

## A BIBLICALLY FUNCTIONING CHURCH Removing Obstacles to Attain Our Goal

*(Available on CD)*

What should be our goal in life and in our church? In the words of Jesus it should be to “love the Lord our God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” But, how do we attain our goal to experience the Almighty at a deeper level and faithfully serve him? The answer is we must intentionally remove all obstacles in our way!

This message is about removing the obstacles that hinder us from accomplishing our goal to experience God at a deeper level and to serve him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

*Biblical Teaching Made Relevant in Today's World  
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Thus far, in our series on what constitutes a biblically functioning church, we have covered: the purpose of the church; what the Bible teaches about biblically qualified Elders and Deacons overseeing and leading the local church; the importance of all the spiritual gifts being used in the church; the power of the church being the Holy Spirit; the necessity for a church to design new wineskins to effectively give the gospel wine to the next generation and finally, the importance of a healthy church being generous in using all of its resources to reach the spiritually lost for Jesus Christ.

The book *Natural Church Development* by Christian Schwarz, has had a positive impact on a number of our church leaders and myself. The research contained in this book comes from surveying more than 1000 churches in 32 countries on six continents.

The four points that come from Schwarz's research deals with: the eight essential church growth characteristics, the importance of timing, the removing of obstacles and the need for flexible organizational structures.

### I. Natural Church Development

#### A. Key church-growth characteristics include:

1. Empowering leadership
2. Gift-oriented ministry
3. Passionate spirituality
4. Functional structures
5. Inspiring worship services
6. Holistic small groups
7. Need-oriented evangelism
8. Loving relationships

The interesting thing for a church, and particularly its leadership, to remember is no one single characteristic leads to growth. It is the interaction of all eight key areas of ministry. A church wanting to grow must not overlook any one of these characteristics and must be structured in a way to maintain oversight of all these ministries. It depends on the interaction of these key characteristics and making changes as needed.

B. Church growth like everything else in life is all about timing. In a church, it is not a matter of doing more or working harder, it is in actuality about doing less, doing it better and doing it at the right time.

A church's limited resources should cause it to concentrate on only doing a number of things well, not doing everything at a minimal level. Timing means certain ministries in a church might need to be dropped, if for example God doesn't provide the gifted people to run a particular program. For example, when some say, "Oh no, we can't drop VBS!" or "We can't consolidate Sunday school classes." That is incorrect thinking. It doesn't help a church grow but actually does the reverse.

C. In his book, *Natural Church Development*, Christian Schwarz writes, "We should not attempt to 'manufacture' church growth, but rather to release the biotic [natural] potential which God has put into every church. It is our task to minimize the obstacles to growth both inside and outside the church. Since we have very little control over outside factors, we should concentrate on the removal of obstacles to church growth and multiplication within churches. Then church growth can happen 'all by itself.' God will do what he promised to do. He will grant growth." (1 Corinthians 3:6)

I believe it is our task "to minimize the obstacles to growth" inside our church. What are the obstacles? Anything preventing the attainment of our ultimate goal to love and serve Jesus with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

D. If the previous steps are taken, then we must create a new church structure that will adequately house the Gospel for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. That is exactly what Jesus meant in the parable of wineskins.

## II. Our Ultimate Goal

Numbers should never become the motivation for what we do. Our ultimate goal should always be to "love the Lord our God with all your

heart and with all your soul and with all your mind", and to "Love your neighbor as yourself", as Jesus said. (Matthew 22:37-38)

But, what will continually motivate you and me to love the Lord with our whole being and demonstrate it to our neighbors? It should be our desire and discipline to go deeper in our faith and trust and love for the One who shed his blood to be the sacrifice for our sins.

The Bible tells us whom our LORD will esteem for keeping him in first place in our life. Isaiah 66:2b says, "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my Word."

What does it mean to be humble and contrite? To be "humble" is to acknowledge our spiritual condition as Jesus said in Matthew 5:3. To be "contrite" is to be broken before the LORD.

Almighty God sets a high value on a follower of Jesus who continually acknowledges his spiritual condition and need for the Holy Spirit's empowerment! Isaiah 66:2-3 summarizes his message to God's people by contrasting two ways of living: that of humble people showing reverence for God's Word and living like people who choose their own way.

But, if we, as a church, are not careful, we can tend to focus on the fruit of church growth and fail to remember the root that produces that fruit. Namely, an ever-growing, daily, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, without which our church will not become healthier even if the parking lot is full.

## SUMMARY AND APPLICATION FOR OUR LIVES

We can apply well-tested church growth principles (and we should); we can restructure our church (and we should); but without humble and contrite hearts desiring to experience God at an ever-increasing level, we will not see renewal. Therefore, let us call on the Lord in full aware-ness of our condition before him. In fear and awe, let us obey his Word literally and completely, knowing he promises to esteem us highly and bless us.

Amen