

Sunday, March 22, 2009
Living Hope EFC

Art Smith

Becoming a Simple Church.

ILLUS: *The Crude Little Lifesaving Station.*

- "Church:" Illus. File.

Past two weeks we've been looking at how our church can make sure we live up to our calling to *Make Disciples*.

Simple Church: In researching some 400 churches the result was: "**There is a highly significant relationship between a simple church design & the growth & vitality of a local church,**" 67.

The book sites a **study** Travis Bradshaw did from the U. of Florida.

In his PhD dissertation he did a research **project on church growth**, hypothesizing that churches that offered more programs would grow more than churches offering fewer programs. His research proved just the opposite. –*Simple Church*, 213

- He placed churches in categories by the # of programs offered.
- Churches that experienced the highest % of growth were churches that offered fewer programs.

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

"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

TODAY: What it would look like to become a simple church?

First Step, CLARITY: Starting with a Ministry Blueprint.

1- CLARITY about our mission as a church & as leaders.

- Matt.29:19-20. Eph.4:11-16; 2:20-22. Col.2:6-7. Gal.4:19. Acts 20:28-32. 1 Tim.5:17; 2 Tim.2:2; I Pet.5:2; Heb.6:1; 13:17.

Matt.28:19-20

¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of **all** nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

²⁰and teaching them to obey everything

I have commanded you.

And surely I am with you always,

to the very end of the age.”

Eph.4:11-16

- ¹¹It was he who gave some to be apostles,
some to be prophets, some to be evangelists,
and some to be *pastors and teachers*,
¹²to prepare *God's people* for works of service,
so that the body of Christ may be built up
¹³until we *all* reach unity in the faith and in the
knowledge of the Son of God and become mature,
attaining to the whole measure
of the *fullness of Christ*.
- ¹⁴Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back
and forth by the waves, and blown here and there
by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and
craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.
- ¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all
things grow up into him who is the Head,
that is, Christ.
- ¹⁶From him *the whole body*, joined and held together
by every supporting ligament, grows and builds
itself up in love, as *each part* does its work.

Col.2:6-7

- ⁶So then, just as *you* received Christ Jesus
as Lord, continue to live in him,
⁷rooted and built up in him, strengthened
in the faith as *you* were taught, and
overflowing with thankfulness.

Gal.4:19

- ¹⁹My dear children,
for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth
until Christ is formed in *you*,

Acts 20:28-32

- ²⁸Keep watch over *yourselves* and *all the flock*
of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.
Be shepherds of the church of God,
which he bought with his own blood.

²⁹I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.
³⁰Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹So be on your guard!
³²"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give *you* an inheritance among *all* those who are sanctified."

1 Tim.5:17

¹⁷The *elders* who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching."

2 Tim.2:2

²And the things *you* have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to *reliable men* who will also be qualified to teach others.

1 Pet.5:2-3

²Be shepherds of *God's flock* that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve;
³not lording it over those *entrusted to you*, but being examples to the flock.

Hebrews 6:1

¹Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity,
 13:17 ¹⁷Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account.
Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden,

for that would be of no advantage to you.

- The church is a body of believers all growing to be like Christ.
- Leaders / elders are responsible to shepherd the people toward maturity. This was demonstrated at the beginning: Acts 2:42-47.
- **Building lives is our mission!** Making disciples (disciplemakers).
- God's will =our church to be a **Life-saving / transforming station**.
- He wants each of us to grow, mature, & reproduce ourselves!
- Leaders must put every member in the path of God's grace!

2- CLARITY about our simple disciple making process.

We need a simple blueprint that moves us from where we are toward maturity. A strategy or process of discipleship development.

TO DO THIS WE MUST ANSWER TWO QUESTIONS:

Q 1: What does a mature Christian look like? His characteristics?

Q: 2: What simple process can help the Christian arrive at this point?

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A MATURE CHRISTIAN?

1- Jesus summed up maturity: Matt.22:36-40; John 13:34-35.

³⁶"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

³⁷Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your *heart* and with all your *soul* and with all your *mind*.'

³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment.

³⁹And the second is like it:

'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

2- Paul described the fruit of the Spirit: Gal.5:22-24, and defined love.

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control.

Against such things there is no law.

²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature

with its passions and desires.

3- Eph.4 talks about coming to the unity of the faith & knowledge of the Son of God (doctrine), mature, doing works of service – each his part.

Eph.4:14-16

¹⁴Then we will no longer be infants ...blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and

craftiness of men...

¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love,
we will in all things grow up
into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

¹⁶From him the whole body...
grows and builds
itself up in love,
as each part does its work.

4- Matt. 28 – making disciples (evangelism). 1 Pet.3:15 Be prepared...

¹⁵But in your hearts set apart
Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give
an answer to everyone who asks you
to give the reason for the hope that you have.
But do this with gentleness and respect,

5- 1 Thes.4:3-5 It is God's will that you should be sanctified...

1 Thes.4:3-5

³It is God's will that you should be
sanctified: that you should avoid
sexual immorality;

⁴that each of you should learn to control his
own body in a way that is holy and honorable,

⁵not in passionate lust like the heathen,
who do not know God;

6- Eph.5:1-2 – Be imitators of God. 5:8 Live as children of light, wisely.

¹Be imitators of God, therefore,
as dearly loved children

²and live a life of love,
just as Christ loved us

and gave himself up for us

as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

7- Eph.5:18 – **Be filled with the Spirit.** Husbands, wives, kids.

Q: How can we combine these into major traits to focus upon?

Model 1: Connecting Church Model: 67-68.

Q: What are the common beliefs, practices & virtues that have to do with loving God? With loving one another? Being a mature disciple?

10 dominant themes of belief -75

1- The Trinity. One God in three Persons.

2- Salvation by Grace. Eph.2:8-9.

- 3- Authority of the Bible. Inspired & authoritative –2 Tim.3:16-17.
- 4- The Personal God. God is involved in our daily lives.
- 5- Identity in Christ. John 1:12-13 & Rom.6.
- 6- The Church. The Church is God's primary purpose today.
- 7- Humanity. Creation, fall, redemption.
- 8- Compassion. We are to love others as Christ loved us.
- 9- Eternity. There is a heaven & a hell. Jesus will return.
- 10- Stewardship. Everything we have is from God & for God.

These core beliefs teach us who God is, who man is, how we come into a relationship with Him, what he wants us to do and be.

- Many postmodern people have little to no Bible knowledge.
- ILLUS:** *Simple Church: Documentary called Super-Size Me, 197,227*
- Low budget documentary about the impact of eating fast food.
- In one scene the producer is proving how effectively McDonalds impacts the future generation. He meets with schoolchildren and shows them pictures of famous people.
- Most recognize George Washington. All know Ronald McDonald.
- NONE recognize a common depiction of Jesus Christ. Not one!

POINT: What has happened to all our Life-Saving Stations?

Q: Can a group be called "Christian," & not know Christian beliefs?

10 Common Historical, Christian Practices, 78

Spiritual practices or disciplines essential for growth & maturity

- They don't = maturity. They get us in the way of God's grace.
- 1- Worship.
 - 2- Prayer. "Be faithful in prayer."
 - 3- Bible study. 2 Tim.3:16-17
 - 4- Single-mindedness. Matt.6:33.
 - 5- Biblical Community. Acts 2:42-47.
 - 6- Spiritual Gifts. 1 Cor.12. Functioning in the body.
 - 7- Giving Away our Time. 1 Cor.10:31.
 - 8- Giving Away our Money. 2 Cor.8:7 – fulfilling God's purposes.
 - 9- Giving Away our Faith. How will they hear, without a witness?
 - 10- Giving Away our Life. Rom.12:1-2.

10- Common Historical, Christian Virtues, 79

These deal with "what we need to be" – in our Christlikeness.

1. Love. 2. Joy. 3. Peace. 4. Patience. 5. Gentleness. 6. Kindness.
7. Faith(fullness). 8. Humility. 9. Self-control. 10. Hope.

PROCESS: These traits are taught through the year – from the pulpit, Discussed in small groups. And worked on individually.

SMALL GROUP COMMUNITY has 7 functions:

- Spiritual formation
- Evangelism
- Reproduction
- Volunteerism
- International Missions
- Care
- Extending Compassion (community service)

Model 2: NAV 2.7 MODEL

POINT: Either of these can give us a Clear Track/ Process for discipleship! We need to choose **one** process for our church.

“Vibrant churches are more than twice as likely to have a clearly defined process,” 112.

Second Step: Movement!

Choosing a churchwide program for each phase of the simple process.

- Programs need to move people to greater levels of commitment.
- Choose “**one**” program for each phase, in each department.
- No program is an end in itself, but a means to growth.
- **New believers** immediately active in a small group are 5 times more likely to remain in the church 5 years later.

Third Step: Alignment. Uniting all ministries in the same process.

- **Benefit:** Family members all experience the same process & material. Great for discussing truths with kids.
- This unites the leaders and workers in how ministry is done.
- New ministries must align with the Simple purposes.

Fourth Step: Focus. Eliminate things outside the Simple Process.

ILLUS: Super-size me diet! -197-98.

- For a month all Spurlock ate was McDonalds. = Gained 25 lbs.
 - Began suffering fatigue, headaches & indigestion. Bld suger skyrocketed. Liver filled with fat. High cholesterol. Bld pres. Unman/abl
- POINT:** No such thing as *fast-food* spiritual diet. Must eat right to grow

Clarity, movement, and alignment mean nothing...without FOCUS!

- There will be a constant temptation to abandon simplicity.
- When needs arise you want to meet, use existing programs.

It is a matter of stewardship!

- Of people, energy, resources, leaders.
- **ILLUS:** Eric’s church – eliminated *Mom’s Morning Out*. 209
- Unintentionally – it was competing with weekend programs.

ILLUS: Johnny Lechner graduates after 12 years.

You’ve probably heard of students who have crammed four years of college into 5 or 6. Johnny Lechner was enrolled in the U. of Wis., Whitewater bachelor’s degree so long, they made him graduate! He was in the program **12 years!** He’s almost 30!

- Interviewed on late night talk shows – Lechner says he just likes being in college! He enjoys the carefree lifestyle, the avoidance of real-world responsibilities.
- He still dressed like a college student, went to college parties, likes sleeping late, playing music, attending a couple classes and hanging out with friends.
- One of his major goals was to go on two spring break trips!
- Staying in the same place was comfortable.

- Simple Church, 148

APPLY: I wonder how many Christians experience the same lifestyle – in their churches?
Staying in basically the same spiri- tual condition – year-after-year? Comfortable, No movement?

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

- 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*.

Q: WHAT KIND OF DISCIPLES ARE WE MATRICULATING?

- Church as usual? OR **A Life-saving Station**? The choice is ours!