

## Lessons in missing the point

I was walking across a bridge one day, and I saw a man standing on the edge, about to jump off. So I ran over and said:

"Stop! Don't do it!"

"Why shouldn't I?" he said.

"Well, there's so much to live for!"

"Like what?"

"Well... are you religious?"

He said yes.

I said, "Me too! Are you Christian or Buddhist?"

"Christian."

"Me too! Are you Catholic or Protestant ?

"Protestant."

"Me too!

"Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?"

"Baptist"

"Wow! Me too! Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?"

" Baptist Church of God!"

"Me too! Are you original Baptist Church of God, or are you reformed Baptist Church of God?"

"Reformed Baptist Church of God!"

"Me too! Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1915?"

He said, "Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1915!"

So I said, "Die, heretic scum", and pushed him off.

(Emo Philips)

That story isn't true...at least not taken literally. Figuratively? I think it points to probably the biggest problem amongst Christians today—and no I'm not talking about denominational separation. This is something ancient and worldwide, and it's much more sinister, much more damaging and much, much subtler.

I always tell the youth that the devil is never going to tempt you to stab yourself in the leg repeatedly, because he knows you would say no. We humans may not be the

brightest group at times, but we're a little smarter than dirt. The devil is much too subtle for that type of thing. He's very good, not only at deceiving us into doing wrong and sinful things, but at doing good. Yep, the devil wants you to do good things. Why?

Because then you never get to the great things God has in store for you.

The problem is us missing the point. Forgetting what the church is REALLY about, and substituting 'good' things for the only thing that really matters. It's treating the headache, fever and cough, but ignoring the virus causing those things. Worse yet, it's almost to the point where we think the problem IS the headache, fever and cough. We're completely unaware of the virus.

Perhaps I'm being a bit vague here...if so it's only slightly intentional. Let's look at a couple verses.

#### Matthew 26:36-40

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."

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16Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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."

Here we have the Great commandment and the Great Commission. These two things, more than anything else, summarize the mission, objective and focus of Christianity. Unfortunately the church by and large has forgotten, neglected and ignored them to one degree or another.

Take, for example, our most recent ‘big threat’ to Christianity. *The DaVinci Code*. If you’re anything like me, you’re a bit tired of hearing about it. It seems everywhere we go, somebody is writing a book about it, making a movie about it singing its praise or cursing it as heretical and the vilest thing to come along since Jury Duty. Amongst the Christian community, a veritable crusade has been launched to fight it.

Another area like this is the whole evolution/creation/Intelligent design debate. The amount of political debate, voting, sermons, and conferences held on this subject alone is mind boggling. If you know me at all you know I was embroiled in this debate for some time, and it still interests me.

But what interests me more is how these two topics—amongst a myriad of others—generate such passionate rebuttals, incite near rabid fanaticism and make Christians go almost completely insane with anger.

While the words of our Lord himself hardly inspire a yawn.

See, when I say missing the point I’m talking about how we as a church—both here on 11<sup>th</sup> street and worldwide—have become so consumed with small issues that many of us don’t even realize why we are concerned about those issues!

Some of us could quote what Pat Robertson has to say about abortion, some of us know James Dobson’s stance on the death penalty and could recall what subject their latest TV or radio shows covered, yet we haven’t read our Bibles in a personal devotional times for weeks.

I’m sure Mr. Robertson, Mr. Dobson and Mr. whoever have interesting and valid viewpoints on many things, but I am not a Robertsonian or a Dobsonite.

I am a Christian. My Lord is Jesus Christ the living God and if I don’t know what HE says about something, I shouldn’t care what ANYONE else thinks until I’ve found out.

And He says love the Lord with all of your heart, love your neighbor, and go into the world telling them about the incredible news of Jesus’ salvation! When was the last

time we held a conference on that? When was the last time the church rose up as a whole in righteous anger and wrote books, did Bible studies on the church's lack of commitment there? While we sit and fight the tiny—and marginally important—battles, we are failing to reach the world. We've become distracted by the good.

This manifests itself in many ways, but here in our church currently I can think of one way that it's become very prevalent of late...the Legacy Project.

Now I can respect both sides of this issue. And every person is entitled to their own opinion. But I think it's time we all took an honest look at our motivations for what we think is the right choice to make.

You may think we should stay, you may think we should leave, but if your basing that opinion on anything besides what will best equip us to achieve the mission of the church—reaching the lost—than your basis needs to be reconsidered.

Perhaps you think we should stay because you love this building, or because you don't think we can afford it. Those are the wrong reasons!

Perhaps you think we should go because you want a newer modern building, or you don't want to see us let the land purchase go to waste or you just want to park within the confines of a church parking lot for once. Those are all the wrong reasons.

The only reason that matters is doing what is needed to help this church fulfill its mission and vision better.

Now, I won't dwell on this long because it's only one indication of the larger problem—that we're missing the point. But when I see people who get passionate and excited about nothing; not Bolivia; not a children's fair; nothing. And I see those same people rise up in arms and debate and argue over a building project...I have to stop and wonder what's wrong.

Where is that excitement when we talked about going to Bolivia...or down the street to Open Door? Where's that anger when we aren't growing and reaching people? What's wrong with our attitude as a church when the things we're most excited about

are a lively building debate, and celebrating what we've done in the last 50 years? I love parties... I'll whip up some hot wings for nothing more than a game of football in the front yard. But what's wrong with our commitment to the mission of Jesus when the committee to plan our celebration is larger than the missions committee?

-----show cartoon-----

This little cartoon here illustrates what I mean. We're asleep at the wheel, or shooting into nowhere, or shooting each other, or attacking symptoms. All the while, our mission and purpose is being attacked. Is it any wonder that this next generation of young people will only be 4% Christians?

So what do we do? How do we fix this? It's surprisingly simple.

1. Remember how we got here.

I don't want you to think that I was criticizing the 50 year celebration. I think it's a great idea, and a terrific event. Because it reminds us how we got where we are now. And that has nothing to do with worship styles or teaching practicums or any of a million things. It has to do with our focus on the goal. One of the things that made me want to interview here despite the fact that I wasn't a Methodist at any point in my life was this church's commitment to reaching out.

And look around you at the faces that weren't here 2, 5 or 7 years ago. Our focus has been to reach the lost and we can't let it falter now. We're sending our 4<sup>th</sup> team to Bolivia in what, 8 years? That's amazing!

So as we celebrate 50 years here at this site, let's not forget that the reason we lasted 50 years was because we reach out to the lost. And let's not forget that we have existed as a church for more than 50 years. We've only been at this building in that time but we did this before this building...let's continue doing it long after this building—whenever that day comes.

## 2. Remember why we do what we do

This isn't a call today to turn everything in this church inside out and scrap everything we're doing for something new. It's a call to remember why we do what we do.

Why do we have 3 services? To grow!

Why does Children's Ministry slave over VBS? To reach unchurched kids!

Why do we give...our money, our time, our prayers, our dedication? To fulfill the mission our Lord gave us 2,000 years ago.

"Go...tell people they don't have to be alone. They don't have to suffer. They don't have to pay for their mistakes in life. Tell them that their creator loves them more than anything and wants to know them again."

That's why we do what we do.

It's not time to change what we do...it's time to remember why.

## 3. Refocus on the vision and the future.

You know what I find amazing about our church as it stands right now? We're not there. We haven't accomplished our goal. This church will never be 'done.' Because living things never are done. Living things always change, always shift, always grow....because once they stop, they die.

We're missing people. Our entire family is not here. There's still some out there in the world who don't know they're part of us yet. How are we going to let them know?

There are people who haven't been born yet who belong to our family. How will we ensure that our children and grandchildren will be here, ready and excited to tell them?

What are we supposed to look like and how will we get there?

It's time to refocus and remember that yesterday's future is here. The day we longed for in years past has arrived, are we going to keep staring at that day or begin looking forward to another future?

Do I have any idea what that looks like? Not really. I have an inkling of what it means though, and I know exactly how to get there. Want to know how?

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And I'll leave you with that, because when it comes to the mission, direction and purpose of our church I can't hope to do better than those words.

Close.