

...on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. – Matthew

16:18 (NIV)

Christ has built His church, but are we the spiritual leaders, modeling the church after our builder?

There are 2 prevalent types of churches in our world, the attractional and the effective church.

These two models have one and the same Lord, but they differ greatly in how they minister that one same Lord within their community.

The attractional model

The attractional model of Church was very successful in the 1950's and focused on several ideas to "attract" people into the church building.

"If you build it, they will come."

The famous line from the Kevin Costner film, *"Field of Dreams"* is a great description of the 1950's attractional mindset. In this case "IT" is a church building, and "THEY" is a congregation. Key to a 1950's model was a church building. Many important life milestones in the 1950's were centered around a church building – Birth, Acceptance of faith, Wedding, and Funeral. Most of our community connections were experienced through simply stepping inside the Church sanctuary. (Church Growth Then and Now)

The attractional model believes that a church building would attract the community to their fold. People were expected to go to Church somewhere, and the better the building the more likely they would attend. Churches of this mindset are among the most elaborate in any city. They feature stained glass, large edifices, crosses upon towering steeples, church bells, and marquee with Christian puns. Most Church pictures from this era feature the congregation standing on the steps leading up to the church building. While there is nothing wrong with being proud of your

church building, perhaps it is not what Christ meant when he said, “upon this rock I will build my Church.” (Matthew 16:18)

Brand Loyalty

Brand Loyalty is a component of the attractional mindset. Just like there are families that that boast they only vote Democrat or Republican, drink Coke or Pepsi, or drive Ford or Chevy, there are Christians who only attend Southern Baptist, United Methodist, Presbyterian Church U.S.A., Disciples of Christ, or Assembly of God.

The denominational branding of the attractional model presents an “us vs them” mindset, but it can lead to growth if enough people “like us” move to your town. During this time an important marketing expense was to list your Church in the “Yellow Pages” phone book under the name of your denomination. An attractional church is depending on “Life-Long Lutherans;” those who belong to the brand always belonging to the brand.

Brand loyalty was an important reason to attend a particular Church. To this day there are some who place more importance on the name upon the Church sign, than how that Church is living out the Truth of Christ in the community. While there are some Churches like this, the number is decreasing. (Church Growth Then & Now)

Church Growth – Baby Boom

Church growth for an attractional church in the 1950s was the birth of babies. It was the norm for people to spend their whole life in a church and duplicate themselves through procreation, rather than sharing the gospel and making disciples.

This growth strategy worked during the baby boom following World War 2, however it is more difficult today with a decreased birth rate and a growing average age of membership being 60 years old. (Church Growth Now & Then)

Time marches on and brings change to the culture, but have attractional churches adjusted to grow in a changing culture? While the attractional Church model was the staple 70 years ago, most churches have changed very little from this paradigm frozen in time. This model of a bygone era is no longer growing churches today, yet many are still following its precepts until the day they close the door for the final time.

The Effective Church Model

The Effective Church model is more like the one found in the New Testament. Instead of expecting people to come to us, we send the Church out to meet them. “Fewer people are attending worship today than ever before in the history of Western civilization, and when they do attend, they are mostly clueless about what it means to be a Christian. Although Gallup still reports about 79% of the US population consider themselves “Christian,” these same polls also report that only 30 percent of the US population attend church regularly.” (Effective Staffing p20)

Effective Churches have rejected the notion of “if we build it, they will come.” “The measurement of effectiveness shifts from “how many in worship?” to “How much difference is the church making in its efforts to transform the city?”” (Effective Staffing p20) Effective Churches are excited about transformation. “Every effective church has four core processes that fuel its passion for transformation: (1) bring people to Christ and into the kingdom, (2) retain them, (3) disciple them, and (4) send them back into society.” (Effective Staffing p29)

The focus is outward where the field is white and ready for harvest (John 4:35), instead of an inward focus of keeping members pleased with programs. An effective Church strives “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until 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.” (Ephesians 4:12-13 NIV)

This represents more than a slight difference between attractional and effective models, but a complete shift in mission and vision. An effective church is focused on the great co-mission that Christ gave His Church, (Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:16, Luke 24:46, John 20:21, Acts 1:8) and envisions the equipping of every member in the accomplishment of the mission.

Staffing an effective church

In times past, ministers, priests, and pastors did all the ministry and there was a clear line of delineation between the ministry and the laity. “In the effective church staff members function more as scouts and coaches than as doers of ministry.” (Effective staffing p21) Instead of the staff doing the work of ministry, they are equipping the saints for the work of ministry. The leadership’s job is not to do, but to lead, and provide a “culture where people naturally connect with the unchurched.” (Effective Staffing p21)

Keystone of Staffing

Effective Staffing for Vital Churches offers 4 keystones for staffing: (p27-28)

1. Every staff member equips and sends out people. Ministry happens “in the world.”
2. Create a culture of transformation, producing disciples and leaders.
3. Scouts and coaches – always on the lookout for future leaders and coaching current leaders.
4. Generates personal and numerical congregational growth.

Embody the Mission/Vision

The pastor, the staff, and every leader must embody the mission and vision. The mission/vision statements are not the latest attractional tactic, but they are meant to direct all the saints towards their own personal ministry and mission field. The staff must actively pursue the mission by living it out daily. The greatest example of our mission should not be the mission/vision page on our website, but our great example should be the lives of our staff.

If the mission of Jesus is fulfilling and rewarding, it should be seen in the staff. If serving others truly draws us nearer to the heart of God, it should be seen in the staff. If working within the Church of Jesus is worth the time, it should be seen first in the face of the staff.

Change

Something must change. The statistics on church decline bear this out. The mass exodus of our young people, reveal this. The lack of denominational “brand loyalty,” the birth rate downturn, and the shuttering of church doors scream this truth. But what exactly do we change?

The attractional design always asks what they can change to provide a thing that will grow the church, and it usually comes up with strange and goofy ideas. Example: “Choir robes! New choir robes would sure grow our traditional worship service.” As Rick Warren says in his book “The Purpose Driven Church, “The wrong question: what will make our church grow? The right question: what is keeping our church from growing?” (Purpose Driven p16)

At the heart of the attractional and effective fight is the forgotten truth that all living things grow. There is no need to make something that is living, grow. Warren reminds us that “the church is a living organism... a body, not a business, an organism, not an organization... if a church is not growing, it is dying.” (Purpose Driven p16) Christ has built His Church to be alive and growing.

An effective church seeks to remove hinderances and restrictions so that natural, normal, growth can occur. Whatever is not accomplishing the Christ given mission is wasted time, energy, and money. It is the Pastor and Church staff’s job to discover these hinderances and remove them quickly.

Change opportunities within a worship service.

Music Style – Are your music styles reflective of the culture or are they considered in opposition to the cultural norms? Are your song choices perhaps a hinderance to your growth?

Relevant sermons – Are your messages expressing realized value to your listeners? Are you

giving them a clear call to action?

Confusing language – Are you welcoming first time guests in the “narthex” with language that confuses them and makes them feel like an outsider?

The truth is that both attractional and effective churches can make these changes. The key difference is why they make the changes. Attractional churches will make these changes so that people will keep coming. Effective churches will make these changes so that they can retain people long enough to disciple them, see them transformed, and include them in the mission.

How to make change: Leadership

The ability required to change the direction of people and organizations is leadership. John Maxwell defines leadership as influence. “The true measure of leadership is influence nothing more, nothing less.” (21 Irrefutable laws)

For every church desiring to implement changes that facilitate growth in size and health, leadership is a requirement. Being called the leader is not all that is required in leadership. The leader must gain “buy in” beyond their position; what Maxwell calls the 5 levels of leadership: Position, Permission, Production, People Development, and Pinnacle. (5 Levels of Leadership)

The leadership must define a compelling vision, cast the vision, implement the vision, and live the vision.

Is your Vision worth fighting for?

Often there will be roadblocks to change, and mostly these roadblocks are people (or cats) with their own “pet mice” agendas. This fight for control of an organization does not simply go away because someone has the name tag – leader. A leader must learn to influence people towards the mission and vision. (Herd Cats Big Mouse)

A leader must have a “big mouse” to herd cats and often form alliances towards the goal. A leader must have a “God sized vision” that gains the attention, hearts, and minds of those they

are leading. A leader must spend time with God and be near His heart to come up with such a vision. Then upon receiving it, the leader must cast that vision in such a way that people would not be satisfied with anything less. When people gather around a single God sized vision, it is a great victory for a leader, yet it is only the beginning of the work.

In the case of a Church that wants to be an effective model, it will require a leader who is of high capacity, teachable, and able to coach and lead other leaders. Much like we are disciples who replicate ourselves into other disciples, it is our job as leaders to replicate ourselves into other leaders. It will require SMART goals – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time bound.

Conclusion

“The key issue for churches in the twenty-first century will be church health, not church growth.” (Purpose Driven p17)

The Church of Jesus Christ is not just another organization in a cluttered landscape of non-profits and programs. The Church of Jesus Christ was built upon the rock by Jesus Himself and is His body in the world. Our Jesus is alive, and His church must also be vibrant and fervent.

As leaders within His Church, we must take upon ourselves the responsibility of His mission to reach the world, His vision to equip the entire body, and embody this calling within our daily life.

Works Cited

Easum, Bill, and Bill Tenny-Brittian. *Effective Staffing for Vital Churches: The Essential Guide to Finding and Keeping the Right People*. Baker Books, 2012.

Tenny-Brittian, Bill. Video: *Church Growth Then and Now*

Tenny-Brittian, Bill. *If You've Got to Herd Cats, You'll Need a Big Mouse: A Congregational Guide to a Compelling Vision*. 21st Century Strategies, 2019.

Maxwell, John C. *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You*. HarperCollins Leadership, 2022.

Maxwell, John C. *The 5 Levels of Leadership: Proven Steps to Maximise Your Potential*. 2013.

Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission*. 1995.