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EVANGELISM AND CHURCH GROWTH ASSESSMENT

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## Introduction

Church growth through the practice of effective evangelism, has been the call of the Church body since Jesus proclaimed this to his disciples in Matthew 28:19. Over the course of history, the Church has been through a continuous state of change, not always for the best, and we the Church need to make sure the call Jesus put forth to “make disciples of all nations” is done effectively for the time and culture we live in today (Matthew 28:19).<sup>1</sup> The call of the disciples by Jesus to become the church was not a single call on twelve people, but a call for all believers in Christ throughout all generations.

The disciples simply “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, [to] fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). In the simplest evaluation, this is still the church today, no matter how complicated God’s people insist on trying to make it in the 21<sup>st</sup> century church. Some in the church have recognized this, even when we take our cues from the secular world, in some cases, we can see that “people are hungry for simple, because the world has become much more complex.”<sup>2</sup> There are many people and corporations that recognize this like Apple, Google, Southwest Airlines, Papa John’s, graphic designers, marketing professionals, and even vibrant growing churches know this.<sup>3</sup> They are all “part of a revolution against complexity,” a complexity that Christ did not initiate.<sup>4</sup> His ministry was a ministry of simplicity, and Christ put forth a way to build the church, which was to simply follow Him. This paper will examine five areas of church growth, each from a personal level, and then evaluate what can be done to continue the growth of the Church body.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version (ESV). *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (ESV)* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church*, 1st Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: B&H Publishers, 2006), 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-15.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

## Understanding Church Growth

### Understanding the Unchurched

The “unchurched” always seem to be a huge mystery to those who have spent their entire lives within the church walls. Who are they, how do we reach them, and what are they looking for? There were many myths about the unchurched that Rainer went through in his text *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* but the myth that was most surprising was “the unchurched are turned off by denominational names in the church name.”<sup>5</sup> This is something my particular church addressed several years ago now, a change I was involved with on an individual level. The decision to do this partly came from the influence of another church that was on the “cutting edge,” which had years of positive growth and active evangelism. We began a rebranding of sorts, which went from our website to our logo, to our sign out on the road frontage. Although our church leadership is firmly rooted in our denomination (Methodist in this case), and there was never any discussion whatsoever to amend that, the staff moved to change “United Methodist Church” to just “Church”.

As a staff member who was involved in this particular move, I have oscillating thoughts about the effectiveness of this move, both positive and negative, but four years later have concluded its change was irrelevant. Rainer alludes to the reasons when he says, “I wish I knew the perfect balance” between cultural consumerism and first impressions.<sup>6</sup> Overall the unchurched really did not care what the name was, nor did they even notice as Mark R commented, “The name of the church never really entered my mind.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, Kindle Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), location 1300.

<sup>6</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, location 1307.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, location 543.

Looking at how this might affect my ministry in the future is also based on my experience in evaluating this change when it occurred in 2008 to the present day. It can be concluded, only through ongoing observations, that those who were affected the most by the change were those who were already heavily associated with the church. Those who were “churched” in the traditional sense viewed this move as a negative change that bowed to cultural consumerism, and perhaps pressure of a postmodernism worship experience, which then made “church” more palatable to the masses. This was not the case or intention, but it carried that perception by some. The unchurched seemed to not even notice or care. It is quite evident our understanding and ongoing knowledge of who the unchurched are, what they really seek, and how to best provide an experienced grounded in Scripture, will be extremely important for the future of the church and church growth.

### **Issues Relating to Pastors and the Unchurched**

The one issue currently lacking in many pastors today when it comes to the unchurched is preaching that teaches the Bible. If there were one area where pastors across the country could improve it would be on feeding people a solid firm exegetical teaching from God’s word, week in and week out. Not every pastor is going to be a John Piper in preaching style, but the lack of exegetical teaching leaves the vast majority of the congregations sipping on lukewarm milk and not solid food (Hebrews 5.12, 1 Corinthians 3.2-3 Revelation 3.16). Today, especially when it comes to the unchurched, “preaching must first be biblical.”<sup>8</sup>

Historically, if we were to look at some of the great pastors of history, we would see days of preparation for each message to be given on Sunday, not a mere two hours as most research suggests.<sup>9</sup> There are still those who spend four days preparing a message for Sunday, but those

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<sup>8</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, location 848.

<sup>9</sup> George Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 1st Edition (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 15.

are few and far between today.<sup>10</sup> Due to the time constraints, and what is required of pastors today, two hours is probably the most amount of time any of them can devote to sermon preparation. One practical way to improve this would be to block out a specific day, or days, on their calendar each week, where they would not be disturbed by anyone, that was devoted only to sermon preparation. Successful pastors in exegetical teaching often become unavailable during this time, or at least try to eliminate any and all distractions that might come up. Another practical suggestion would be to study the bible, every day, day in and day out. This sounds like a strange suggestion for a pastor but many are so busy they rarely have time to study the Scriptures. To present an exegetical message the pastor must know and study God's word. The unchurched are not going to be repulsed by God's Word explained in this way, if their hearts are open to receive God's grace, they will be more attracted by expository preaching than cute fifteen minute stories with a touch of humor.

### **The Evangelism of the Family Members**

When it comes to evangelism, family members often come into contact with their most influential evangelist from within the household itself. In our culture today, it is the woman of the family, specifically the wives, who are the most effective at bringing people back to church, or into the church for the first time.<sup>11</sup> This trend with our church members in America has been going on for some time, but it is very clear, the wives are the ones who overwhelmingly bring the husbands back into church. This should be a convicting statement to men, but the men continue to be the weakest "members" of the church body. In that case, much as it was with Deborah in the Old Testament, the women have stepped into the role of evangelist or leader (Judges 4.4, 10),

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<sup>10</sup> John MacArthur, *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2005), 25.

<sup>11</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, location 1300-2547.

and they continue to lead the husbands to church. With that in mind, a local church can actively support women in all stations of life by providing adequate parking, childcare, and small groups designed around their needs.

### **The Unchurched First Impressions**

There are many first impressions we the church may not even recognize, which the unchurched can clearly see when they step into the building. Many churches, ours as well, struggle with the having enough volunteers who are committed to their duties assigned to them (greeters and welcome centers as listed by Rainer).<sup>12</sup> It could be argued that “greeters” is far too limiting to the many aspects that involve volunteers and the roles they now fill within the church. As Rainer says “a good [volunteer] ministry requires good training,” and this can often be a challenge to staff-strapped churches.<sup>13</sup> Volunteers today take on a much bigger role in many churches, but keeping them motivated and focused is a challenge, as much as it is in retaining members.

One solution to this issue is to train the volunteers much as you would train an incoming staff member. This puts more emphasis on the importance of the role, and while it does not have to be a long drawn out process, this should be well thought out and meaningful. Another solution, and longer term, would be to have the volunteers involved in a small group that would be focused on Bible study and also specific issues that volunteers face or ways they can affect the church. This solution is basically a discipleship training solution. With volunteers who are more heavily trained in discipleship they will see the importance for the very positions they are filling.

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<sup>12</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, location 2572.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Problems with Retaining Members**

Church “hopping,” especially with the younger generations, is by far the most important issue regarding the retention of members. This is something that is a growing trend of sorts, but one that is clearly not Biblical by its members either, and can be alleviated in part by a strong clarity in doctrine. Today, members want to know what the church can do for them, not necessarily what they can do for the church. It may be the cleanliness of the facilities, or the great preschool program the church has in place, but ultimately it all comes back to a solid teaching of Biblical truths in clearly stated doctrine. A visitor, or the unchurched, may not see doctrine as the most important issue in the church, but the backbone of all programs and services provided by the church stem from its doctrine. Without clear doctrine and exegetical teaching from Scripture the preschool program might as well be the local Kindercare down the street. Strategies to implement clear doctrine start with an exegetical teaching as noted above, but should also be part of the polity of the church and its organizational structure.

## **Today’s Church Growth and Missionary Movement**

In an eye-opening article, “The Rise of the Church Growth Movement,” McGavran brings to light many issues the church was dealing with as far as missionary growth and the growth of the church body in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> These issues are still relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century church, but it is indeed a far different church body today than it was from the 1930’s to 1960’s. Part of what America is dealing with today is the destruction of the missionary base. We once sent out more missionaries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than any other nation. Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, according to the latest research by Barna, we now have more missionaries coming to the United

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<sup>14</sup> Donald A. McGavran, *Effective Evangelism: A Theological Mandate* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1988), 41-71.

States than we are sending out.<sup>15</sup> Where McGavran was, rightfully so, focused on international evangelism, the church needs to also focus on local church growth in the form of multiplying believers, not addition. The American church for many years has tried to add to the existing base, building bigger and bigger institutions, when multiplying the church is an exponential way of applying church growth. When a church gets to be a certain size, instead of building a bigger building, if they planted a church (or went multi-site), they would cause the growth to be exponential, reaching more people, in different locations. This is where my local church is focused as far as growth is concerned. After years of trying to find ways to build a bigger building, the leadership was finally lead to start a multi-site church process that will be opening churches where new people can be reached. The intention is to create a strong base for multiplication growth, not transfer growth.

### **Becoming a Leader in the Church**

If everything rises and falls on leadership, it is should be very important to understand leadership, how it affects church members, and how best it can change church growth, for better or worse. This is an area of great challenge for me, since my ministry is a supporting role in the church. One mistake made by those in church administration is to be passive in leadership, when what the church needs a strong administrative leader to support all areas of ministry, especially for those whom God has appointed to preach and teach.<sup>16</sup>

### **Strengthening Leadership Through Priorities**

There are four non-negotiable commitments, presented by Jonathan Falwell, that pastors

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<sup>15</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity*, 1st Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 10-17.

<sup>16</sup> Robert H. Welch, *Church Administration: Creating Efficiency for Effective Ministry*, Kindle Edition (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 2005), 15.

and administrative staff need to make for effective leadership in the church.<sup>17</sup> As an administrative staff member, I find it most difficult to make sure I am not ministering to my church at the expense of my family.<sup>18</sup> On the surface, this sounds easy to do, but books have been written on this topic because it is a very real problem in the church.<sup>19</sup> Falwell mentioned the first section 1 Timothy 3 (1-4) as an example, but did not specifically mention verse 5, which seems to make the boldest statement of all about the importance of family over ministry. In fact, if your ministry is to be more successful, however that is quantified, it must start with managing your household well (1 Tim 3.5).

There are a few basic things that have kept me focused on the proper balance. First, it is important to make our priorities line up properly, as Falwell stated in *InnovateChurch*.<sup>20</sup> God should be first, our family second, and our ministry third.<sup>21</sup> Saying or writing this isn't good enough. This actually has to be lived out, and as such, will be proof of its importance in our lives. How are we making God our first priority? How are we managing our household well, and where do we need to change or improve what we are doing day by day?

Second, we have to learn how to manage our time well. This means learning how to say no without feeling guilty about saying no, even if it is something "important." Often times in church ministry, everything is of the utmost importance, mainly because it is most important thing to the person asking. We cannot get into the habit of allowing our schedule or calendar to control our life in idol-like fashion.

Third, we have to learn how to focus on a few things that we do well, and let the others

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<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Falwell, ed., *InnovateChurch*, Kindle Edition, ed. Jonathan Falwell (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 2008), 14.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Anne Jackson, *Mad Church Disease: Overcoming the Burnout Epidemic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 45.

<sup>20</sup> Falwell, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

go. This means learning how to delegate without looking back. Learning how to give tasks away is hard for me, especially if I perceive that they will not be done as well as if I did them myself. In many cases this means learning how to lead a team of volunteers who can accomplish assigned tasks that could not be done by a single person. A person is rarely gifted with the ability to do only one task well. God has generally gifted us with the ability to do a few things very well, and we should learn what these are and focus on them, not on those things we do not do well. This strikes in the face of our multi-tasking 21<sup>st</sup> century culture, but delegating allows us to focus on those things that are our highest priority.

### **Biblical Servant Leadership**

Servant-Leadership is a more modern catch phrase, not easily defined, but often associated with a business and corporate culture today that teaches self-awareness, coaching, and foresight.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, “Biblical” servant-leadership is the key term, and is best defined by Jesus. Servant-hood is found throughout the Bible, but Jesus’ teaching from Matthew 20:20-28 gives one of the best descriptions for leaders, who should be, or should become, servants. Here in Matthew 20, and again in Matthew 25:31-46, Luke 9:48, Luke 22:26, 1 Corinthians 15:9, 1 Corinthians 3:5, and the great servant-leadership example of John the Baptist (John 1:19-28), Jesus says to the effect that, whoever is great among you shall become a servant. Jesus himself said, “I did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matt 20:28 and Mark 10:45). Robinson in *Total Church Life* describes this in a husband-wife relationship where the husband places himself under his wife and children, and states that equipping, encouraging and enabling are the

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<sup>22</sup> Dr. Kent M. Keith, "The Key Practices of Servant-Leaders," *Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership*, Greenleaf, 2010, <http://www.greenleaf.org/whatissl/TheKeyPracticesOfServant-Leaders.pdf> (accessed January 25, 2012).

important principles for servant leadership.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Three Functions of a Pastor**

Pastors take on an increasingly complex role of duties today in everything from marriage counselor, to casting vision for the whole church. Of the three areas Paul uses to define the functions of pastoral ministry in Acts 20, a Pastor (*poimen*), Bishop (*episkopos*), and Elder (*presbuteros*), the most difficult to fulfill in our 21<sup>st</sup> century churches today is that of Bishop.<sup>24</sup> This function is that of an administrator, and is probably the most neglected area by senior pastors today. Robinson in *Total Church Life* explains this duty can be delegated, and it generally is delegated to a church administrator in larger churches, but in smaller churches the pastor must take on the role of Bishop. The reason it usually becomes a delegated position is because it is one of the most difficult to fulfill properly when a pastor sees his position as “Pastor or Elder” to the congregation. Of the three, one is generally not more important than the other since all three are vital to a healthy and growing church. When one area becomes neglected, the other areas are affected and can become less productive, even if the pastor finds them to be the most important in his ministry.

To conclude the evaluation on leadership, we can see how complex this task can be in our churches today, but strong leadership is vital to the growth of a church. In my particular case, this is an area that needs to be learned, evaluated, and advanced from where it is today. It does not benefit the church for me to stay in a state of simply doing repetitive duties, but learning how to become a leader so I can personally give the greatest support to my ministerial leadership team in return. Doing so will not only benefit the ministerial team, but it will benefit those I lead, and it will help them in turn become leaders themselves.

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<sup>23</sup> Darrell W. Robinson, *Total Church Life: How to be a First Century Church in a 21st Century World* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 1997), 59.

<sup>24</sup> Robinson, 58.

## **Church Growth Principles**

The principles of church growth involve a proper understanding of church plowing, planting, and harvesting. Evaluating these principles over time is extremely important, but understanding how these principles work and applying them is critical. How will these principles impact our current and future ministry such as understanding how to properly use and coach volunteers, and how to get back to the basics of church ministry?

### **The Importance of a Volunteer Vision**

The current volunteer-vision at our church is one of building teams that use the staff member working in that particular area as their team leader. As our church has grown the lay-leaders and senior staff leadership intentionally kept staff levels at a point that requires the church to step up in volunteer roles. This process is put in place to build a culture of volunteerism that gives members ownership in what the church does and how it operates. Using volunteers for tasks more technically challenging than “greeter” is sometimes difficult to maintain, but it forces staff to interact with, and operate with, the church instead of in isolation.

Currently our volunteer levels average approximately 30% of Sunday attendance, and the church would like to see that number be much higher, somewhere around 40% or more. There are many challenges to building a culture of volunteers in the church, and it is always ongoing, fluid, and constantly changing. Improving upon our current vision itself would be difficult as the church has a strong future vision for volunteers. Improving upon our results is something that needs to be done continually. More specifically, training our staff members on how to obtain, and continue to maintain, volunteers is very important. It is far easier as a staff member to just do the job yourself than it is to build a team that can then do the job or task at hand. It is very important for staff members to resist the urge to get the job done faster (and in many people’s

eyes, better than what a volunteer could do) for the sake of getting it done. A long term, sustainable plan is far better and allows church members and attendees to take ownership of their own church.

### **Connecting and Coaching Volunteers**

The aspect of coaching volunteers I find most important is the term referred to as “basic training,” which is when volunteer first steps forward.<sup>25</sup> Basic training, as outlined in *InnovateChurch*, is so critical to the longevity and growth of the volunteer that if this aspect is done well the person will find their place in ministry, and grow to produce great fruit for the church. This includes an assessment of their skills and areas of spiritual gifts, an orientation with leaders in the area they will be volunteering, and a trial run.<sup>26</sup>

The most important aspect within basic training comes towards the end, the trial run. This aspect gives each party a chance to see how the job will function, and see if the match is correct with their spiritual gifts and ability to commit to the time requirements. This period, *InnovateChurch* suggests 30 days, is important.<sup>27</sup> It is vital that the leader communicates to the volunteer that within this 30 days if either party decides the match is not what was originally intended that each can be free to explore other areas of service without any hard feelings.

### **The Back to Basics Model**

The “Back to Basics” model for Biblical Multiplication is a model that can transform the Church body into one of action, from one of being complacent and comfortable. Fortunately our church uses, or has recently adopted, a similar model of multiplication. This model comes from a need to reach those who have not been reached by the Gospel message through opening new churches, by way of being a multisite church. Multisite is Church multiplication (Church

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<sup>25</sup> Falwell, 52-56.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Planting) with a slightly different administrative structure, but the results should be much like a church plant. This process of multiplication is not meant to be for one additional location, but for many multiplying churches. Once a site is established, they will be expected to launch their own multisite locations as well, thus making it a multiplying factor, not a multiplication factor.

### **Understanding Church Discipleship**

We should be constantly asking ourselves “how can we assimilate new members, and how can we reclaim inactive members?”<sup>28</sup> How does the church recover a Biblical perspective, what are the techniques we can use for penetrating deep with our ministry, and how do we do this in an orderly way? The relevance of the early church is also very important in understanding church discipleship today, more so than we might suggest from looking at our current ministry work. In the end, the goal “of disciples, is both personal and corporate, which is to live a life worthy of the name *Christian*.”<sup>29</sup> Understanding discipleship is extremely important in our churches today, because ultimately “disciples must reproduce themselves in Christ” when our ministry has ended and is turned over to another generation.<sup>30</sup>

### **Recovering a Biblical Church and Biblical Evangelism**

The Church body over the recent decades has become one focused on being the church organization, not necessarily as a body of believers called to evangelism.<sup>31</sup> This often means a bloated organization of events and programs, not a group of people intent on multiplying disciples for Christ. The church is better understood as that of flesh, not buildings, taking place in our “neighborhoods and workplaces.”<sup>32</sup> Changing this mindset in our congregations through

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<sup>28</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth, History, Theology, and Principles*, 1st Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: B&H Publishers, 1993), 281-285.

<sup>29</sup> George Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 1st Edition (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 23.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Falwell, 120-124.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 120.

going back to the basics of being a “Biblical Church” and using “Biblical Evangelism” will start to change the church from an organization to an organism, and one that multiplies.

Changing the mindset of how the church functions, and has functioned now for several generations, will not be an easy task at all. Even after hearing the church is not modeling the church of Acts, many members are content with the current state making it quite difficult to change without strong leadership, and resolve to see a lasting change take place. Leadership is key to making this change, and church leaders and staff must be able to get beyond “committee meetings and putting out fires” to do the work of multiplying disciples.<sup>33</sup> The mentoring and accountability process Falwell presents in *InnovateChurch* can accomplish this task, but once again only if all members are committed to sticking with the process. If changing the mindset of the people in the Church body is key to changing the organization, each member must be educated and mentored, and in the process, build a new DNA structure for the Church that models the New Testament Church. Once the mentoring and education takes place, the hard work of eliminating unnecessary events or programs will need to take place, and a focus put on evangelism; the work of worship, discipleship, prayer, missions, and fellowship.<sup>34</sup>

### **Five Evangelism Techniques for Ministry Penetration**

The five evangelism techniques outlined by *Total Church Life*, are public proclamation, caring ministry, event attraction, geographic saturation, and personal presentation.<sup>35</sup> Each of these points together forms a picture of complete evangelism. Robinson examines each one, but makes the point that many churches only implement one or two, thus limiting the effectiveness

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>35</sup> Darrell W. Robinson, *Total Church Life: How to be a First Century Church in a 21st Century World* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 1997), 168-169.

of evangelism by the Church.<sup>36</sup> The question at hand “how will *you* apply this to *your* ministry” makes it personal, and that is how these techniques are implemented in the Church, that have to become personal.

In my particular case, we use these five techniques in many of the ways specified by Robinson. Public proclamation is usually done on Sunday mornings, but unlike Robinson’s claim that the lost aren’t present, we specifically target, through various communications pieces and worship style, the lost in our community. Caring ministry and event attraction are done off-site and by individuals for task at hand. We often hold a few specific events aimed at reaching the lost in our community, such as wrapping Christmas packages for free outside the local shopping centers throughout the month of December. Geographic saturation takes place by the members of the church. We have laid out maps of our area with the location of each members’ house to show and prove to the church that we as members saturate the area. From that information we often use mailers or other marketing tools to coat the area within our church’s geographic area.

### **The Early Church and its Relevance Today**

We read about the earliest formation of the church, and what they consistently practiced, in the first few chapters of the book of Acts, specifically in Acts 2.42-47. This is one of the first summaries given to us in the book of Acts. As a summary, they were first and foremost devoted to the Apostles teachings, fellowship (Gk. *koinonia* or participation and sharing), breaking of bread (the Lord’s Supper and larger fellowship meals), and prayer (in houses and the temple). These would be the priorities practiced in the earliest church body. In addition to those, verses 45-47 give us a little more detail as they were selling their possessions, attending to the temple, and praising God.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

One difference between the church in Acts 2 and the church as it proceeded through history is how many times it has now fractured into another set of beliefs or understandings (denominations), yet still being a part of the same body of believers. In Acts, they were said to have been “together, and had all things in common” (Acts 2.44), but it didn’t take long before differences started to tug at the church. This can be seen as early as Peter in Acts 10, but today we almost have to define the church first since some churches seem to not have any understanding of Acts 2, let alone put any of these items into practice. With that understanding, a true body of believers will still consistently practice all the items in Acts 2. Most churches that hold Scripture as inerrant will be consistently devoted to the Word (the Apostles teaching), fellowship, the Lord’s Supper, prayer, the church building itself, and to small groups (meeting at the home). If there was one among the list in Acts 2.42-47 that is most neglected today it would probably be “selling their possessions” and making sure the brethren lack for nothing. This is more of a nationalistic thing today (meaning it’s different in each country), and in the U.S. the church has given way to the government as the “helper” of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

### **Priority of the Church in Ministry or Witnessing**

The priority of the church must be the summary outlined in Acts 2.42. This is what the earliest tradition stated, which was founded on the immediate resurrection and ascension of Christ who put this summary in place. Therefore, the priority of the church should be (1) being devoted to Scripture, (2) fellowship, (3) breaking bread, and (4) prayer. In short, this means the church is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ” until we reach maturity in faith (Ephesians 4.12-13). The question above combines two pieces (ministry and witness) that the author of Ephesians does not necessarily show in 4.12-13, though the importance of being a witness for Christ is made in other areas of Scripture. In this context, the priority of the church, as seen in Acts 2 and Ephesians 4, is to use the spiritual gifts given to

the saints, to build up the saints, so they can then go out beyond the church and become effective witnesses.

In essence, that means the church is not necessarily here to bring in scores of the unsaved and the faithless so as to then convert them from within the church. The equipped saints are to be working as witnesses, and then bringing in those who have responded to the call of Christ in their life. This practice of alter-calling has been a long-standing use of the church, but it shouldn't necessarily be the priority if the church is to follow the example given to us by the book of Acts. The best way to do this would be to discover, develop, and use the spiritual gifts given to us as listed in Ephesians 4.11; Romans 12.6-8; 1 Corinthians 12.7-10, 28-30; and 1 Peter 4.8-10.<sup>37</sup>

### **Personal Opportunities for Effectiveness**

There are many ways to effectively minister and witness as the church. As mentioned above, I think developing the spiritual gifts of believers is vitally important to being effective in ministry. Churches today do not seem to spend too much time in this area other than perhaps a sermon series, but it needs deep attention. A concrete opportunity we recently had in our church was to collect boxes of food for our local community, which we then went out and distributed to families targeted by our food bank. Our congregation collected over 14 tons of food, and then on one Saturday morning, distributed it all within our local community with no strings attached. This may not have been effective at getting people in the seats on Sunday morning, but it was effective at witnessing to our local community.

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<sup>37</sup> Darrell W. Robinson, *Total Church Life: How to be a First Century Church in a 21st Century World* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 1997), 108.

## **True Biblical Discipleship**

Understanding discipleship requires knowing what a true disciple is and how to recognize those who exhibit these qualities. Based on Dr. Dempsey's article "On Being a Disciple Based Upon Scripture," the true disciple is one who is intentional about the Great and New Commandments, an individual focused on equipping saints for spiritual work, and being a missional church as set forth in Matthew 28.18-20.<sup>38</sup> Through many great Biblical references, Dempsey concludes by forming a definition of a true disciple, as "a person who has trusted Christ for salvation and has surrendered completely to Him."<sup>39</sup> He, or she, is committed to practicing the spiritual disciplines in community and developing to their full potential for Christ and His mission."<sup>40</sup> Biblical multiplication comes into making true disciples from the very beginning of the church in Acts. From the actions of disciples almost automatically results in a multiplication factor of good fruit. Praising God and having favor with all the people, the Lord added to their number day by day to those who were being saved (Acts 2.47).

## **Facing Church Conflict**

One of the most destructive, and yet most inevitable qualities of a church is that, at some point, you will experience conflict within the church. Churches are made up of God's imperfect people, sinners, and this makes finding a perfect church, perhaps that is one without conflict, impossible. As believers, we should recognize this, and learn how to deal with the inevitable conflict in ways that make the church stronger in the end, not just decide to give up and move on to another church. The new believer, or the unchurched, probably will not understand or recognize this, so it is vitally important we learn to show people love, the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36-40), accept people for who they are, and where they are, and in the process try

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<sup>38</sup> Dr. Rod Dempsey, *On Being a Disciple Based Upon Scripture*, Evangelism, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary (Lynchburg: Unpublished Notes).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

to develop the church into a “Great Commission church.” When we do this, we can better understand how a truly healthy church is supposed to function, to better serve the unchurched, and make disciples of all peoples (Matthew 28:18).

### **Ways to Show People Love and Share Christ**

There are often more ways that we use the principles found in *SPLASH* than we might think from day to day, but determining what works best for reaching people is not always an easy process. As *SPLASH* points out, “God is everywhere... but it is not up to you to ‘win someone to Christ.’”<sup>41</sup> That can be a very freeing principle if taken to heart, because it is up to God to do the work of changing a person’s heart, not ours. As *SPLASH* points out, “prayer is the key to showing people love and sharing him.”<sup>42</sup> That is the basis for the entire principle; prayer has to, and must, accompany any attempt to reach anyone.

Personally, being on staff at a local church, I spend more time on the “Share” part, mainly because just as part of church staff we are constantly trying to maintain all the others. The main way I try to share is online, through my website. I have spent 10 years developing the site and have interacted with many people over the years from superficial topics to very serious debates. This online environment is often cutthroat and raw, but there are also barriers that can be broken down via electronic communication that couldn’t be face-to-face. The future of this particular area of evangelism is virtually endless (like Twitter or Facebook), but it cannot, will not, and should not, take the place of face-to-face community and discussion.

### **Accepting People How and Who They Are**

Jesus meets people where they are throughout His ministry, but he also goes to where he knows they will be, like the Temple. Two examples of Jesus meeting people where they are

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<sup>41</sup> Ken Hemphill and Paula Hemphill, *SPLASH: Show People Love and Share Him* (Travelers Rest, SC: Auxano Press, 2007), 5.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

comes from John 4 and 5 with the woman at the well, and the invalid at the pool in Bethesda. Jesus also specifically travels to Bethany in John 11 about the story of Lazarus.

Just as Jesus met with people where they were, he also went to them and taught in the temple quite often, in fact Scripture says “as was His custom, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up and read” (Luke 4:16). Jesus was teaching on the Sabbath where people would come to him to learn. Using Jesus as the example, I think we can be effective doing both, but the essential part of that is prayer “that the Holy Spirit will bring them where they need to be,” without prayer we become far less effective.

### **Becoming a Great Commission Church**

Transforming our congregation into a Great Commission Church is basically the mission of the Church itself, or should be of every church. To not be a church with the Great Commission in clear focus is to not be aware of the very teachings we are trying to emulate, and the Church in the book of Acts. From what we have learned in this course, the most effective strategy for accomplishing our tasks is to become a multiplying church.

As *InnovateChurch* instructs, “we must always be driven by the desire to multiply at every level of ministry,” the effect then being a fulfillment of the Great Commission.<sup>43</sup> In our particular case, our Church has decided to become a multiplying church in total. We started a campaign about 9-10 months ago to become a multisite Church, instead of building a new building on our same location. This is a multiplication principle, because once a second site is set; we then expect that site to multiply itself at some point and so on.

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<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Falwell, ed., *InnovateChurch*, ed. Jonathan Falwell (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group), 119-123.

## **What Does a Healthy Church Look Like**

The specifics of what defines a healthy church today are not necessarily how we think we should evaluate it in our postmodern culture. From the view of an administrative staff member, we often see the health of the church in view of numbers. How high is attendance, is membership increasing, and what is the financial income or budget for the week, month, or year.

These factors are not necessarily bad indicators of the health of the church, but they are not the only indicators, nor should they be seen as the only aspect of a healthy church. Often our society today is far too hung up on numbers and less concerned with Jesus as the head of the body. Jesus has to be the head of the church, no question about it (John 12:32 and Colossians 1:18). That is the very first and most important indicator of a healthy church.<sup>44</sup> From there, the church must be evaluated to see if they submit to the head of the church, does the church give Jesus preeminence (Colossians 1:18), does it obey the head of the church, and are the members unified in this effort.<sup>45</sup> If these principles are not in place, or are broken, they would have to take priority to repair, no matter what the numbers indicate, because without Jesus as the head of the church ultimately the church will fail at some point.

## **Conclusion**

Finding your place in God's work is sometimes a challenge, but what I am experiencing on a daily basis within my own ministry, parallels the discussions and principles examined in each section above. There are many areas that need improvement, and many aspects of ministry I have never considered prior to this study. Our church, and my area of ministry within our church, has a pretty clear future vision, and seeing that vision accomplished is a daily challenge.

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<sup>44</sup> Darrell W. Robinson, *Total Church Life: How to be a First Century Church in a 21st Century World* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 1997), 29-41

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

The vision and experience put forth by the leaders presented throughout this material is an amazing collection of ministry knowledge, and a little overwhelming at times. Some of these leaders have been in ministry for decades, have had a great vision for their own ministry, which they can now give out as wisdom to others. For those of us who have only been in ministry for a few years, it is sometimes difficult to translate a great leader's approach into solid concrete results.

Understanding overall concepts from these leaders is probably more beneficial than one can grasp at the time, but should result in a greater development of a personal ministry hand crafted by God. Each ministry is so unique, and each approach has to be geared to the specifics of that particular ministry. The impact these leaders will have on my ministry in particular will be less in specific step-by-step processes and more in an overall vision for leadership. As they help develop my leadership in ministry, they will enable me to learn, understand, and then create steps that will put forth a vision that works for my particular ministry.

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