

The modern church uses a large variety of methods and programs to create disciples such as sermons, small groups, and the Internet.¹ Some methods are more traditional, some more contemporary, like the use of Internet and social sites, are growing exponentially in their importance. We should continue to ask if these methods are effective in creating true disciples or are they bringing the local church to a point of being culturally indistinguishable from our postmodern society.

To gain an understanding of what methods are used in *most* Protestant churches today would require a kind of research that the Barna Research Group specializes in, so the main focus here is going to be on a few fast growing contemporary churches. The overwhelming majority of Contemporary Evangelical churches studied for this paper used the Lecture-Lab model, or the typical Sunday morning sermon, as described in *Growing True Disciples by Barna* as their main focus with follow-up continued through a small group setting. This method of creating true disciples is probably not the most effective method that a church can utilize, but it has come to be what people expect on a Sunday morning. For this method to be the main focus of discipleship in a church, the sermon must encompass “material of a substantive foundation... that becomes more than a warm-and-fuzzy-but-forgettable message.” (Barna, 154) Once the foundation is made it must be continued into the small group setting where the material can be labored over and absorbed in a pattern of growth that will eventually create a true disciple. There are several obvious downsides to only using this method, like a lack of any effective evaluation system or delivery of any basic theology or doctrine. (Barna, 156) Even more troubling than that would be a church that uses this method without a focus on creating disciples, leaving just the warm-and-fuzzy-but-forgettable message. When younger

¹ It would be noteworthy to say that while a large variety of methods, or even a combination of many different methods are used to create disciples, there are some modern churches today that are not all that focused on creating disciples to the point of even having a recognizable program at all

adults (those who tend to more highly favor contemporary worship churches) were asked in a survey for *UnChristian* “What would you say are the most important priorities for Christians to pursue in terms of your faith” only 31% said discipleship well behind their first choice of lifestyle or that of being a good person. (Kinnaman 2007, 50)

Finally, in the churches studied², the Internet would have to be one of the fastest growing programs or methods of discipleship today. The Internet’s importance and reach among the Church body has become something these churches have come to depend on for an enormous number of functions, including discipleship. Everything from reading materials, sermons, small group meetings, and bible study can be done over the Internet. This method is inexpensive, generally easy to use, and provides a format that many younger adults prefer and use in their non-church daily life. The downsides are numerous, but like the Lecture-Lab, the Internet lacks any kind of effective evaluation system to determine discipleship growth and may not facilitate a deeper knowledge of the materials.

The number of methods for creating disciples today can be so great that the method itself may be almost indistinguishable, but just because the number of options are plentiful doesn’t mean we are creating true and mature disciples. Each method for creating true disciples should be evaluated for its effectiveness on a continual basis, and if the effect is undeterminable perhaps a new method should be put in its place where a genuine transformation and growth can take place.

² The churches studied for this paper would include Saddleback in California, LifeChurch.tv in Oklahoma, Granger Community Church in Indiana, Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minnesota, Newspring Church in South Carolina, Northpoint Church (and their satellite churches) in Georgia, Mariners Church in California, Cornerstone Church in Alabama, and Prestonwood Baptist Church in Texas