church is as guilty of lost focus in many ways. While missions are still an important part of the church, it is often correlated as part of the colonialism that came with the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The focus of salvation through imperialism is an idea whose implementation caused many of the issues the world is faced with today. Peyman Amanolahi Baharvand writes “Orientalist discourse depicted non-western people as savage and primitive. It was at the service of the western powers to justify their presence in the East. European colonizers referred to their occupation of the East as a civilizing mission.”<sup>31</sup> The focus of the church was never meant to be “civilizing” a people group to match what those who brought the message saw as right. In doing so, the Church labeled those who were from a different culture as wrong. The argument is not whether or not a Christian is called to take the word of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. The prevailing thought during colonial times was that Western Civilization was far more advanced in morals and other ideals than those in the East and in the Southern Hemisphere. The resulting thought, as Baharvand points out, is “The degradation and subsequent eradication of native cultures were prerequisites for the accomplishment of imperial policies”<sup>32</sup>, was one of superiority. A country that was subjected to colonialism then had negative feelings for Christianity. It is understandable. Taking the Gospel to the

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<sup>31</sup> Peyman Amanolahi Baharvand, “Victims of Colonialism in Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North,” *Forum for World Literature Studies* 10, no. 1 (2018): 137-153.

<sup>32</sup> Baharvand, “Victims of Colonialism in Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North.”

world is a Christian's call, but in doing so if one country subjugates another to its desires and sullies the name of Christ, has any good come of the process?

The point should be introduction to Jesus, not homogenization of cultures. How do Christians take the Great Commission and not take it into a new culture and try to completely change that culture while giving the good news? Missionaries used to plant churches and make them look just like their home church and when they left the church died. The newer way of taking the Gospel is to contextualize the Gospel without watering down the message so that the church that is planted is vibrant. Southern Baptist churches are not run as the Early Church was, it reflected society around them. When the Gospel reached Rome, the churches looked nothing like the churches in Jerusalem. It follows then that churches planted today should not be mirror images from a different culture.

### **Differences between the Western Church and Churches World-Wide**

Churches planted in different cultures of the world should not be carbon copies of the church that has sent out the planters. This is regardless of where the church is to be planted. When God has allowed a church to flourish under the leadership and circumstances where that church is, it should not be expected that the same exact circumstances will be in play when that church decides to plant a new church. This is exaggerated when planting a new church in a completely new country, even if the country is similar to the sending church's country. For example, the United States and Canada have many similarities on the surface, but when a church planter from a Southern Baptist seminary tries to plant a church in British Colombia, Canada, there will be many difficulties of which the planter is unaware.

The first thing to understand between the Western Church and the rest of the world is to see a breakdown in numbers of Christians between the two areas. In 1910 there were approximately 600 million Christians worldwide. The distribution was 66.3% in Europe, 27.1% in the Americas, Asia-Pacific had 4.5%, Sub-Saharan Africa was at 1.4% and the Middle-East/North Africa comprised 0.7%.<sup>33</sup> Fast-forward to 2010 and the numbers have changed dramatically. The number of Christians has ballooned to more than 2 billion, but the percentage of Christians in the world is still close to the same as 100 years ago, 35% - 32%. The distribution percentages are what has changed the most. While Europe and the Americas still have the highest percentages at 25.9% and 36.8%, now Sub-Saharan Africa is at 23.6% and Asia-Pacific is at 13.1%, while Middle East/North Africa has stayed relatively the same at 0.6%.<sup>34</sup> What is seen is that although globally Christianity still makes up approximately the same percentage of the totality of people, the shift from Europe and the Americas has dramatically increased. Christianity is also moving from the Global North to the Global South. The shift looks like this: in 1910 82.2% in the North and 17.8% in the South to 2010 with 39.2% in the North to 60.8% in the South.<sup>35</sup>

With the above numbers considered, it would not be out of the realm of thought that although Christianity is on the wane in Western countries, it is growing elsewhere. The Western Church has been the driving force in Christianity since the Protestant

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<sup>33</sup> "The Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, July 10, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>.

<sup>34</sup> "The Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population."

<sup>35</sup> "The Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population."

Reformation began in the 1500's. Before this there were significant contributions from both the Western and the Eastern branches of Christianity.

Most Christians in the West have little knowledge of Christianity after the apostolic age up until Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door to the Wittenberg Castle church. There is little knowledge of the Council of Nicaea, the Council of Constantinople, the Council of Trent, and so on. Many of these councils were not just about theological disagreements. They also contributed to who would be politically in charge of the Church going forward. As discussed earlier in this paper not only did Africa have much to contribute to Christianity but the Middle East, being the birthplace of Jesus Christ and the beginnings of the Early Church has much to contribute as well. When the Christian church began to take on the Western ideals and politics it turned its back on its early beginnings.

This is also noticeable within the Church today. A church service in middle America does not feel or look like a church service in other places throughout the world. Of course, there are always similarities but what is being argued is that the church in America is comfortable. One can count on air conditioning and being sheltered from the elements. The nursery is far away from the service so as not to bother those in worship. If there are newborn babies present, parents are encouraged to take them to the sound-proofed cry rooms available for your (read our) convenience. There are musicians with sound systems that are perfectly mixed for our listening and viewing pleasure. The churches in other parts of the world would not be so comfortable for those in America. Unless it is a church plant of a large world-wide church such as Hillsong, most churches in the Southern Hemisphere have no A/C. There are not many who have professional

musicians and singers, much less the technology that is available to churches in the West. The differences in money spent is also, as discussed earlier, a distinct difference found between North American churches and Southern Hemisphere churches.

There is encouraging news within this shift. As Patrick Johnstone writes in his book *The Future of the Global Church: Histories, Trends, and Possibilities*, there has been a decline of the “cosy cohabitation of Christendom with national and imperial governments.”<sup>36</sup> There seems to be a push for true Christianity and not just cultural Christianity. The difference is immense. Cultural Christians are Christians because of where they live or how they were raised. True Christianity is marked by truly allowing Jesus Christ to be the Lord of one’s life, along with a desire to tell others of this life-altering decision. Cultural Christianity has as its hallmarks, which are materialism and power, whether within the church or politically. It has a desire to make others behave as it would have them behave.

The pull of Christ on his church is by no means any less than it was over 2,000 years ago at its inception. The Church can reach back within Scripture and find its way back not just to a culture of Christianity, but a true life lived for Christ. Implementing change to a system hundreds of years in the making is a difficult undertaking. Leadership within the church must understand there is difficulty in the process. Pastors and leaders may be run out of the church when they attempt to change what is comfortable for what they feel God is calling them to produce. Change hurts those who are being told the way they are comfortable in doing church can change for the better. Staying the course in the church will only lead to further decline within the Western Church

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<sup>36</sup> Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends and Possibilities* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 61, ProQuest Ebook Central.



## CHAPTER 4:

### RESEARCH INTO THE PROBLEM

#### **Churches and Change: How Are They Dealing with It?**

Churches in the Southern Baptist denomination have not always dealt with change in a very effective way. Whether the change is minimal, such as changing which pulpit to use in the sanctuary, to major changes, such as music changing from traditional to contemporary, the change is at the very least pushed back from one group or another. The interviews and discussions with pastors and leaders of the churches researched all agreed the changes were necessary for their church to continue to be vibrant.

The SBC had a building program for any new churches, or for any church that wanted to build a new sanctuary. If a church wanted to build a new place of worship the church would contact the SBC church building team. There were very few differences within the architecture of these buildings. If a family moved to a new town, the First Baptist Church of (insert name here) looked so much like the First Baptist Church from the town they moved from, it felt immediately like home. Even today on the SBC website there is a section dedicated to church architecture with three master plans for the church to choose from.<sup>1</sup> It makes sense from an ease point of view and it is comfortable. In the mid-1990's churches started doing things differently by hiring architecture firms to build the new church, and for the first time SBC churches started to reflect the area they were

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<sup>1</sup> "Church Architecture," Texas Baptists, accessed October 3, 2019, <https://texasbaptists.org/ministries/church-architecture>.



in, instead of being cookie cutter. These changes were met with many pushbacks, including costing pastors their jobs and being the impetus for church splits. Architecture is not the only change many in the SBC pushed back against.

The worship changes that started happening in the mid-to-late 1980s were, and still are, a source of contention within Southern Baptist churches. Many churches started to use projectors to put the words of the songs on screens, even if they were still using hymns as worship. This is still causing many to pine for the “good ole’ days” of using hymnals. There are still articles written wishing for the use of hymnals or hymns in general with titles such as “Why You Should Keep Using Hymns in Your Worship Service”<sup>2</sup> and “15 Reasons Why We Should Still Be Using Hymnals”<sup>3</sup>. They lament the lack of musical ability needed just to read off a screen. There are pithy quotes about “What’s new is not always best”<sup>4</sup> or “Hymnals actually teach music”<sup>5</sup>. The problem with articles such as these is, they are focusing on why “I like my hymns or hymnals” instead of what will reach a lost and dying world. There is still so much pushback from churches against change, because it makes the congregation uncomfortable.

In his book *Autopsy of a Dead Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*, Thom Rainer looks at churches who have closed their doors and looks at reasons behind their death. He argues “The most pervasive and common thread of our autopsies was that the

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<sup>2</sup> Matt Boswell, “Why You Should Keep Using Hymns in Your Worship Services,” ChurchLeaders, January 22, 2018, <https://churchleaders.com/worship/worship-articles/254977-vintage-worship.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Boswell.

<sup>4</sup> Boswell.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Ponder, “15 Reasons Why We Should Still Be Using Hymnals,” The Aquila Report, April 5, 2017, <https://www.theaquilareport.com/15-reasons-why-we-should-still-be-using-hymnals/>.

deceased churches lived for a long time with the past as the hero.”<sup>6</sup> Rainer also makes clear the churches were not “hanging on to biblical truths . . . were not clinging to clear Christian morality . . . not fighting for primary doctrines, or secondary doctrines or even tertiary doctrines. As a matter of fact, they were not fighting for doctrines at all.”<sup>7</sup> These churches also declined to make budget decisions reflective of reaching others. Rainer noticed that the budgets reflected an inward focus, “in most cases, cuts were made to ministries and programs with outward foci.”<sup>8</sup> The budgets reflect those things that make the church comfortable, staff, buildings and grounds, electricity, and water.<sup>9</sup> Rainer goes onto compare the dying churches to the Rich Young Ruler in Scripture, Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Matt. 19:21 ESV). The thing that held the young man back was his love of money and comfort. It had become his idol; so too with a church with an inward focus. Rainer goes on to describe these churches as “Preference Driven Churches”<sup>10</sup> The decisions are based on my preferences instead of what the church needs to do to reach the lost. Whether it is music style, when church starts, activities and programs it always starts with the same word, me. The Great Commission takes a backseat to what will make the members comfortable.

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<sup>6</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 14.

<sup>7</sup> Rainer, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Rainer, 32.

<sup>9</sup> Rainer, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Rainer, 47.

Further discussing churches with focus on themselves in the “The Preference-Driven Church.”<sup>11</sup> Instead of making changes to help the church reach others, one’s own preferences rule the day. Rainer describes a church that had started to come back from the brink of death. Newer families had started coming to a new service started by the church, which featured contemporary music. The problem is they started the new service at 8:30 a.m. and kept the traditional service at 11:00 a.m. The new service had started to gain traction but most who were invited, even though they liked the service and preacher, said they probably would not come back because 8:30 a.m. was too early to try to get young kids ready on a Sunday. The church held a business meeting about swapping the services and in Rainer’s words:

There were about 150 people present. That included members who had not been in church in five years or more. That included people most others did not know. It was obvious what was taking place. Members had recruited others to come to the meeting to vote not to change. The exchange of words was harsh. Accusations were made. Guitars were declared to be “of the devil.” One member declared he would let the church die before that change was made. He would get his way eight years later.<sup>12</sup>

Rainer continues to talk about the past being tantamount to a hero for those who have been in the church most of their lives. It is revered because major events happened within the church. They found Christ, raised a family, had parents who helped start the church, and other reasons. There is a place for reverence for what has gone before but as Rainer states, “Yes, we respect the past. At times we revere the past. But we can’t live in the past.”<sup>13</sup> The idea of sacrificing the comfort the church member has come to love is a

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<sup>11</sup> Rainer, 29.

<sup>12</sup> Rainer, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Rainer, 29.

difficult request. However, if Scripture is to be the guide for Christians, being uncomfortable and sacrificing what one desires is the natural outcome of reading Scripture. Rainer points out the book of Hebrews heroes of the faith (Heb. 11) because “they obeyed God even though they did not know the consequences of that obedience. They saw themselves as foreigners of this land and life, temporary residents of this earth.”<sup>14</sup>

Preference is an American way of life. You can “have it your way” at any number of fast food restaurants. The ability to choose the exact services and how they are received is part and parcel in the modern West. How one views the church and Christianity in general appears to be no different. The things that generally are high on the preference list are music style, desired length and order of worship services, desired color and design of buildings and rooms, activities and programs, and need of ministers and staff.<sup>15</sup> All of the above list is proceeded by my. My way of doing things is more important than anything else in the church.

When held up to the mirror of Christ these issues do not reflect the Savior’s attitude. Christians are reminded by Paul to have the same attitude in Philippians. “Do nothing from selfish ambition . . . Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4 ESV). The example Christ gave the church was this, “who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant . . . he humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8 ESV).

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<sup>14</sup> Rainer, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Rainer, 30.

This is the call to Christians, and this is the call to the church, to put others before self. Any other option taken is dangerous to the future.

### **The Materialistic Church**

The West is product-driven; in fact, most of the world is product-driven. With a few exceptions made for tribes who are completely cut off from the world, humanity is subjected to marketing on an almost constant basis. It is not just on television or even the movies. According to research there are 257.3 million smartphone users in the United States, which is 69.6% of the population, and 74% of households.<sup>16</sup> It is estimated that over five billion people own a cell phone of some sort.<sup>17</sup> It does not seem to matter what economic demographic one belongs to, the smartphone is part of daily life. Along with the smartphone come social media. There are 4.388 billion internet users worldwide and 3.484 billion social media users.<sup>18</sup> Social media is mass marketing. There is the pretense of the user being in control of what they see and what they read, but algorithms make sure the user is making money for them with every click. In 2018 the average North

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<sup>16</sup> Arne Holst, "Topic: US Smartphone Market," [www.statista.com](https://www.statista.com/topics/2711/us-smartphone-market/), August 1, 2018, <https://www.statista.com/topics/2711/us-smartphone-market/>.

<sup>17</sup> Kyle Taylor and Laura Silver, "Smartphone Ownership Is Growing Rapidly Around the World, but Not Always Equally," Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project, August 22, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/02/05/smartphone-ownership-is-growing-rapidly-around-the-world-but-not-always-equally/>.

<sup>18</sup> Dave Chaffey, "Global Social Media Research Summary 2019," Smart Insights, September 6, 2019, <https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/>.

American made Facebook \$8,246.00.<sup>19</sup> Just by being online the average user makes companies billions of dollars per year.

When these numbers are considered it is not hard to understand humans are now programed to be materialistic. Churches and churchgoers are no different. As discussed in an earlier chapter, it is not cheap to put on a good show for the average congregation. When the church makes its goal to reach consumers instead of the lost it is reflected within the usage of not only the money brought in but in the focus of the time of worship. If there is to be a change in attitudes within Christianity at large, there must be a decision made to push aside the personal creature comforts for a different attitude to prevail.

This is an easy thing to write, but a difficult thing to manage. Who in their right mind would want to give up what is comfortable for that which is difficult? And yet, a materialistic church is not what God calls His church to be. In her article on consumerism in the church Carole Cusack begins with a description of consumer culture and how it has affected the church. She writes, “The secular public space of Western democracies became filled with innovative goods that individuals sought to acquire, both for pleasure and as sources of personal identity, and religion and spirituality were subsumed into this marketplace as institutional Christianity retreated.”<sup>20</sup>

If a church or a Christian is materialistic or has a consumer mindset it leads to a small god. Rick Barger writes, “common consumerism is not seeking transformation; it

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<sup>19</sup> Amy Gesenhuens, “Facebook Ad Revenue Tops \$16.6 Billion, Driven by Instagram, Stories,” MarTech Today, January 31, 2019, <https://martechtoday.com/despite-ongoing-criticism-facebook-generates-16-6-billion-in-ad-revenue-during-q4-up-30-yoy-230261>.

<sup>20</sup> Carole M. Cusack, “The Messiah Is a Salesman, Yet Consumerism Is a Con(spiracy). The Church of the SubGenius, Work, and the Pursuit of Slack as a Spiritual Ideal,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 19, no. 2 (2015): 2.

has an agenda of other personal needs”.<sup>21</sup> This consumerism leads to a small god because it puts the needs of self as the goal of life. When self is of upmost importance then the worship needs to meet my approval. If self is the center thought, the prayer life centers on affirmation of self. The prayer life that puts self first, seeks blessings to fix what may be wrong, marriage, kids, job, etc. This Christian will tell others they are praying for them, or that thoughts and prayer are being given for a difficult situation, but, like most things in the social media age, it is often a passing thought at best.

Barger goes on to argue, “The main task before the church in this time of cultural transition, confusion, and opportunity is the recovery of its authentic story. That includes the creation of a congregation culture whose self-understanding and ethos emerge from the DNA of its story.”<sup>22</sup> The DNA of said church must focus on what God has called the church to be, which is salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16 ESV). If everything is held to the lens of the calling on the church the focus begins to narrow and expand at the same time. The narrowing results in not a turning of the back to worship, but an understanding that worship can be different than what the personal preferences are and can be embraced as good. The expansion then becomes part of how the world is to be seen. Bruce Epperly tells of being raised as a “pious Baptist child.”<sup>23</sup> The narrow-minded theology encountered growing up caused him to become a “spiritual refugee, whose emerging faith no longer fit within the narrow confines of a small-spirited Baptist theology by which I

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<sup>21</sup> Rick Barger, *A New and Right Spirit: Creating an Authentic Church in a Consumer Culture* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2005), 27.

<sup>22</sup> Barger, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Gordon Epperly, *Emerging Process: Adventurous Theology for a Missional Church* (Cleveland, TN: Parsons Porch, 2011), 26.

was raised.”<sup>24</sup> If a church is to gain a kingdom-focused mindset it has to be able to narrow its own desires to match what God is calling that church to be. The reality of church should not be personal preference but to reach outward to those who have not met the living God.

Materialism, both in personal lives and within the life of the church, leaves its adherents wanting more. In *A New and Right Spirit*, the reader is introduced to a couple visiting the church where the author was pastoring. The family is described as “very attractive and . . . economically affluent”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, both “attended prestigious undergraduate and graduate-level schools. They both held ‘great’ jobs and lived in a very upscale development and their kids were in private schools. They told me that their lives were ‘great’ and they were ‘happy’.”<sup>26</sup> The American dream was completely fulfilled in their lives. This can describe a great many people and churches in the West. The problem is there is something missing. When pressed, the couple says, “‘something was missing’ and were seeking a connection to a ‘spiritual community’ that would be ‘the icing on the cake’ for their otherwise wonderful lives”.<sup>27</sup>

This is a picture of what the church in the West has become. It is a place to search for the perfect cap on a perfect life. It is cliché to say, but there is truth in some sayings. There is a piece missing from the life lived for self and only God can fill it. Likewise, a church with an inward or materialistic focus will be great but there will always be an

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<sup>24</sup> Epperly, 26.

<sup>25</sup> Barger, 45.

<sup>26</sup> Barger, 45-46.

<sup>27</sup> Barger, 46.



underpinning of the need for more. When a church has truly embraced its calling, there is difficulty, there is struggle, but there is not a wanting for something more.

The idea of a perfect church to fill my needs perfectly is not something that will go away any time soon. It is also not a new phenomenon. Barger describes a VCR tape left on his door in the 1980s. He describes coming home and a bag was taped to his door with a picture of a sumo wrestler dunking a ball with the words “Just imagine” and below it, “7 minutes”<sup>28</sup> He describes the video as very similar to a marketing video from an all-inclusive beach resort. Both videos show smiling people doing fun things and both promise to deliver a fun time and meaningful impact. The problem with this is, as anyone who has ever gone on vacation can testify, you always have to come home. Church is not supposed to be an attraction; it is supposed to point us to God and, through worship and discipleship, draw us closer to Him.

### **How Can A Church Help Its Members Change?**

The problem of helping a church change its focus is something pastors of many churches face. There are different avenues to attempt moving a church to a new focus. The eight churches that were involved with the field research were of varying sizes and styles. Three were established at least thirty years prior to the time when the pastor came to the church. Four were planted in the past ten years and there was one that had been started twenty years prior to the pastor coming to lead it.

One thing all of the pastors agreed with was that discipleship was lacking when they first took over the church. The lack of discipleship does not mean there is a lack of

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<sup>28</sup> Barger, 1-2.

teaching. There are plenty of Sunday School options at most churches. Even if the church has moved away from a Sunday morning offering of a Bible study and has moved to a home-based small group meeting, there is not a lack of teaching Scripture, especially within SBC churches. According to the Southern Baptist Convention's Annual Church Profile (ACP) 62% of those who attend a worship service also attend either a small group off campus or Sunday School.<sup>29</sup> What this indicates is that there is an ability to make time for what most assume is discipleship. However, discipleship is not happening if out of these churches there is a lack of willingness or ability to share the Gospel or to reach outside of their comfort zones.

To be sure, there are many who are voracious in their study of God. They read the latest books, sing the latest songs, but the problem is they do all this to fill themselves. There is not a shortage of books to buy, blogs to read, or studies to join. The authors of *Transformational Discipleship* argue if a person is not transformed, they are not a true disciple of Christ.<sup>30</sup> If church goers are just being taught and very few are making disciples then something has to change.

In understanding where the change can come from, Dottie Escobar-Frank in describing Methodists in the U.S. writes, "History has proven that change happens from the edges of society and organizations."<sup>31</sup> Her argument is that although the Methodists made up a very small percentage of Christians in the U.S. they affected societal change.

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<sup>29</sup> Aaron Earls, "Worship Attendance Rises, Baptisms Decline in SBC," Facts & Trends, LifeWay, June 1, 2018, <https://factsandtrends.net/2018/06/01/worship-attendance-rises-baptisms-decline-in-sbc/>.

<sup>30</sup> Barger, 9.

<sup>31</sup> Dottie Escobedo-Frank, "The Church Revolution from the Edge," (DMin dissertation, Portland Seminary, 2012), <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/34>

The same can happen in the church today. A small group, either positively or negatively can affect change.

There has to be an intentionality in teaching to focus on making someone a disciple. Everyone is a disciple of something. The Greek word, μαθητής, or mathetes, means learner or pupil. Therefore, everyone is a disciple of something.<sup>32</sup> Whether it is a person's job or a hobby, humans tend to learn about things they enjoy. Thus, all members of churches have the ability to become disciples of Jesus Christ who makes disciples of Jesus Christ. If they do not, then the Church is not living up to its reason for existence.

Geiger argues that churches are good at building things, such as buildings, programs, staff, events, and initiatives, but are deficient in making disciples.<sup>33</sup> The problem then lies not only with the individual Christian but also the church itself. There has to be a point where church becomes something more than a social gathering of like-minded people and true transformation begins to be the focus. Geiger also reminds those who will listen that Jesus saved his strongest rebukes for those who had the most knowledge of the Scriptures.<sup>34</sup>

Geiger goes on to describe the disconnect in today's church. He likens it to a team playing prevent defense or playing not to lose. "Defensive discipleship focuses primarily on protecting people from influences in the world, from anything that could corrupt the perceived purity of the heart."<sup>35</sup> Offensive discipleship understands that all humans need

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<sup>32</sup> Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2012), 9.

<sup>33</sup> Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, 17.

<sup>35</sup> Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, 25.

transformation because of the sin nature that is inherited. It is hard to get through to most Christians but once they grasp this idea, then they can move forward. Christians would do well to remember David, when was confronted with his sin in Psalm 51, “For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.” (Ps. 51:3-4 ESV). When a Christian understands the need for transformation, not just salvation, then they are on the road to becoming a disciple.

One of the churches that was researched for this project has begun to make a change in how they disciple and they are starting to see the fruits of those changes. They are a fairly large church, with a membership of 1,400. The current pastor started to make changes when he arrived eighteen years prior. It has not been a quick transformation and there was major pushback, but the church has removed some sacred cows, such as Wednesday night Bible study and Sunday evening church, so they could focus on small group discipleship. Throughout all of the changes there has not been full buy-in from every member. However, about 40% of the members are now engaged in the discipleship groups and from that group approximately 50% of them have gone on to become new small group discipleship leaders. This has led to the church consistently reaching outside of its own walls to those who need the most help. The ability of these disciples to share the Gospel and to love on others has shown in the transforming of the lives, not only within the church but also within the community where they serve.

Within this church, and others described in the above book, it is not just one program that is changing people, “it is part of everything they do.”<sup>36</sup> The authors give a

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<sup>36</sup> Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, 43.

list of attributes of discipleship these churches have: Bible engagement, obeying God and denying self, serving God and others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, seeking God, building relationships, and being unashamed.<sup>37</sup>

While the one church has made significant inroads into changing its culture the other churches within the research group have struggled to make inroads in changing the culture of their church. It has not been for lack of trying. There are many different programs, both purchased and home grown, which have been tried. The biggest problem encountered within these churches has been a lack of buy-in from their congregations.

There have been little victories. The problem is the victory is short-lived and the majority who have gone through the programs have made little impact in changing the church culture. There is only one church that had success among those researched, it is the outlier within the Baptist churches in the group. One must ask why they are different. All the churches have stability in their leadership positions. There is not a head pastor who has not been in place for less than five years. The churches have had little to no success in changing the attitudes of those who are attending. This does not imply the congregations are not good people who love God and have a love for others. It means there has not been a radical change in how they see the world to which they are called.

When asked why their congregations had not changed the answer given most often (although in different ways) was there was no reason for the congregation to change. In the churches researched there are plenty of programs and feel-good outreach but there has never been a feeling that they need to change. The churches have no

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<sup>37</sup> Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, 43.

problems to speak of; they reach their budget and pay all their bills; some are even growing. The problem arises again, they are too comfortable.

When we are comfortable there is no reason to change. When considering the reasons to change the critical success factor is there has to be an uncomfortableness within the church. The one church that has seen change in culture had a moment of clarity, which is so rare for a church to have while they are doing well. The pastor was able to communicate the passion that was needed to make a change. He became uncomfortable with being comfortable.

This happened with another pastor who had a moment of clarity as well. Francis Chan, in his book *Crazy Love*, describes the problem he found within his church. He writes, “The core problem isn’t the fact that we’re lukewarm, half-hearted, or stagnant Christians. The crux of it all is why we are this way, and it is because we have an inaccurate view of God. We see Him as a benevolent Being who is satisfied when people manage to fit Him into their lives in some small way.”<sup>38</sup> Chan then challenges the reader to understand the immensity of God when he directs the reader to watch a video and follows with a question when describing the smallness of the Earth compared to the known universe, “Do you think maybe it was to make us say ‘Wow, God is unfathomably big’? Or perhaps, God wanted us to see these pictures so our response would be, ‘Who do I think I am?’”<sup>39</sup> Chan then follows up with a quote from R.C. Sproule quoting John

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<sup>38</sup> Francis Chan and Danae Yankoski. *Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2015), 24.

<sup>39</sup> Chan and Yankoski, 28.

Calvin, “Men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance, until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty of God.”<sup>40</sup>

When talking about leaving his church because of the uncomfortableness he felt, Chan talked about the need to be a disciple.<sup>41</sup> Chan speaks about taking his family and living in Southeast Asia in different places and planting house churches, raising up disciples, and moving on. He is replicating the same idea in California now.<sup>42</sup> This is where the listener is confronted with the statement “What if God is calling us to make disciples not just be a disciple.”<sup>43</sup> He argues the church has been stagnant for too long. The idea of making disciples is a hard call. Hard things are difficult to get comfortable people to do. A pastor’s job is to shepherd those whom God has given, but pastors are not called to make the flock comfortable while teaching them to love others.

The idea of loving the others within the community is what Jesus commands and is very clear about several times within Scripture. Jesus also gives the reader an idea what that looks like. Barger asks the question, “What do people who love Jesus do? They feed his sheep. They are attentive to his word. They serve the saints and love all of God’s children. They show mercy and make peace. They rejoice with indescribable and glorious joy.”<sup>44</sup> The first of the statements is seen when Jesus confronts Peter after the resurrection with the thrice asked question of “Simon son of John, do you love me?” (John 21:16

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<sup>40</sup> Chan and Yankoski, 31.

<sup>41</sup> Francis Chan, host, “Sensing God’s Presence,” Church Leaders (podcast), July 2018. <https://open.spotify.com/episode/1Y48K75fXfaI4kKYEe8Ahv?si=4pjlW96oSAyWlvoEZrEHFg>.

<sup>42</sup> Chan, “Sensing God’s Presence.”

<sup>43</sup> Chan, “Sensing God’s Presence.”

<sup>44</sup> Barger, viii.

ESV). Peter answers in the affirmative that he does indeed love Jesus. Jesus then instructs Peter to care for and feed my sheep. This brings to mind the question of who are the sheep?

This question can be seen from several angles. The first is those who are followers of Christ. One of the titles given to Jesus is the Great Shephard. Many times, Jesus uses this motif in describing his followers. When he is asked if he is the Messiah he answers, “I told you and you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep hear my voice and follow me” (John 10:25-27 ESV).

Conversely, if his command was to only take care of those who follow Him Jesus would not have given the parable of the Good Samaritan. In that instance Jesus is asked what one must do to attain heaven. The short answer is love God and love people. This illustrates his point on who to love to those who would listen to the parable. Among all who pass the traveler, it was the Samaritan, from whom nothing was expected, who showed what it means to care for others. Barger calls loving Jesus the “essence and identity” of the church.<sup>45</sup>

If a church is to take on the essence and identity of loving Jesus as Barger suggests, why is it so hard to move a church into a mindset that matches this? Jesus spent time with those whom he called, for sure. He also spent much of his time with those who needed Him the most. When confronted with about spending time with tax collectors and sinners his response is telling. “But when he heard it, he said, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire

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<sup>45</sup> Barger, viii.



mercy and not sacrifice'. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners'" (Matt. 9:12-13 ESV). The implications for those he said this to, which was the Pharisees, was not lost. He called out the self-righteous who thought they needed no help but really were just as lost as those who knew they were lost. In SBC churches, there are hardly any who are members, especially long-time members, who would consider themselves in need of help. The church has filled its seats with self-righteous members who claim salvation but do very little to reach the world.

### **Why Do Church Members Resist Change?**

In her book, *Being Smart about Congregational Change*, Diane Zemke makes a claim about how change can be seen. She claims if one is trying to change the church, he or she is "acting as a dissident. Dissent often has a political connotation since that's where we most often hear the word used. Yet dissidents don't just live in oppressive foreign regimes."<sup>46</sup> She argues that dissent is a step away from change and brings with it many difficulties.

If this is true, it would begin to help explain why change in church is so difficult. Historically speaking, dissidents do not end up on easy street. Most are thrown in jail and the key is thrown away. In China or North Korea, a dissident is likely to never be seen or heard from again. Dissidents call for revolutionary change and that sort of change brings difficult times. In the modern church change can be so divisive that it splits a church. Zemke states, "Unfortunately, dissent, especially in congregations, is frequently a dirty

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<sup>46</sup> Diane Zemke, *Being Smart about Congregational Change* (N.p.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), 67.

word. It's used as a synonym for divisiveness, obstruction, and relational conflict, all of which should be viewed very negatively."<sup>47</sup> Zemke argues though, that dissent can be a good thing and it can bring a change to an institution that so desperately needs it. She then goes on to lay out what a good leader or pastor within the church needs to understand. "Dissent is not practiced by leaders toward the group. When leaders work to change values and practices, it's called leadership."<sup>48</sup>

If dissent is to be turned into leadership, then the leader has to figure out why those in the church are pushing back. Frequently, church members do not see a need for change because everything within the church seems to be humming along perfectly well. This may be the case but being in a good place financially and having a lot of programs for members is not the call for the church.

Historically, the church has grown the most in times of persecution. To understand this in the modern day, it is helpful to look at the church in a country hostile to the Gospel. A study of Global Christianity by Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary shows Christianity is the fastest growing of all religions.<sup>49</sup> The biggest growth is not seen in North America or Europe, but in the global south. So, if the argument is that the church needs to be uncomfortable to grow, then the pastor's job is to find a way for the church to become uncomfortable.

In his book *Who Moved My Pulpit: Leading Change in the Church*, Thom Rainer lines out a list of unmovable church members. These are the first blocks of resistance

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<sup>47</sup> Zemke, 67.

<sup>48</sup> Zemke, 68.

<sup>49</sup> Aaron Earls, "7 Surprising Trends in Global Christianity in 2019," Facts & Trends, June 19, 2019, <https://factsandtrends.net/2019/06/11/7-surprising-trends-in-global-christianity-in-2019/>.

within the church. The first is “The Denier.” The example given was a church that had gone from 350 in church to 180 in five years.<sup>50</sup> When confronted about the church’s decline a member in her seventies response was “Our church is not in decline.”<sup>51</sup> She refused to even acknowledge what was plain to see. This kind of block is as hard-headed as they come. This member does not want to admit what is staring them in the face.

The next group who resist change are what Rainer calls “the Entitled.” His opening description of this group is enough to make most pastors want to quit. “The entitled church member treats the church more like a country club than a church. They view financial offerings as dues to get perks and privileges. They make pastors cringe when they say, ‘You do know we pay your salary.’”<sup>52</sup> This type of member is more concerned that the music is to their liking and the style of decorations to fit their tastes. They do not worry about others, even within their own congregations. These people are usually big givers and when they give, they choose. They do not want anyone or anything to upset their ideals of what church is supposed to be. Many even demand a certain Bible translation be the only one that can be preached or taught from.

The next group of issues come from are described as “the Blamers.” The blamers want the church’s issues to be everyone else’s fault besides them. “If our pastor was a better leader . . . . Our society is so messed up . . . . I don’t understand why these new churches have to keep starting in this community . . . . If they would stay out of this town

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<sup>50</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit? : Leading Change in the Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 18.

<sup>51</sup> Rainer, 18.

<sup>52</sup> Rainer, 19.

the rest of us could grow.”<sup>53</sup> This reflects Western society. If something is wrong in a person’s life, whether it is personal, work, or otherwise, it is never the individual’s responsibility. It is always the others who are at fault. It is much easier in this groups’ world to complain rather than make changes.

The next group is remarkably similar. They are “the Critics.” The critic is very good at giving their opinion, sometimes face-to-face, and other times subversively through social media.<sup>54</sup> The critic always finds fault in every change that is brought forward, but never have a viable solution themselves.

The last group described is “the Confused.” Rainer gives the following description, “The confused are often well-intending church members. They really do view some things as more important than they were intended. The outcry by a church member over the new pulpit is a classic example of the confused who resist change.<sup>55</sup> The idea of change can scare this group, who are afraid of losing something they cherish, but what they cherish is not one of the tenets of the faith. “Belief in the bodily resurrection is a tenet that cannot be compromised. Skipping the doxology one week will not result in immediate damnation.”<sup>56</sup>

Rainer concedes the above list is enough to make most pastors not want to lead change where they are or where they are going to be serving next. The stress is enough to make many pastors leave ministry all together. While the statistics are up for argument,

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<sup>53</sup> Rainer, 20.

<sup>54</sup> Rainer, 21.

<sup>55</sup> Rainer, 22.

<sup>56</sup> Rainer, 22.

there is plenty of burnout within ministry. Burnout can occur in several areas, whether it is physical, emotional, relational, or spiritual.<sup>57</sup> Any one, or a combination of these areas can and have caused some to leave the ministry. The problem is then just passed on to the next leader. However, there is hope. Rainer provides pastors some ways that can help a leader survive in ministry. The list is as follows: “Stop and pray, confront and communicate a sense of urgency, build an eager coalition, become a voice of vision and hope, deal with people issues, move from an inward focus to an outward focus, pick low hanging fruits, and implement and consolidate changes.”<sup>58</sup> This list can help a pastor focus to move the church into change, but it is not a guarantee that change will take and move forward. It is like a play called in football. If everything goes perfectly, a touchdown is the result. If there is breakdown in some area the result may not be perfect, but it can set the team up for another try. Ministry is never easy, and it is never perfect. This should not dissuade pastors from trying to lead their congregation through difficult change. If the goal is to obedience to the calling God has put on one’s life, even if the outcome is not what is intended, the time spent is worthy.

In their book, *Sacred Strategies: Transforming Synagogues from Functional to Visionary*, the authors point to the same issues found in the Christian church. Their definition of functional would be “an inward-focused church.” The characteristics of this synagogue are broken down into six categories. The first is “Consumerism.” This is characterized by “the fee for service arrangements (that) provide consumers with discrete

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<sup>57</sup> Kevin Halloran, “Christian Ministry Burnout: Prevention, Signs, Statistics, and Recovery,” Leadership Resources, February 11, 2019, <https://www.leadershipresources.org/blog/christian-ministry-burnout-prevention-signs-statistics-recovery/>.

<sup>58</sup> Rainer, 25-27.

services, in particular education of children for ceremonial celebrations of bar or bat mitzvah and clergy officiation at life-cycle ceremonies.”<sup>59</sup> This consumeristic ideal is common throughout the West. If someone is paying, they expect certain services. The tithe then is seen as no more than a bill come due.

The next characteristic of a functional church is “Segmentation.” This is a programming issue. The authors write, “programs stand on their own, with little integration of worship, learning, caring, social action or community building.”<sup>60</sup> This is not to say programs are bad but the lack of discipleship within the programming is what drives this issue.

Next, they cover “Passivity.” This is one thing most common in big churches because of the large staffs. It is defined as “professionals exercise firm control over congregational functioning; worshipers sit passively; parents drop off children for religious schooling; boards deal with marginalia.”<sup>61</sup> One reason given for enjoying a big church, or in this case synagogue, is that they are fully staffed, and all the congregation has to do is show up and be catered to completely. It can happen in smaller churches but with a lack of full staffs, it is rarer. More commonly, in a small church it is a single group of people who take care of everyone else, so the result is similar.

Next, the authors list “Meaninglessness.” It is the idea of no emotion within the context of worship. They describe this as “rote performance of scripted interactions, with

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<sup>59</sup> Isa Aron, Steven M. Cohen, and Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Sacred Strategies: Transforming Synagogues from Functional to Visionary* (Bethesda, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 18, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>60</sup> Aron, Cohen, and Hoffman, 18.

<sup>61</sup> Aron, Cohen, and Hoffman, 18.

little genuine significance of feelings of transcendent connection with Jews or Judaism”.<sup>62</sup> This is not seen as much in SBC churches, but it is indicative of a similar issue. The idea of being overly comfortable with the worship because it panders to members’ desired format is a real issue within the SBC. Whether it is hymns or contemporary music, the style should not push the worship, the heart for God should.

The last two play off of each other to create a larger issue. The first is resistance to change. It is defined as “the routine is supreme, preventing diversification and serious consideration of alternative modes and structures”<sup>63</sup> The next issue results in the above-mentioned issue, unreflective leadership. Its definition adds fuel to the fire, since a leader “focusses on program and institutional arrangements rather than purpose and vision”.<sup>64</sup> A lack of vision and purpose feeds into the idea that all is well within an institution. If all was well then churches, and of course synagogues, would not be fighting the issues they are fighting. Lack of purpose puts people at ease with what is transpiring. If the leader feels there is no issue, then a congregation can sit back and settle into the routine.

If there are problems with a functional place of worship what then does a visionary place of worship offer in response to the above issues. The authors have lined out the characteristics of a visionary synagogue and they too can be reflected within a Christian church. The first is “sacred purpose.” Sacred purpose is “a pervasive, shared vision, that influences all aspects of a synagogue.”<sup>65</sup> The idea of a sacred purpose, if

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<sup>62</sup> Aron, Cohen, and Hoffman, 18.

<sup>63</sup> Aron, Cohen, and Hoffman, 18.

<sup>64</sup> Aron, Cohen, and Hoffman, 18.

<sup>65</sup> Aron, Cohen, and Hoffman, 18.

caught by a group, is a very powerful motivator. The idea of being used by the creator of the universe, if understood with the redemption given through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, can motivate people out of their shells and onto a path of obedience and discipleship.

The next characteristic is “holistic ethos”, which is defined as, “the parts are related to each other and to the whole; ritual, learning, caring, social action, and community appear in several areas of functioning; lay and professional leadership function cooperatively; boundaries within and around the community are more porous and fluid”.<sup>66</sup> When a church can grab onto this idea, that all things that it does are interconnected to being a disciple and feed into each other the whole focus of the church can be affected.

The third characteristic is “participatory culture.” “Defined it is, “on all levels; congregants, students, lay leaders, professionals, and parents engage in the work of the sacred community.”<sup>67</sup> A congregation of biblically disciplined members do not have to be cajoled into serving. It becomes part of their DNA. When a disciple of Christ sees a need, to the best of their ability, they take care of the need.

The fourth characteristic of a visionary congregation is “meaningful engagement.” Meaningful engagement is “achieved through repeated inspirational experiences that provide genuine meaning to people’s lives.”<sup>68</sup> Many Christians live a roller coaster spiritual life. What this means is there are many highs and lows spiritually and this is

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<sup>66</sup> Aron, Cohen, and Hoffman, 18.

<sup>67</sup> Aron, Cohen, and Hoffman, 29.

<sup>68</sup> Aron, Cohen, and Hoffman, 29.



usually brought on by an experiential Christian life. Most churches have one or two programs a year that will give the high and two weeks later the spiritual high is gone. This is not a call for more programming but a call for a true spiritual life that is marked by repeated experiences with God on a personal level. This is part of being a disciple: meaningful prayer life, meaningful worship, meaningful interactions with the others.

The fifth characteristic is “innovative disposition.” This is described as being “marked by a search for diversity and alternatives, a tolerance of failure, ability to address and overcome resistance to change, and a willingness to abandon less functional ways of doing things.”<sup>69</sup> This characteristic holds the idea that it is good to try new things and if they do not work, there is not anger but an understanding of “let’s try something else.” As long as the goal is to love God and love others, there should be no fear of trying something. Change in a visionary church is expected, if not encouraged. As long as the basic tenets of faith common to Scripture are adhered to there is freedom to try.

Again, the last characteristic of a visionary church helps to inform the others, just as in a functional church. The characteristic is reflective leadership and governance. The authors define it as being “marked by careful examination of alternatives, a commitment to overarching purpose, attention to relationships, mastery of detail, and a playful approach to change.”<sup>70</sup> This is best summed up by a quote from Rabbi Rick Jacobs, who says, “We came to believe strongly that learning informs change, whatever change we want. If we want to change our ‘tikkum olam’ program, if we want to change worship, we don’t just ask the rabbis and the cantors to make the changes. Instead we gather a

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<sup>69</sup> Aron, Cohen, and Hoffman, 29.

<sup>70</sup> Aron, Cohen, and Hoffman, 29.

wide cross-section of lay people and professionals to learn, think, experiment, and refine.”<sup>71</sup> In gathering a large cross-section of members, an organization can not only receive input from all areas, but get buy in from each of those groups that are represented.

Throughout the research and reading on how a pastor can help a congregation move from a me-focus to an others-focus, the issue of a poorly disciplined church kept making itself known. The churches that do not focus on self-need but on reaching outside of their comforts and engaging with a lost world were overwhelmingly focused on biblical discipleship. Research reveals it does not matter whether a church is small or large or anywhere in between in determining good discipleship. Pastors with leaders who have understood the importance of discipleship, are more likely to be able to lead their congregation into the same mindset. So, if the goal of the church is to glorify God, the process must include biblical discipleship so the members will have a greater understanding of the call on their lives.

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<sup>71</sup> Aron, Cohen, and Hoffman, 29.

## CHAPTER 5:

### HOW LEADERSHIP CAN MOVE A CHURCH THROUGH CHANGE AND THE EFFECT IT HAS ON MEMBERS

Once a pastor and leadership of a church decide on the changes that have to be made the really difficult part starts. As discussed in previous chapters, congregations have difficulties with change. An effective pastor will not make changes without considering the cost associated with making changes. The cost can come in many different forms. The first is an outright rebellion from the congregation, which will result in the pastor either resigning or being let go. Other possible costs include loss of congregants, in-fighting with staff, and reduction of tithes. These are all difficulties which can, and do, arise even if a pastor does everything he can to help the changes be as gentle to handle as possible. This is a major reason why many pastors have a desire to make changes but in the end the fight is just too much for them and they carry on with business as usual. While it is understandable to not want to fight a sometimes seemingly unwinnable fight, this does not mean pastors have any less responsibility if they truly feel God is leading them to make a change.

Leading a church through change has unique challenges, but there are similarities within the corporate world. In the corporate world change is common. If an employee fights the change, the employee is shown the door, a difficult thing to do in a church. Julie Hodges writes “Change can trigger different emotions (positive and negative) within an individual at various times during transition depending on a range of factors,

including speed, timing and frequency of the change.”<sup>1</sup> Understanding these emotions can help lead others through change.

Even in the business world small changes can bring issues. “Emotional reactions to change are often viewed as a burden that leaders and managers must endure and, in some cases, even ignore. This is a misguided approach, however, as emotions are an important part of change.”<sup>2</sup>

As one leads an organization through change there are things to consider. The change cannot involve just one group. “Change culture takes place more effectively when worked at three levels: organizational, team, and individual.”<sup>3</sup> The change, whatever form it takes has to take into account all three groups.

This is true for the church as well. A leader must also decide what type of change the church needs. Sometimes the change is just adjusting and sometimes there needs to be a complete change. William Rothwell describes the differences. He divides it into three different categories. The first is developmental change, this “represents the *improvement* of an existing skill, process, performance standard, or condition that for some reason does not meet current or future needs.”<sup>4</sup> This change is just adjusting what is happening and is the least painful.

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<sup>1</sup> Julie Hodges, *Managing and Leading People through Organizational Change: The Theory and Practice of Sustaining Change through People* (London, England: KoganPage, 2016), 49.

<sup>2</sup> Hodges, 50.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Carter, Marshall Goldsmith, Norm Smallwood, Roland L. Sullivan, and Dave Ulrich, *The Change Champion's Field Guide: Strategies and Tools for Leading Change in Your Organization*. (Somerset: Center for Creative Leadership, 2013), 29, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>4</sup> William J. Rothwell, Jacqueline M. Stavros, and Roland Sullivan, *Practicing Organization Development: Leading Transformation and Change*, 4th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 62

Next is transitional change, “Rather than simply improve what is, transitional change replaces what is with something different.”<sup>5</sup> There are opportunities for something new and it is added to what is already part of the organization. Last is transformational change, “triggered by a profound shift in worldview, with leaders realizing that the organization cannot continue to function”.<sup>6</sup> This is a fundamental change in DNA of the church.

### **Helping Congregations Change from Consumers to Disciples**

In the book *Renovation of the Church: What Happens When a Seeker Church Discovers Spiritual Formation* the reason for consumerism in the Western church is spelled out quite well. Kent Carlson, in describing the moment of realization writes, “The issue is that the church in North America has, for the most part, embraced this insidious monster of consumerism in the most pragmatic manner and has used it as a principle foundation for church growth.”<sup>7</sup> Carlson shines the light on pastors being a part of the problem, noting, “The difficulty is that we live in a church culture where external success is self-satisfying. If more people are coming to our church, this is obviously a sign of success, and God must be pleased”<sup>8</sup> This is a dangerous stance to take in that just because a church seems to be growing and having great energy, it does not mean the church is doing the right thing. In the pushback against consumerism a pastor may be asking the

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<sup>5</sup> Rothwell, Stavros, and Sullivan, 63.

<sup>6</sup> Rothwell, Stavros, and Sullivan, 66.

<sup>7</sup> Carlson and Lueken, 67.

<sup>8</sup> Carlson and Lueken, 67.

congregation to not have an opinion on certain things, such as worship style or programs. When faced with the question “can’t I have opinions about the kind of songs we sing at the church?” Kent replies, “Of course you can. But perhaps we should not feel that our particular tastes and preferences should be catered to.”<sup>9</sup> If God created us in his image, it then goes to reason that if he is a creative being then so are we. The idea is not to create automatons who just do what the pastor tells them to do. Rather, it begins with helping Christians to understand that it is not about us and our preferences. The goal we are given is to be like Christ, love God, and love the world.

Carlson goes on to postulate the reason we go to church is to have an experience with God. He argues that the God we seek must be “a very small God indeed who can only be encountered at a church with a vibrant youth program, killer music, and specialty coffee drinks in the lobby.”<sup>10</sup> The argument is we do not choose a church based on the ability to meet with God, but we choose a church that caters to our needs. As pastors lead into change pastors also have to be able to put their own personal preferences to bed as well. There are many things pastors have influence over within church life and because they are human, they will have a tendency to make it in their own image.

If pastors must put aside their own desires to follow God that also means not looking for the next best church to serve. The idea of moving up the ladder to a bigger church with a bigger salary should not be the goal. Carlson talks about a time he spoke to a prospective member class at his church in Oak Hills. He talked to the group about the Benedictine Vow of Stability. The vow he speaks of is the one taken to “live in a

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<sup>9</sup> Carlson and Lueken, 69.

<sup>10</sup> Carlson and Lueken, 67.

particular monastic community for life.”<sup>11</sup> Benedict was particularly against monks who would jump from monastery to monastery. Yet, it is common now in churches for pastors to move from church to church in search of a better position that will pay more money or give them an opportunity to promote themselves. Carlson relates how he was asked “if he was encouraging the possible new members to go back to their churches” to which he replied that he has no idea, “that question is better asked of God.”<sup>12</sup> This is a particularly strong statement considering the idea of church growth. One thing to be grasped as a church is the understanding that “Each local church is meant to be a unified body, working together in a coordinated way toward a common purpose”<sup>13</sup> The purpose being to make disciples for Christ.

The pastors spoken to throughout the research process all agreed that church-hopping must stop; if it does not, we fall into the same patterns over and over. As pastors push for a sacrificial commitment to Christ instead of a “what’s in it for me” commitment, they have to be willing to question a visitor who is looking for a new church to “meet my needs”, if their needs are as important as being obedient to the point of sacrifice. If they are affirming of this ideal, then this question has to be directed to them: “Then why are you leaving the church where God had you?”

The idea of the vow of stability tells the monks they are to stay until they are called to leave. This requires us to put our needs and preferences at the bottom of the list

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<sup>11</sup> Gerald Schlabach, “The Vow of Stability: A Premodern Way through a Hypermodern World,” Gerald W. Schlabach, 2019, <https://www.geraldschlabach.net/the-vow-of-stability/>.

<sup>12</sup> Carlson and Lueken, 67.

<sup>13</sup> Steve Gladen, *Planning Small Groups with Purpose: A Field-Tested Guide to Design and Grow Your Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 18, ProQuest Ebook Central.

of things that need to be taken care of instead of finding a better fit in a new church. If a pastor were to put all new prospects to this test by finding out exactly why they are seeking a new church, and then if it is for reasons that seem as if they are just church-hopping, then possibly the pastor can encourage them with this truth: there is no perfect church and if one church made you mad about something, it will happen at the new church.

This discussion plays into the issue of not only being able to follow Jesus in his command to make disciples, but it also helps to inform the unhealthy attraction to self-ambition so many pastors get pulled into as they lead. The idea of ambition, on the surface, does not seem like a negative thing. When faced with the mirror of Scripture, leaders are to be humble and servants.

Kent Carlson, in discussing a meeting of large church pastors, described the following, “As we began our meetings, there was an unmistakable sense that we had to establish a pecking order among us. It didn’t take long to discern who had the largest church, which church was growing fastest, which pastor was better connected, who was more nationally recognized and so forth”<sup>14</sup> He then spoke of a pastor who considered himself the least of all gathered because his church only had 750 members. His question following this was telling. “I remember thinking that there must be something dreadfully wrong with a religious culture that would make someone as outwardly successful as this pastor feel insecure.”<sup>15</sup> This is the type of culture within leadership which must be turned away from. Not the striving to be the best leader that we can be, but that in doing so

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<sup>14</sup> Carlson and Lueken, 75.

<sup>15</sup> Carlson and Lueken, 76.



leaders must recognize it is not about their personal gain. If, as leaders, pastors want their congregations to buy into the biblical way of discipleship, then they must heed Jesus when he says, “But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be a slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as ransom for many (Mark 10:43-45 ESV).

This is not to say large church pastors are the only ones guilty of self-ambition. Those at the top are the ones who have the most arrows shot their way. Carlson continues, “Those of us who look longingly and with envy at our successful colleagues are equally, if not more, guilty of ambition.”<sup>16</sup> Pastors whispering that is such a shallow church, or I prefer a smaller church because you just can’t do ministry in a big church, are just as self-absorbed. When in reality, most of those slinging the arrows would give just about anything to be a pastor in charge of a large church.

### **What Is a Pastor to Do?**

John Chrysostom wrote a warning for preachers that still rings true today. He warned those who would preach that most who attend church are there for the entertainment value. In reviewing Chrysostom’s work *On the Priesthood*, Richard Lischer quotes John in this warning, “For most people listen to a preacher for pleasure, not profit, like adjudicators of a play or concert. The power of eloquence, which we rejected just now, is more requisite in a church than when professors of rhetoric are made

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<sup>16</sup> Carlson and Lueken, 76.

to contend against each other!”<sup>17</sup> If one were to change a few of the word choices, this quote could have been made in 2019. The issue is not new, but churches have exacerbated this problem by throwing up their hands and catering to this problem instead of pushing back against it.

When pushing into a new realm of discipleship the pastor must help the congregation see the need. Kenneth Boa reminds pastors “No one suddenly stumbles into spirituality, and if we do not decide to apprentice ourselves to Jesus’ authority, we will not become his disciples.”<sup>18</sup> In his dissertation, Eldon Babcock reminds leaders “It is one thing to go to church but another to intentionally make disciples.”<sup>19</sup> Again, Babcock encourages the leader that there is a difference between a program that someone can complete and a process that has been thought out with the goal of life change. There is where the biggest problem lies in the modern church and where the leadership of the church today must make inroads to change.

A process must have a beginning and in discipleship the first step must be for Christians learning how to effectively share their testimony of how accepting Christ as Lord and Savior has changed their life. This is where most Christians will put on the breaks and quit a discipleship process or program altogether. As discussed earlier, a large portion of Christians do not even think this is an important ability to have.

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Lischer, *The Company of Preachers : Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 58.

<sup>18</sup> Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 371.

<sup>19</sup> Eldon Babcock, “The Implementation of a Disciple-Making Process in the Local Church,” (DMin dissertation, Portland Seminary, 2002), 70, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/180>.

There are many ways to share one's testimony. Most training on how to share a testimony contains three steps. The first is to "Describe your life briefly before you met God."<sup>20</sup> This does not need to be a long drawn out tale of just how bad a person one has been. This is just to be a snapshot of one's life. The second step is "Describe your encounter with God."<sup>21</sup> What were the circumstances of hearing the Gospel and even if you had heard it multiple times before, something was different this time. This is very specific for each person. There is a reason why it is called a testimony. Just as in a court of law, the important thing to understand is how you encountered this moment. The last step is "Describe your life after surrendering to God."<sup>22</sup> This should also be where Christians describe how they have learned to listen to God through prayer, Scriptures, and worship. This area can be extremely impactful as it is set against the life before and how we now walk with God. A general rule for those who share their testimony is it should not take any more than 3-4 minutes. Any longer and people start to tune out.

This process should be a beginning for a new Christian, but as shown, most Christians in the SBC, particularly, have never shared their testimony. While being able to share a testimony can be the first step in the discipleship process it by no means is the easiest step. When learning how to give a testimony, a Christian must be able to remove fear of speaking to strangers aside, but they also must learn they will offend some and learn to accept this fact. It is not a goal to offend someone, but it will happen. Jesus offended those who heard Him speak many times.

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<sup>20</sup> C.J. Palmer and Teri Palmer, "3 Simple Steps to Develop Your Mission Trip Testimony, Prepare My Mission, 2019, <http://preparemymission.com/3-simple-steps-to-develop-your-testimony/>.

<sup>21</sup> Palmer and Palmer.

<sup>22</sup> Palmer and Palmer.

The first offense came right after Jesus announced his ministry, “When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove Him out of the town and brought Him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw Him down the cliff” (Luke 4:28-29 ESV). There are certain attributes a person will have as a disciple of Christ. The end goal is “to be conformed into the image of Christ—to talk the way he talked, walk the way he walked, and respond the way he responded.”<sup>23</sup>

The process of becoming a disciple is not an easy road to travel. Nor is it a quick road. This is one of the reasons so many in church today start with good intentions and then fall by the wayside because it takes too much time. Robby Gallaty calls it making disciples in the “McChristian cult.”<sup>24</sup> There is a problem with just chocking this up to impatience. If history is considered, it has been quite a long time since churches have truly strived to make disciples. If this were a new phenomenon associated with our microwave society, there would not be 70 and 80-year-old members of congregations whom have never truly been disciplined.

The excuse of blaming how society is today will not float if we are to be honest with ourselves. It comes from wanting to do whatever is easiest. It is easier to sit in a pew. It is easier to sit in a Sunday School class and then it is easier to go about one’s life as if there is no difference between a Christian and an unbeliever. Gallaty described what is gained by allowing time to be part of the process of discipleship. “God’s timing is best.

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<sup>23</sup> Robby Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus Final Words Our First Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 79.

<sup>24</sup> Gallaty, 127.

And there are such qualities of godly character such as patience, perseverance, and endurance that can only be formed through waiting upon the Lord.”<sup>25</sup>

Allowing time for discipleship is a difficult request for pastors and their congregations. Most of the time, when a decision has been reached for a necessary change, the time to make that change seems short. When a church finally comes to the realization that it is dying and in desperate need of change it may already be too late for that church. This does not mean the changes are not implemented but that the members must understand their church did not come into dire straits overnight and nor will the ship be righted easily as well.

Imitation of a mature Christian is the best way to learn to be a disciple. In discussing Augustine, Gallaty points out that it was through imitation that Augustine learned the ways of following Christ. “Imitation was an integral part of Augustine’s discipleship ministry, as he believed that ministry skills are cultivated through ‘informal apprenticeships and experiences.’”<sup>26</sup> The motivation for this was for him to “glow with fervor to imitate him.”<sup>27</sup> Jesus used this same process for three years with the apostles, so it would stand to reason this should be the way discipleship effectively should be done.

### **How Fast Can Change Be Made?**

As was pointed out earlier, this process is most effectively a slow one. This does not mean changes cannot be implemented quickly, it just means the results will not be

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<sup>25</sup> Gallaty, 131.

<sup>26</sup> Gallaty, 88-89.

<sup>27</sup> Augustine, “Confessions of Saint Augustine,” Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed October 24, 2019, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/confess.vii.v.html>.

overnight. How does a change get implemented church-wide? In the SBC the churches are ruled by congregational polity. The best place to start with an SBC church wanting to change is to understand how they are set up. From the Baptist Faith and Message, the following informs this question:

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by his laws, exercising his gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord.

It is the belief of SBC churches, through Scriptures such as “To all who are in Rome, loved by God, called as saints” (Rom. 1:7 ESV), “To the saints and believers in Christ Jesus at Ephesus” (Eph. 1:1 ESV), and others that each church is autonomous. The argument is the letters are written to “the entire congregation . . . not simply the leadership”<sup>28</sup>

What does this have to do with change? For change to happen in an SBC church, the congregation, which has by-laws that must be followed, has to vote to make the changes in how ministries are run. For example, if a pastor and their leadership decide changes are necessary the first thing to do is to start to build a group of those who support the changes and will be willing to do so publicly. The deacons as a group are the best place to start this process. If they can be convinced the change will be for the church’s betterment, they are good allies. The next step would be to take the changes to the church through a business meeting for them to vote on the change. If they do so then the changes

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<sup>28</sup> Floyd A. Paris, “The Church ~ Considering Congregational Polity,” SBCLife, August 1, 2011, <http://www.sbclife.net/article/2029/the-church--considering-congregational-polity>.

can begin to be implemented. In most churches in the SBC business meetings are a quarterly occurrence. It can take up to six months just to build the backing and then to bring it to the church. This is a place where Independent Baptist churches can move through a change more quickly, but the problem can lead to a dictatorial leadership where the pastor is the only authority.

In sensing the difficulties in just getting the question of “should we change?” brought to bear in an SBC congregation, it is no wonder many if not most pastors in these churches resign themselves to give up the fight for change. This leads to an empowerment of the congregation in seeing the leader give up the fight.

While it is difficult to implement change, it is not impossible. In part of the research of this problem the question of “how does a pastor move a congregation through change” was discussed. What most in the discussion agreed with was if the spark of seeing the need for change can catch hold with a few influential members the flames of change will begin to take hold. When asking a church to make changes in how it views discipleship, Gallaty suggests first explaining what discipleship is not. The list is easy for a lay person to understand. He writes discipleship is: “not a class, not a seminar, not a degree you earn, not a program, not a 12-week Bible study, not a 40-day home group, not a quick process, not a quick fix, not reserved for super Christians, not hard, and not an option.”<sup>29</sup> When presented the list of what it discipleship is not, leaders then have the ability to line out just what discipleship can look like. Again, this is a conversation to have many times in smaller settings to get the members ready to embrace this change in how they see discipleship. Gallaty again gives a good description. “Discipleship is

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<sup>29</sup> Gallaty, 154.

*intentionally equipping believers with the Word of God through accountable relationships empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to replicate faithful followers of Christ.* When people become disciples, they learn what Jesus said and live out what Jesus did.”<sup>30</sup>

The fight for true discipleship is not just about the congregations. The pastors of these congregations, in all likelihood, have not been biblically discipled themselves. If it were just a book knowledge or even just reading the Scriptures this would not be an issue, but it is so much more than head knowledge. Mike Breen of 3D ministries hits the mark:

Maybe you’ve grown up in church. Maybe you’ve even gone to seminary. Maybe you led a church small group or a Bible study. Maybe you’ve read every Christian book there is to read from the last 50 years. Great! It means you have an outstanding informational foundation. But you still need to be discipled in the way that the Bible understands discipleship.<sup>31</sup>

This same message over and over from many different sources, leaders, and denominations all point to the difficult fact that the Western Church, as a whole, has not been discipled in a biblical manner. What pastors, leaders and others within the church must understand is making disciples is not “a gift of the Spirit that only elite, super-Christians are expected to possess . . . all believers have been given authority to disciple by Christ and all Christians have been commanded to disciple others.”<sup>32</sup> In understanding the need for discipleship it helps to understand what stage a Christian is at the time discipleship is made a priority. There can be four stages: unconscious incompetence,

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<sup>30</sup> Gallaty, 155.

<sup>31</sup> Gallaty, 156.

<sup>32</sup> Gallaty, 157.



conscious incompetence, conscious competence (literacy) and unconscious competence (fluency).<sup>33</sup>

The first stage, unconscious incompetence, is “you don’t know that you don’t know”<sup>34</sup>. This is where new believers, or even seekers, are with their idea of discipleship. Although, it is my argument that many in the church who say they are believers can be put in this category as well. They have never been taught and have never sought for themselves. This can be seen as a lazy approach to belief.

The next stage is conscious incompetence, or “you know that you don’t know.”<sup>35</sup> This is the first step of someone who truly begins to understand the call to biblical discipleship. Gallaty reminds that “humility is the forerunner to this level of understanding.”<sup>36</sup> In this stage believers can start to add tools to their bag. Time is spent doing ministry and “you discover skills you are lacking or areas in which you need to mature.”<sup>37</sup> This stage brings to mind from childhood the 1985 cartoon series *G.I. Joe*, which ended every episode with the P.S.A. of “teaching kids an important life lesson.” After each P.S.A. the kids would respond enthusiastically, “Now we know!” And the G.I. Joe speaking to them would respond, “And knowing is half the battle.”<sup>38</sup> The assumption

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<sup>33</sup> Gallaty, 159.

<sup>34</sup> Gallaty, 159.

<sup>35</sup> Gallaty, 159.

<sup>36</sup> Gallaty, 159.

<sup>37</sup> Gallaty, 159.

<sup>38</sup> Ryan Wolfe, “Knowing Is Half the Battle,” Ability Ministry, December 20, 2017, <http://www.abilityministry.com/2017/12/19/knowning-is-half-the-battle/>.

being, if believers would truly understand what biblical discipleship entails one of several things could happen.

First, they accept where they are and begin the process of discipleship. The second possible response would be that they accept where they are spiritually, but do not desire change and will choose to stay in this state. This is the group that most often resists change and can cause grief from within the church. The third, sadly, with the understanding of the difficult task, there would be those who choose to walk away from their faith. Even if the larger part of a church chooses the later, the church would begin to be a healthier vibrant place of worship. Not by the world's standards but by God's.

The third stage is conscious competence, or "you know that you know".<sup>39</sup> This is the level where "you acquire knowledge, learn a skill, and implement what you know, fully aware of your abilities."<sup>40</sup> It can be compared to taking a language for many years, studying and understanding the words and the grammar. Students can be confident they can visit a country that speaks the language and not be lost. In the church, people can hear a calling from God to a ministry and be confident, with others working with them, that the task can be completed. Whether it is teaching, music, or anything else, they can walk into the situation and be successful.

The last stage is unconscious competence or "you don't know that you know".<sup>41</sup> This is the level, to carry the language comparison further, of being able to live in a country that is not a person's native tongue and be thought of as a native speaker. There

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<sup>39</sup> Gallaty, 160.

<sup>40</sup> Gallaty, 160.

<sup>41</sup> Gallaty, 160.

is a blending that happens at this point. There is no thinking “am I choosing the right word?” There is only conversation on an intimate level. In discipleship, this is the level a Christian will start to seek out the opportunities to disciple others. There is an innate understanding of God’s calling. Unfortunately, if the numbers given so far in this discussion are to be taken seriously, then the conclusion is there are very few at the fourth level. Even if discipleship is happening most are at the third level. It is my belief, if the Western Church does not begin to make changes, especially in the SBC, then the church in the West will continue its decline. The good news is that it is never too late to begin the process of discipleship, even at the home level.

When trying to understand how to organize discipleship within the church there is no need to reinvent the wheel. There are many who have gone before who were very adept at discipleship. One such example is John Wesley. While there may be disagreement with some of Wesley’s theology, there is no doubting his ability to organize discipleship for new believers. In his time spent at Oxford, Wesley was part of a group called the Holy Club. The club consisted of those who desired a closer walk with God. They would “engage in long periods of prayer, seasons of fasting, daily times for Bible reading, confession of sins, and routine observance of the sacraments.”<sup>42</sup> The interesting insight in this, is that they were basically a church, coming together for discipleship training and times of worship. This group was looked at with “scorn from outsiders, who began referring to the group as ‘Methodists’ because of their methodical approach to the Christian life”.<sup>43</sup> Wesley and the group eventually adopted this name.

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<sup>42</sup> Gallaty, 104.

<sup>43</sup> Gallaty, 104.

What we can understand from this group is that what they did was intentional. They intentionally met, read Scripture, and observed sacraments, among other practices. The intention was to draw nearer to God, so they may intentionally draw others to Him as well. Wesley, in his organization, had the “least stringent rules for membership and participation. Societies were similar to what we might today call congregations”.<sup>44</sup> In setting up his societies, he set up discipleship and people were expected to contribute and actively participate.<sup>45</sup> In today’s churches there are many who do not participate apart from attending. Thus the 80-20 split of work to actual participation. If churches in the SBC were to implement these specific prescribed rules for membership, it is the guess of this writer that membership would plummet. That is why church leaders must help those who are part of their congregation to see the desperate need for discipleship.

### **Putting the Money Where the Heart Is**

Materialism in the church is a given. In chapter two it was discussed how much a church spends on things other than others. The overwhelming majority of SBC churches spend 20% to 25% on outreach. This number includes money given to the Southern Baptist Cooperative, which runs the International Mission Board (IMB), the National Mission Board (NAMB), and a host of other things which take much of the money. In the 2017-2018 budget of the Cooperative Program, out of \$140,544,000 given, 50.41% was allocated to the IMB.<sup>46</sup> In fact, in 2015 the IMB announced it would be cutting 600-800

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<sup>44</sup> Gallaty, 109.

<sup>45</sup> Gallaty, 109.

<sup>46</sup> “Statistics,” Southern Baptist Convention, accessed October 29, 2019, <http://www.sbc.net/cp/statistics.asp>.

missionaries and staff “six months after . . . the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) revealed . . . that it had lost 1,132 workers—almost twice its low-end estimate”<sup>47</sup>

While the executive committee does not publish its salaries (unlike SBC churches where every member knows how much the staff makes), they have not reduced their staffing. When looking outside of the church one gets a fairly nasty slap in the face. In his book on materialism Richard Ryan writes, “We can turn to religious leaders, but while the Bible says that a person who cares about wealth will have trouble entering the kingdom of heaven, televangelists with toothy smiles pull in millions of dollars contributed by viewers.”<sup>48</sup> It is time for the church to put its money where its heart should be, reaching a lost world which surrounds us. The church universal is the largest property owner outside of government entities.

While there is a need for places of worship, other means can be found. When seen in contrast to the Western Church, other countries’ churches meet in warehouses after work, homes, small meeting rooms, and outside in the elements. There is not a specific need for ornate unmatched buildings, but it is understood these are not going away any time soon. This is a call for churches to spend less on self and more on those outside the walls of the church. When the church has more concern for those on the inside than those on the outside it is reflected in the budget.

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<sup>47</sup> Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, “Southern Baptists Lose Almost 1,000 Missionaries as IMB Cuts Costs,” Christianity Today, July 30, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2016/february/southern-baptists-lose-1132-missionaries-staff-imb-cuts.html>.

<sup>48</sup> Tim Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 2, ProQuest Ebook Central. 2.

When walking through a church in the SBC denomination, the focus of the church is not hard to discern. If there is an over-abundance of materials for programs within the church it is a good bet, they are for those already in the church. Again, it is understood these are not going away without a fight, but if that is what the focus is and where the money goes, then it is no wonder those on the outside come later.

While research for this study has focused mainly on SBC churches, this is not a phenomenon just in SBC churches. According to a study in 2016, 49% of church budgets go to staff and 52% of those churches spend less than 10% of their budget doing ministry outside their walls.<sup>49</sup> This is not just a problem within the Southern Baptist world. It is a problem within the Western Church. If this trend cannot be reversed there are serious repercussions which will ripple throughout churches. When the present Boomer generation finally passes on, and these are the most ardent supporters of how church is done, will there be anything left to pick up, or will there need to be a reboot?

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<sup>49</sup> Billy Hallowell, "Researchers Explored More than 1,100 Church Budgets - and Here's What They Discovered," Deseret News, October 5, 2016, <https://www.deseret.com/2016/10/5/20597502/researchers-explored-more-than-1-100-church-budgets-and-here-s-what-they-discovered>.

## CHAPTER 6:

### CONCLUSIONS

“The Christian church is not doing well. Church is a weekly convocation of the converted and the content. It is not an incubator for fledgling Christians.”<sup>1</sup> These are the words of Gary Hamel in an interview from 2011. This statement is the greatest concern of this dissertation; our churches are not doing the job of discipleship and therefore are not living out their calling. The church, of course, is an easy target. It has been for quite a long time. Religious leaders and followers are mocked by those in the world systems who see them as nothing more than either hypocrites, or in need of an emotional crutch. Hamel, who has a Ph.D. in business, goes on when he describes the shortcomings of the church today. “So, is the problem with our methods? How effectively are we engaging those who aren’t even nominally Christians? How effectively are we moving people to transformation? There’s much about what we do that is not effective. Many things are going to have to change if we’re going to reverse these trends.”<sup>2</sup> Hamel also argues that the biggest problem with the church is not a list of things that one would normally find in a list of issues, such as materialism, atheism, relativism, etc. He points out what many others have: the church is losing membership, not just people leaving but people not coming at all. We are not replacing those who leave. He points out, “In 2006, there were 91 million more Americans than in 1990, but there was no increase in church attendance

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<sup>1</sup> Erich Baumgartner, “Organizing the Church to Outrun Change,” *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 5, no. 2 (2011): 20-35.

<sup>2</sup> Baumgartner.

during this time frame.”<sup>3</sup> Even if churches were keeping up with the growth rate of the country, percentage-wise, that would have meant organic church growth. It did not and continues to trend that way. Hamel concludes that the biggest problem is inertia. “We are institutions that are not changing as fast as the world around us.”<sup>4</sup> The problem with this statement is the assumption the church must change along with culture. While it is not a bad thing for the church to evolve in how it runs and how it reaches outside of its walls it has to be careful to not change what it believes. When a church makes a change to be seen as relevant to the culture of the day it can be a dangerous thing. The church must bear in mind the warning from Ephesians.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we attain to the unity of the faith and of knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (Eph. 4:11-14 ESV).

The church must remain true to Scripture and true to the teachings of Christ. There have been many different ways of discipleship. Just like there are many different translations of Scripture, these ways of discipleships all have their own strengths and weaknesses.

The strongest discipleship program is the one that is not a program. The lives of Christians are filled with one program or another. Hamel reminds in the interview, “In Silicon Valley, we have to generate thousands of ideas to get only a few useful ones. How do we get every single member of the church to be an entrepreneur?”<sup>5</sup> Pastors have

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<sup>3</sup> Baumgartner.

<sup>4</sup> Baumgartner.

<sup>5</sup> Baumgartner.



to empower their members to think outside the box when reaching outside the church. In the same way, pastors must become creative to create discipleship opportunities with those God has put in their care.

It stems back to the Early Church. Discipleship was part of the DNA of every Christian. It was assumed mature Christians would take new Christians and disciple them organically. They would be a part of the lives of those who they mentored. Today, with society fractured into boxes, such as home, work, church, entertainment, school, etc., it is almost impossible for discipleship to find an anchor point in most Christian's lives. Asking members to add a new program into their already overprogrammed lives does not bear fruit.

As discussed previously in earlier chapters, the church has lost membership at an alarming rate. People just do not want to go to church anymore, let alone add another program to their lives. Carey Nieuwhof postulates the over-abundance of options in society today as a reason for church becoming less and less important. "Generations ago, the church was the social hub as well as the missional hub. In addition to faith reasons, people loved going to church because it was one of a handful of options available in a community as well as the main way (other than personal devotions) you connect with God."<sup>6</sup>

The argument of over-saturation, though, is not a great argument as to why discipleship has become such a difficult practice for churches and Christians. The reasoning is, like most excuses, a red herring. A red herring is something that is meant to

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<sup>6</sup> Carey Nieuwhof, "Why Attending Church No Longer Makes Sense," CareyNieuwhof.com, June 4, 2019, <https://careynieuwhof.com/why-attending-church-no-longer-makes-sense/>.

be misleading. The argument is not whether or not someone will be disciplined. Generally, when people see a need and have a desire, they make room for things in their lives. Rather, the argument should focus on why it is not seen as necessary by the majority of churchgoers.

As pointed out in earlier chapters the majority of Christians today do not see the need to share their testimony, and they also do not see the need to be disciplined any more than they already are because that is what the leadership in churches has allowed to be the norm. Nieuwhof gives compelling reasons why he goes to church and these can also be pointed to as to why a Christian needs discipleship. First, he argues, “You don’t attend church. You are the church.”<sup>7</sup> Christ calls the church his Bride, and he is not talking about a building—he is talking about those who are believers. Next, he claims it is “An experience for the sake of those not yet in the room.”<sup>8</sup> Whether it is the person who is seeking, or a Christian is bringing a friend, the church experience is as evangelistic in nature as is discipleship.

The emphasis on how a church looks, how professional the music sounds, and what programs the church can offer those who attend is foremost in the mind of most congregations. These are not discipleship, but they have taken over as the most important aspect of church life. The attendance at local and national gatherings for denominations are funded and thus focused on stuff for the church. When a pastor signs up for the convention, the focus is advertised to be on “church growth” and “how can a pastor better

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<sup>7</sup> Nieuwhof.

<sup>8</sup> Nieuwhof.

lead the church.” Sadly, the biggest focus seems to be the vendors trying to sell the next great product to get done whatever is the hot button for the day.

In his concluding thoughts with Baumgartner, Hamel states “We must ask ourselves: ‘Are we committed to redemption, renewal, and reconciliation than to our programs, policies, and practices?’”<sup>9</sup> When a question such as that is posed, the need for an answer is imperative. Pastors and church leaders must be bold enough to confront their members with this question. Why are we so committed to something that is not working? If the best answer is, because we have always done it that way, then change must happen.

### **Why This Must Happen**

There are many reasons why churches must change in order to focus on those outside of the walls of the church. The ability to see the need for the change is just the first step. The fortitude to make those changes is possibly the most difficult step. Discipleship that produces mature Christians is necessary for the church to survive. It is easy to look outside of the church to see what happens when change is neglected.

In an article on change in the business world, M. S. Rao writes “there are many people and companies who once performed at the top of their line because they were zestful and adventurous but became complacent.”<sup>10</sup> Rao then gives the reader a list of companies who failed to change, “Blockbuster, which was crushed by Netflix. Dell, which was overridden by mobile devices. Kodak, which lost track of the digital era. Motorola, which got outmaneuvered by smartphones. Sears, which lost immense market

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<sup>9</sup> Baumgartner.

<sup>10</sup> M. S. Rao, “The Global Companies That Failed to Adapt to Change,” Training Magazine, November 1, 2018, <https://trainingmag.com/global-companies-failed-adapt-change/>.

share to aggressive discount stores such as Walmart and Target.”<sup>11</sup> There are others, but the point is clear; these companies did not change, lost market share and all but died. When seen from this point of view, there has to be a recognition from church leaders of this reality, if the move from programming and catering to desires to bring new members in is not changed the church will also suffer the same fate as those companies. In the same article Jack Welch, the former CEO of GE, is quoted as saying “If the rate of change on the outside exceeds the rate of change on the inside, the end is near”<sup>12</sup>

Churches in the US close at a rate of 100-200 per week.<sup>13</sup> That averages between 6,000 and 10,000 per year. Rainer points out “It’s tempting to blame secular culture, national politics, or church leaders for the declining evangelical influence in today’s culture”<sup>14</sup>. This would be a mistake. Outside forces being hostile to the church is nothing new. The Early Church faced persecution from many different sides and yet still thrived and grew. The persecution facing the first century church caused exponential growth. The areas in the world today where the church faces its harshest persecution have produced the greatest growth in the church. No, hostility to the church has and always will draw Christians to a closer walk with God, thus producing a vibrant church. What causes the church to decline is apathy and contentment with where it is at that moment.

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<sup>11</sup> Rao.

<sup>12</sup> Rao.

<sup>13</sup> Thom Rainer, “Hope for Dying Churches,” Facts & Trends, Lifeway, November 27, 2018, <https://factsandtrends.net/2018/01/16/hope-for-dying-churches/>.

<sup>14</sup> Rainer.

Rainer provides a few ideas for churches to remain vibrant. First, “We must remember our purpose.”<sup>15</sup> The purpose of the church is to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the love of Jesus. Through the programs within the modern church this purpose has been, at best, assigned toward the back of the list. Not overtly. Ask church leaders why they do what they do, and the likely answer is to serve Jesus and the community.

The next suggestion is to “become a house of prayer.”<sup>16</sup> The reason for this step is a reminder that a church or a pastor cannot do what is necessary to reach the lost on their own. It is only through prayer that the Christian connects with God and hears his commands.

Next, “We must cease seeing the church as a place of comfort and stability in the midst of rapid change.”<sup>17</sup> The message does not change but the way in which it is proclaimed may. Too many times people hear the change word and have anxiety that the message will be watered down. That is not what needs to happen, but the format can change.

The next, and most important is, “We must emphasize evangelism and discipleship.”<sup>18</sup> Discipleship and evangelism go hand in hand. A mature disciplined Christian will inherently seek to share the Gospel with those they meet. This Christian will seek opportunities to love others as Jesus has loved them. A church where the

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<sup>15</sup> Rainer.

<sup>16</sup> Rainer.

<sup>17</sup> Rainer.

<sup>18</sup> Rainer.

majority of members are mature and disciplined will be a church who looks to the needs of others rather than seeking out a church with the right programs for their own need.

Finally, Rainer reminds that a church “must focus externally rather than internally.”<sup>19</sup> A church that focuses on those on the outside will be a church that draws the outside into the church. Seeing and meeting the needs of the community around it, this church makes a difference, not only spiritually in the lives of those around it, but physically as well. Whether it is food, shelter, or any other concern, this church fulfills this role.

A church that does not focus on those outside tends to become bitter at the world around it. There are statements such as, “When I was young, people did not behave that way” and “This translation was good enough for my grandparents and it is good enough for anyone else.” Such attitudes prevent new ideas or approaches.

However, there are pockets of thriving church communities that provide some examples of how they have taken new roads to reach those outside. The first is “Dinner Church.”<sup>20</sup> The idea behind this strategy was “Inspired by Jesus’ table practices, the writings of Origen and the Agape feasts of the second and third centuries, there is nothing ‘new’ about Dinner Church.”<sup>21</sup> The Dinner Church focuses on those who would not normally come to church for various reasons. Whether it is because of work schedules, or socioeconomic reasons, this church reaches outside to connect. They focus on the poorest neighborhoods and become a place of community to help those who need it most. It is

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<sup>19</sup> Rainer.

<sup>20</sup> Chris Morton, “Churches Are Closing. These Four Models Are Thriving,” Missio Alliance, February 5, 2019, <https://www.missioalliance.org/churches-are-closing-these-four-models-are-thriving/>.

<sup>21</sup> Morton.

this type of outreach which reaches into a community, sees the need and finds a way to adapt to the need so the Gospel is proclaimed at the same time that needs are met.

When Jesus saw needs, he met them and then gave them access to so much more. Jesus saw needs even in those who did not seem to lack anything. In the interaction with Zacchaeus, Jesus saw a man who had no physical needs; he was a rich man who was a tax collector. “Jesus’ interaction with Zacchaeus did not center on providing an economic solution. As a tax collector, Zacchaeus was someone ‘rejected’ by society.”<sup>22</sup> Jesus, by dining with Zacchaeus, was able to change the path of his life from one filled with self to one lived for others. You see this in how he reacts to Jesus’ compassion, “Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold” (Luke 19:8 ESV).

By meeting needs people turned toward Jesus and that is what can happen today. Instead of focusing on a better building, sound system, or program, the church is called, through its disciples, to meet needs. When the church does not do this, it is in the process of dying.

Another group of thriving churches can be categorized as a micro-church called “The Underground.”<sup>23</sup> They are described as, “an entirely calling-driven network, with a thick theology and culture of calling with no room for consumers or spectators.”<sup>24</sup> The leaders within these micro-churches are tentmakers. They are not paid, rather, they are self-funded, or they have other means of making money. These churches attract those

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<sup>22</sup> Karon Powell, “Jesus Ministered to Their Needs,” Spectrum, March 18, 2019, <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/2016/08/25/jesus-ministered-their-needs>.

<sup>23</sup> Morton.

<sup>24</sup> Morton.

who are looking for community not found in seeker churches. They want a closer-knit group, which harkens back to the Early Church where there were small gatherings of like-minded believers who worshiped and took care of the needs of others together. Luca Pulley points out, “The Underground is built to adjust and adapt to any cultural moment, not just 2019 but 2030 as well.”<sup>25</sup> The church is built to contextualize the Gospel to meet the needs of those around, to be able to meet needs and create community.

The next style of church is called “Blended Ecology.”<sup>26</sup> This style is the heart of Michael Beck, who upon arriving at his new church found it to have an exclusive senior membership. There was just a handful who were just barely able to pay the bills. He states he was inspired by John Wesley’s “Make the world your parish” thought and has done so. They have approximately 300 people meeting in various places such as “dog parks, tattoo parlors, and running trails.”<sup>27</sup> He explains the idea behind blended ecology as, “The church was originally driven by a ‘single economy’ revolving primarily around the inherited Sunday liturgical gathering.”<sup>28</sup> They now have gatherings that blend both the old and the new in different ways in smaller groupings to, again meet people where they are, not expecting them to come to a building but going to where they are at that moment.

Another example of a blended ecology church called Grace Church. This church, in Cape Coral, Florida, has transformed from a program-driven church in things such as

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<sup>25</sup> Morton.

<sup>26</sup> Morton.

<sup>27</sup> Morton.

<sup>28</sup> Morton.



children's ministry, youth ministry, and other programs to one going out into the community to meet the needs of the poor and marginalized within the community. They have "transformed from a 'come to' church to a 'go to' church".<sup>29</sup> The idea was brought about by seeing other churches in the UK and the US changing how they did things. Jorge Acevedo, the pastor of the church, says, "We are not really innovators, but early adapters."<sup>30</sup> The need to reinvent church is not necessary; the perfect example is within Scripture and the writings of the Early Church. It is a true movement born out of discipleship and obedience to the call can transform the church.

Within these churches there was a moment of clarity where a decision had to be made. If they continued to do things the traditional way, to continue down a path of materialistic consumerism within the churches, they would have died. Without changing, the church as it is known today will not survive. It is clear if one looks to areas of the US that used to be heavily religious. There are very few thriving churches left in the larger cities where the population centers are located. The society around them has turned from traditional expressions of the church and have embraced self over church. When Christians retreat from communities around them and seal themselves into their church, they cease to become a viable option to the lost around them. This is not a "if you build it, they will come" society. If the church is to have influence on those around them, they must meet the needs, and disciples meet the needs of those around them.

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<sup>29</sup> Morton.

<sup>30</sup> Morton.

### What Happens if Churches Don't Change?

Over the past 100 years the dynamics of church and its influence in Western society are undeniable. Whether it is an exodus from the church of those whose relationship with the church was purely familial or those who grew to be disillusioned with what they perceived as faith, the leaving has been impactful. In the latest Pew Report the *nones* have grown once again. Nones are those who, when asked, claim no faith in any religion. The decline of Christianity, in research from 2018 and 2019, has seen “65% of American adults describe themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, down 12 percentage points over the past decade.”<sup>31</sup>

This number can be jarring, but not as much as the trend of those who claim no religious affiliation, which includes atheists, agnostics, and the *nones*, which “now stands at 26% up from 17% in 2009.”<sup>32</sup> When these numbers are seen through the lens of the lack of focus on others within the church, it should not be a surprise to leadership within the church community. When the *nones* are seen for what they may be, those who came to a point of being fed up with organized religion, then it may be easier to understand.

There is another group that sometimes gets lumped in with the *nones* but deserve their own category, the *donees*. Simply put, “The *Donees* are people who are disillusioned with church. Though they were committed to church for years—often as lay leaders—they are no longer affiliated. Whether they are dissatisfied with the structure, social message, or politics of the institutional church, they’ve decided they are better off

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Lipka, ed., “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

<sup>32</sup> Lipka.

without organized religion.”<sup>33</sup> The attributes of the dones should probably not come as a shock. These are people who were highly active in their churches, did not want to leave, and felt stifled by the church structure.<sup>34</sup> They became frustrated by the lack of the church’s ability to change, and the connection once felt strongly waned as church became rote. These are not individuals who have given up their faith in God, but they have lost faith in the institution. It is this very reason why the church must realize the attitude many churchgoers have, the fast-food mentality of have it your way, must be abandoned.

Like any other institution that refuses to see its decline because at one point how it did business led its industry, the church in the West will cease to have any influence of note if it does not see the need to change. The idea of perfect preaching, perfect worship, and perfect programs are not perfect for the church. The generations coming into their own now, Millennials and Generation Z, are more interested in community and making a difference in the lives of those around them than in preserving the traditional model of church. The Southern Baptist publishing and research entity, LifeWay, found “66% of Americans between 23 and 30 years old said they stopped attending church on a regular basis”.<sup>35</sup> In fact many responded with negative views as seen in the table below.

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<sup>33</sup> Joshua Packard, “Meet the Dones: Burned Out on Ministry and Fed up with Organized Religion, These Spiritual Refugees Present a Challenge to the Church,” *Leadership* 36, no. 3 (2015): 18.

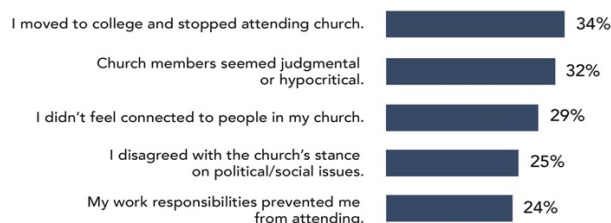
<sup>34</sup> Packard, 18.

<sup>35</sup> Griffin Paul Jackson, “The Top Reasons Young People Drop Out of Church,” *Christianity Today*, January 16, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/january/church-drop-out-college-young-adults-hiatus-lifeway-survey.html>.

Table 2: The top reasons young people drop out of church.<sup>36</sup>

### Top five reasons church dropouts say they stopped attending church

Among young adults (ages 23-30) who attended a Protestant church regularly for at least a year in high school:



Notes: Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

LifeWay  
Research Center

LifeWayResearch.com

If there is no change in how the church focuses on self rather than others this trend will continue.

A separate group who are leaving the church are pastors. The thread of becoming disillusioned with the church and their calling is just as concerning, if not more so, than lay people leaving the church. One of the main reasons pastors are leaving the church is clashes with the members over changes the pastor proposed.<sup>37</sup> Many pastors get tired of the fight and do one of two things. They resign themselves to the idea that maybe they were wrong, and God really was not wanting the church to change, or they fight so hard they either leave on their own or are ushered out unceremoniously.

<sup>36</sup> Jackson.

<sup>37</sup> Lisa Cannon Green, "Former Pastors Report Lack of Support Led to Abandoning Pastorate," LifeWay, January 12, 2016, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2016/01/12/former-pastors-report-lack-of-support-led-to-abandoning-pastorate/>.

In her research, Laura Howard writes, “Conflicts within churches are a profound area that affects pastors, members, and lay leaders”.<sup>38</sup> The sad reality of those leaving the church can have a profound effect on the social lives of those leaving. Howard notes they can become outcasts as they reject what they have found to be wrong within the church.<sup>39</sup> When pastors leave their calling, the profound effect is felt through the entire family. They are leaving a calling on their lives, which can cause depression and anxiety not only for them but their spouse and children as well.

Pastors may also leave a church because they feel God has released them from serving that church. This can cause deep resentment within that church that the next pastor will have to overcome to even begin to help the congregation move in a positive new direction. When leadership, along with membership, begins to abandon the institution of the traditional church, the institution itself will cease to exist in its present form.

### **What Happens if Change Occurs**

It can be quite depressing if all one reads about is church decline. Even if the church in the US continues on its path God will not allow his Bride to fade away. There are pockets of churches who have begun to change their focus and are doing amazing things in their communities. One of the churches in the research done for this paper has outgrown their buildings and are looking for new ways for people to meet, not only for

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<sup>38</sup> Laura Lynn Howard, “The Contemporary Problems and Solutions that Influence the Exodus Population of Christians,” (DMin dissertation, Portland Seminary, 2018), 3, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/284>

<sup>39</sup> Howard, 3.

times of worship but for times of discipleship as well. As Hamel said in his interview “Living in a society that is increasingly ‘me centered’ has made things difficult for the church.”<sup>40</sup> Instead of allowing society to so completely influence the church with materialism and self-focus, Hamel makes a poignant statement, “Maybe we should be glad a materialistic culture has left people hungry for true authenticity.”<sup>41</sup>

When a church is truly seeking after God, making disciples, and having true impact on the community, people are drawn to that church. People are tired of the shallow interactions they get from the world and are hungry for truth and meaning. If the church can become a true light in the dark, then great things will happen. There is not a lack of need within any community and there are opportunities for discipleship within every church. Like the church in the research, a definitive decision has to be made on how the church will move forward, regardless of how it will affect the giving or membership. Changes must be made.

Change within the church is nothing new. As discussed earlier, the church as it is constituted today looks nothing like the Early Church. This is also not a call for the church to take steps back into its history and become what would be recognizable to the Early Church fathers. This would be a request that is unobtainable and ineffective. What is necessary is to see that the church does and has changed throughout history, and the need to be part of a change that needs to happen for the church to continue to be relevant.

In her article for *Sojourners*, Phyllis Tickle begins, “Every 500 years or so, the church—and the world—experience huge social, political, economic, and cultural shifts.

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<sup>40</sup> Baumgartner.

<sup>41</sup> Baumgartner.

What does this revolutionary evolution mean for the church?"<sup>42</sup> These times are marked in both the history of the church and the world history. From the day of Pentecost in the early first century the church has its beginnings. In the fourth century there is the conversion of Constantine and the time of the church as the religion of the Roman Empire through Medieval times. Next comes the Reformation and its birth through the work of Martin Luther through the Age of Enlightenment to the Modern church today. The pattern Tickle describes is not one of destruction of the church but a revitalization that happens. "First a new vital form of Christianity does indeed emerge. Second, the organized expression of Christianity that up until then had been the dominant one is reconstituted into a more or less ossified expression of its former self."<sup>43</sup> The idea is that the new expression of the church does not remove the church but gives the church a new life and in the process causes the former version to become more open to the changes that are occurring.

In the midst of this time, the church becomes a stronger version of itself. Through the Reformation, corruption within the Catholic Church in the matter of indulgences was one of the main factors that led to the split the Western church into Catholics and Protestants. Luther did not intend to split the church; he desired reform but because of his stance he was excommunicated.

In the past thirty to forty years there have been serious debates about the direction of the church. There have been the worship wars, liberals versus conservatives, and many

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<sup>42</sup> Phyllis Tickle, "The Great Emergence," Sojourners, November 6, 2015, <https://sojo.net/magazine/august-2008/great-emergence>.

<sup>43</sup> Tickle.

other battles. Both sides in these disagreements have vehemently decried the other as inherently wrong in their thinking and have intimated that each other were not true Christians. In the midst of these disagreements there is a common ground to be found. Even with Catholics and Lutherans they “have begun to heal and the pace of concrete efforts toward restoring unity [is increasing].”<sup>44</sup>

The changes in focus seen as necessary, it would seem, fall into the same ideal. This is not a call to disband the church as it is constituted but a call for the church to grab hold of biblical principles of discipleship and to refocus the ideal of what church actually is capable of being. This is not a call for what some may call a social justice Gospel. This is also not a call for good works for the good of the community. It is a call for those who have found salvation through grace to live as if those around them who do not know Jesus as their savior will end up in hell. The idea of personal comfort and desires should disappear with this realization. It should not matter if the music is not to your taste, or the programs are just not perfect enough for your children.

With recall to the first chapter, the church I am serving in now had reached a ‘moment of clarity’. If things did not change, the church would have to close its doors. The church did not have a focus on others. There were programs in which they gave, such as a feeding program for hungry kids on the weekend, a diaper ministry for those who needed them but the church itself was dwindling in size and in a matter of a year would probably ceased to be able to keep the bills paid. The church had always had pastors stay for one to three years but eventually the pastor would move onto a bigger church and

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<sup>44</sup> Peter Finney, “Luther’s Goal Not Schism but Reform of ‘Church He Loved,’ Says Bishop,” Catholic News, April 7, 2014, <https://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2014/luther-s-goal-not-schism-but-reform-of-church-he-loved-says-bishop.cfm>.



anything he had tried to change either failed or never was implemented. The church did have a pastor for 12 years and while the church did grow, it never changed.

God used the pastor before me to help the church begin to see it desperately needed to change. He researched the church and what it had been doing in several areas. Outreach and discipleship were several places in which he pinpointed where the church was lacking. Unfortunately, in presenting his report on the church's health, his harsh tone created animosity among those who were in the church. When he-resigned there were many who had their feelings hurt by what he said. However, I truly believe if he had not taken the church to the point of seeing just how close they were to dying, they would not have been receptive to the changes I suggested and have since implemented concerning our discipleship training and practices, as discussed in this work.

As with any addict of any kind, if there is not a recognition of self and destructive practices there is no urgency to change. In addition to the successful changes being implemented in my church, I have implemented the findings of my research, and assisted other ministers to work in their church on discipleship and focus change, resulting in many small victories.

The purpose of this work is not to change a whole denomination, but to help pastors lead their churches into a "moment of clarity", where they face their imminent death, and subsequently choose life and find hope through accepting change and implementing effective solutions. The transformation may seem slow and small at first, but with each successful change, be it big or small, it is the beginning of a life-giving focus change, for the individual believer, the church, and the community it desires to serve.

## What Is Next?

If the first steps of seeing a need for change, and then convincing the membership of a church, has been successful, the question then is, “What is next?”. In reading *Kingdom Conspiracy*, the final chapter lists out the ideal kingdom vision for believers. Whether or not one agrees with Scott McKnight and his outline of what a church should be, there is truth in the follow statement. “Christian public actions are, then, the ‘spillover’ of the church’s inner workings. A Christian not engaged in the world in ‘good works’ has failed to live according to the kingdom vision.”<sup>45</sup> If a church is filled with those whose main contribution is showing up, there is a need for change.

There was a common thread throughout all the research into this problem. The pastors and leaders all agreed one cannot force a group to change. If it does not see the need there will be no desire to change. Interestingly enough, once that need is understood, there are many in the church who welcome the chance to be discipled. When this begins to occur, a movement starts to happen. Just like at the day of Pentecost, a movement is begun by the power of the Holy Spirit moving in believers. The outcome is nothing short of miraculous.

The goal then is to help a congregation become more than just churchgoers. Within this process disciples become much more concerned about the Kingdom of God and less concerned with just being a church member. McKnight argues there are two distinct people. He calls them church people and kingdom people. His layout is below.

- Church people—have reduced ministry vision and can’t see past church-bound categories for ministry (i.e., usher, greeter, children’s worker, inviter-of-the-lost-friends, etc.).

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<sup>45</sup> Scott McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 208.

- Kingdom people—have Kingdom vision to think/dream/act outside the box (read church here). They want to heal the wounds in their neighborhood, workplace, and community (fatherlessness, addictions, marriages).
- Church people—see the Gospel in terms of good news about the afterlife (it's how you can be sure you're going to heaven after you die.)
- Kingdom people—see the Gospel in terms of good news about kingdom life (it's about life in God and with God, both now and forever.)
- Church people—understand discipleship as primarily about enjoying a closer relationship with God that grows me to spiritual maturity.
- Kingdom people—understand discipleship as the call to lose their life for Christ's sake so they can participate in His family for His mission.<sup>46</sup>

These descriptions that McKnight gives are mirrored in a church. A church that is more concerned about its programs is limited. A church that desires to make a difference in the world around it will takes steps to do so. A church that focuses on saving people (this is not a call to not give the Gospel message) and not on discipling them afterward is a church not looking forward. A church that just wants good Bible studies and great fellowships will not make a difference except maybe in the waistline of its members. A church that understands the call to lose self to reflect Christ will have an impact greater than any fellowship is able to do. The ability to live sacrificially as a church means allowing God to have his agenda, not the members. This call to be different has been ignored for far too long in the Western Church.

The Scriptures call Christians to be change agents in the world around them. Pastors who want to help their congregations be these change agents, not bench warmers, have to be willing to push against the norms of their church. In the Southern Baptist world, for too long, those norms have trended toward creature comforts. Creature comforts are difficult to give up; just ask the average American to give up the pursuit of

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<sup>46</sup> McKnight, 78.

luxury items. In doing so, you are asking the church to give up self in place of others, which is the goal. It is what Jesus called his followers to be when he called them salt and light in the world. It is not easy to be a church pushing outside its comfort zone. It is not supposed to be easy.

When looking at great leaders within church history, many times those who pushed for change were vilified in the moment. People like John Wycliffe and Martin Luther paid steep prices for their desire to see change within the church. Sometimes a leader within the church will pay a steep price for pushing change. While not as steep as Wycliffe being put to death, or Luther being excommunicated from the church, there can be a price to pay for calling for something different. Most pastors have families to take care of, bills to pay, a life to lead. When a church refuses to see the need for change those pastors are usually voted out of the church in the Southern Baptist denomination. Too many times church-goers have overruled leaders because they are pushing something the church has not grasped yet. This is why it is so important to help the congregation see the need for change and to see how change will affect how the church looks.

### **In the End...**

In the end, a pastor must lead a church in a way that pleases God. It would be hard to imagine a scenario where God would be pleased with a church or a pastor who only caters to the desires of those who are members of the church. He has never called his followers to be comfortable, rather he has called believers to a life of sacrificial love. Love for God and love for others. When confronted by the Pharisees as to which was the greatest of the commandments Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first

commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37-39 ESV). Sacrificial love is a love that places the needs of others above self. A church that values others over self, will have a significant impact on the community it is part of, but also on other churches as well.

Rainer reminds pastors, leaders, and church members that church is not about you. “The strange thing about church membership is that you actually give up your preferences when you join . . . you are there to meet the needs of other. You are there to serve others. You are there to give. You are there to sacrifice.”<sup>47</sup>

As part of learning what it means to lead a church into change, I am reminded of a personal lesson that was difficult to learn. A pastor whom I was serving under taught me the idea of winning by losing. It is not always necessary to get our way in an argument or a discussion. Many times, we learn and grow best when we acquiesce to others. The joy of being a Christian is not about being right all the time, nor is it about getting our way. As leaders, pastors are to reflect Christ and help the congregation to do the same. This is where joy is found in servanthood. “We will never find joy in church membership when we are constantly seeking things our way. But paradoxically, we will find the greatest joy when we choose to be last. That’s what Jesus meant when He said the last will be first. True joy means giving up our rights and serving.”<sup>48</sup>

Ideally, pastors and church leaders are to help members to do the same. This comes through discipleship. It does not come in fellowship. Even Bible study does not

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<sup>47</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *I Am a Church Member: Discovering the Attitude That Makes the Difference* (Nashville, TN: B & H Pub. Group, 2013), 34.

<sup>48</sup> Rainer, 35.

help Christians to see this. The twelve disciples had to be reminded of this truth. So too must pastors remind church members of this gift of salvation and church membership they have received when they became followers of Christ. Paul reminds the readers of his letters that they are the body of Christ. Not just universally but within the context of the local church. If it is a gift, then the care and growth of that gift must be foremost in the minds of Christians.

Once a pastor has helped the members of the congregation begin to grasp the necessity of change within the attitude of the church, the process of change begins. It can be seen in light of the caterpillar becoming a butterfly. The caterpillar first has to feed almost constantly to get ready for the change. When the caterpillar starts its change within the cocoon it actually dissolves almost completely before the transformation into a butterfly begins. Once ready, it emerges as a completely new creature. So too are Christians. The new Christian must take in as much teaching as possible so that the transformation into a mature Christian can take place. Through this time of transformation, or discipleship, what was once the defining characteristics of that person are changed and what emerges is a new creation in Christ. Mature Christians are completely different in how they see the world around them and, hopefully have a better understanding of what Christ has given, and thus what is required.

The end result of loving others over self is the ultimate goal of being a Christian. It is never going to be about our desires but what God's will is and what God has called us to be. The change in focus is not easy for the church or the individual. but it is necessary and will always be worth it. Even if the pastor who starts it is not around for the result.

The idea of a monolithic institutional church is an idea whose time has passed. The community of churches in discipleship and reaching outside the walls to a world in desperate need of hope is seen as the ultimate end game. If these do not happen the church in the West will cease to have an influence in the society around it.

Though challenging, the Church must follow the example of our forerunners, and adapt to the changes of the times, while not compromising the Gospel message. As modeled by our Lord Jesus Christ, this is realized through creating disciples who create other disciples. Based on the research, it is this author's conclusion that the discipleship model, as modeled by Jesus Christ, over the attraction model is the answer for the church successfully shifting from a me focus to an others' focus, and moving forward in the relevancy and positive societal influence leading to growth.

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