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Living Hope EFC

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Carrying out the Great Commission (Church Planting) requires a Simple Process of Making Disciples

ILLUS: IF I could have seen the Shore, I would not have quit!

The California coast was shrouded in fog the morning of July 4, 1952. 21 miles to the west, on Catalina Island, a 34-year-old woman waded into the water and began swimming toward California, determined to be the first woman to ever swim the 21-mile strait. Her name was Florence Chadwick, and she had already been the first woman to swim the English Channel in both directions.

The water was numbing cold that morning and the **fog was so thick** that Chadwick could hardly see the boats in her own party—there to scare away the sharks. As the hours ticked off, she swam on. Fatigue had never been a serious problem; it was only the bone-chilling cold of the water that was threatening. More than 15 hours later, numbed with the cold, the swimmer asked to be taken out. She couldn't go on any longer. Her mother and her trainer, in a boat alongside her, urged Chadwick to go on, as they were getting close to shore. Yet all she could see was dense fog. A few minutes later, the swimmer was taken out of the water. Later, when she found out that she had been within a half-mile of the shore, she blurted out, **"I'm not excusing myself, but if I could have seen the shore, I might have made it."**

Florence Chadwick had been licked, not by the cold or even by the fatigue, but by the fog! The fog had obscured her goal; it had blinded her reason and her eyes. – Green, 165

You know – it's that way in life, and in the church too.

- It's not fatigue that defeats us. It's losing sight of the goal.
- This describes the history of the church & God's Mission.

All organizations, including -church, tend toward institutionalism.

Symptoms of institutionalism:

- 1- The organization (the form & structure) becomes more important than the people in it.
- 2- The atmosphere is threatening rather than open and free.
- 3- People are afraid to ask uncomfortable questions.
- 4- The structures have become rigid & inflexible.
- 5- People are serving the organization more than the objectives for which it was brought into existence.
- 6- The means have become the ends.
- 7- People become prisoners of their procedures. The policy manual gets bigger & bigger, and new ideas are few.
- 8- People develop their own special interests within the organization, creating competitive departments & divisions.
- 9- Morale degenerates. People become discouraged, critical.

- *Sharpening the Focus of the Church*, 252

EXAMPLE: 1st Century Judaism that Jesus came to change!

Matth.23:13-14. Their religion actually hid God from people! **-#6,5** Woe to you teachers of the law

And Pharisees, you hypocrites!
**You shut the kingdom of heaven
 In men's faces.**

You yourselves do not enter,
 Nor will you let those enter
 Who are trying to."

- 23:15. Their converts are going to hell! **#1**
 "You travel over land and sea
 To win a single convert,
 And when he becomes one,
 You make him twice as much
A son of hell as you are."
- 23:16-22. The goal is money, not worship. **#7**
 "You say, 'If anyone swears
 By the temple it means nothing;
 But if anyone swears by
The gold of the temple, he
 Is bound by his oath.
 You blind fools! **Which is
 Greater**; the gold or the temple
 That makes the gold sacred?"
- 23:23. The leaders are loveless, harsh, without life. **#2, 5**
 "**You give a tenth** of your spices-
 Mint, dill and cummin. But **you
 Have neglected the more
 Important matters** of the lay -
 Justice, mercy and faithfulness...
 You blind guides!
 You strain out a gnat
 But swallow a camel!"
- 23:25-28. Hypocrisy is rampant. **#4,8.**
 "You clean the outside of the
 cup and dish, but **inside they
 Are full of greed and self-
 Indulgence.** Blind Pharisees!..
 You are like whitewashed tombs,
 Which look beautiful on the
 Outside but on the inside
 Are full of dead men's bones
 And everything unclean...
**You are full of hypocrisy
 And wickedness.**"

ILLUS: Contemporary rules that actually work against Mission!

- It is amazing the things Christians will do to one another – because of manmade rules or bylaws or legalism.
- We will turn on one another in an instant, because someone doesn't keep our rules, all the while – doing it in the name of Christianity. We make it a mockery!

What happened to God's mission? To make Himself known?

It's no surprise Jesus came to bring **mega-change** into this scene

- Jesus came to build His church: **Matt.16:16-18.**

“Who do you say that I am?”

“*You are the Christ,
The Son of The living God!*”

-Peter

“My Father in heaven has
revealed this to you.”

“On this rock I will build my church.”

- What did He mean by this? What process did He have in mind? **HOW do we build the Church?** - What is the Church?
- The Church is believers. **How do we make believers? Mature?**

SIMPLE CHURCH. SIMPLE LAW. SIMPLE MISSION.

From time to time the church must ask itself the question:

Why are we doing what we are doing? What is our purpose?

- It is one of the benefits of starting new! As a church plant.
- It is important to examine forms in the church in our day, to find how we can best fulfill God's purposes: “Make Disciples.”

Comparing Traditional Church with the Simple Church

Thom Rainer & Eric Geiger: “In our extensive research of more than 400 evangelical churches, we discovered the simple church revolution. We compared growing & vibrant churches to nongrowing & struggling churches. Church leaders from both groups completed the same survey, which was designed to measure how simple their church discipleship process was...**The vibrant churches were much more simple than the comparison churches.** The difference was so big that the probability of the results occurring with one church by chance is less than 1 in 1,000. –13-16

The significance is that, in general, simple churches are growing & vibrant...Church leaders who have designed a simple biblical process to make disciples are effectively advancing the gospel.

DEFINITION: A simple church is a congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth. – 60

- Leaders must craft opportunities where people will encounter the grace of God. They design the church around a simple process of spiritual growth, and abandon everything else.
- They rely upon the simple process to move people to growth.
- It is the center of what happens – by “design.”
- It is straightforward, understandable, strategic.

In researching these 400 churches the result was: “**There is a highly significant relationship between a simple church design & the growth & vitality of a local church,**” 67.

- They also found that there are four key elements critical to designing a simple ministry process:
- "The leadership & the church are clear about the process (clarity) & are committed to executing it. The process flows logically (movement) and is implemented in each area of the church (alignment). The church abandons everything that is not in the process (focus)." – 68

FOUR CRITICAL ELEMENTS in a SIMPLE PROCESS
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CLARITY: the ability of the process to be communicated and understood by the people.

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- It involves certainty & eliminates confusion.
- The *how* is clear, taught, and *illustrated*.
- Understanding always precedes commitment.
- If leaders are not clear, the people will not grasp the process.

MOVEMENT: the sequential steps in the process that cause people to move to greater areas of commitment. -72

- It is about flow, moving someone to the next step.
- It is about handoffs, what happens between programs.
- Moving a person from observer to being a contributor.
- Assimilation effectiveness is more important than programs.

ILLUS: Many churches are like poor relay teams. Instead of car- ing about the handoffs, they are preoccupied with programs.

- Programs are tools (not ends) to promote movement.
- Winning teams excel at handoffs.

ALIGNMENT: the arrangement of all ministries and staff around the same simple process.

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- All ministry departments have the same overarching process.
- Assures the entire church is moving in the same direction.
- A church lacking alignment competes for same resources.
- All churches naturally drift away from alignment.

ILLUS: When a car isn't in alignment – serious costs occur!

- Without alignment, complexity is certain.

FOCUS: the commitment to abandon everything that falls outside of the simple ministry process. – 76

- Focus requires saying **yes** to the best & **no** to everything else.
- Focus gives power to clarity, movement & alignment.
- Without focus, a church becomes cluttered despite process.
- ...The process is buried underneath a myriad of events.

"Simple churches abandon all that is outside the simple process because it threatens to steal attention and energy from what has been determined as necessary."-77

- New ideas are funneled into the current ministry process.

THREE SIMPLE CHURCH STORIES

1: IMMANUEL Bap. Church, Glasgow, KY. (about 16,000 people)

- Over 100 churches listed on the city web site.
- Buckle of the Bible belt.
- Immanuel is vibrant, alive, and growing. New converts.
- In the past 2 years, doubled from 150 to 300 people.

STORY: p.87

- Pastor knew the church needed a simple process of disc'p.

2: Christ Fellowship: Miami. – 92

- 89 yrs old. Rich in history and tradition. Transformed.
- Pastors began evaluating the ministry.
- Sought to define the kind of disciple their church would make
- Impressed to focus on four things: Intimate rela'p with God, community with others, serving, and influencing nonbelievers.
- They committed to become simple, to streamline and focus.
- READ p.97 about extra programs.

3- Northpoint Community Church. Alpharetta, GA. –99.

- Andy Stanley, pastor. He grew up in a complex church.
- Committed to simplicity. Believes ministry drifts to complexity.
- Complexity dilutes your potential for impact.
- Grown from a handful of people to more than 16,000 in 10 yrs

CONCLUSION

Three different churches, different communities, all effectively making disciples. All have a simple process for making disciples.

Pertinent stats: (*Boot camp manual & Planting Missional Churches*)

1. 240 million unchurched Americans makes us the third largest mission field in the world, behind China and India; the number one English-speaking mission field in the world.
2. The number of unchurched in America almost doubled from 1991 to 2004.
3. 80-85 % of churches have plateaued or declining.
4. We are closing more churches than we are planting. We close about three churches for every church we plant.
 - 3500-4000 churches close each year.
5. In the 1980s the EFCA closed an average of six churches a year. In the 1990s we closed an average of 25-30 churches a year.
6. Roughly 10 million **born again** Christian adults are unchurched.
7. The U.S. leads the world in every category of violent and domestic crime.

8. 50% of all churches last year did not add one new member through conversion growth.

- **Survey: Non-Religious Americans on the Rise in Every State** 3-6-09
- [The % of Christians decreased from 86.2 % in the 1990s to 76.7 % today.](#)
- [57% of evangelical Christians say many religions can lead to eternal life.](#) - Steve Waldman: Author of *Founding Faith*.

9. 80% of church plants die within five years, those who remain average 65 people.

QUESTION: What will the future of Living Hope Church read?

- What statistical column will define us?
- Will we be making disciples?
- How many people will know Christ because of us?
- Will we survive the 5-year mark?
- What will determine our future?