

Introduction

Many moons ago, while I was plowing through my doctoral studies on Missional Leadership, I was blessed to visit some of the most amazing and transformational churches in North America. Some were macro, medium, and micro while others were renewals, reboots, and relaunches. Far more important to me than getting a degree was to discover the “secret sauce” that enabled the churches to successfully do the biblical mission of making disciples. Although they were different in composite and context, size and scope, they shared some very important distinctives. So, for the next few weeks, we will look at the dynamics, characteristics, and behaviors that made them such amazing churches.

Church-a-file

Before we do however, I want to take a flash survey and then make a confession. The survey: by show of hands who wants to belong to an amazing church? Who wants to belong to a semi-amazing church? Who wants to belong to a thoroughly un-amazing church?

Now for the confession. For those who know me well it will hardly come as a surprise that I am a self-avowed, loud and proud, church-a-file. I love the church of Jesus Christ. I love that it is the 2nd greatest thing in heaven and the greatest thing on earth. I love that it’s spiritual and physical, organic and organizational, redemptive and missional. I love that it’s Jesus’ Body, Bride, and Temple, his hands, feet, and heart! I love that it is blessed by the Father, saved by the Son, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. I love it because it has the most amazing Lord, most amazing Word, and most amazing mission. I love the church even with its warts, pimples, and flaws, and filled with reforming sinners and rookie saints. Yes, I love the church even after decades of pastoral ministry and more now than when I joined it over 50 years ago after giving my life to Christ. I also love this definition of the church:

Church is what you do. Church is who you are.
The church is the human outworking of the person of Jesus Christ.
Let’s be the Church.

A Prominent Church

One of the most amazing churches I got to study had a world-wide reputation for its innovation and influence. So, I was thrilled to sit down with its leadership to see what made it tick. What was most impressive to me, beyond its visionary leadership, massive numbers, and incredible culture, was its burning passion to reach folks far from God. This passion was palpable from the moment you set foot on the campus, journeyed through its acres of parking lot, and entered its 10,000-seat worship center. When interviewing its pastor about the “secret sauce” that created a 25,000-member congregation, he said, without batting an eyelash, “Luke 15.” I said, “Really?” And he nodded, “Really, Jesus’ parables in that chapter provide the jet fuel of all we do and say around here.”

Luke 15

Luke 15 is one of the most amazing chapters in the Bible because it reveals God’s heart for the lost. Jesus says to his followers:

Imagine you are a caring shepherd and you have lost one of your sheep. Imagine you are a woman living on a fixed income and you have just lost a silver coin, a 10th of your retirement. Imagine you are a loving father and your rebellious son has hastily moved out and you have no idea where he is or what he is going.

In these scenarios, God is represented as a distressed shepherd, desperate woman, and devastated father. He has lost something of unimaginable worth and that something is humanity here represented as the lost sheep, lost silver coin, and lost son. How does God feel about his losses? He is absolutely crushed. He created us to have a loving, dynamic, and interactive relationship with him and when we reject that relationship he is devastated. When John 3:16 tells us that “God so loved the world,” it means he loves the world totally, fully, and utterly. When 2 Peter 3:8 tells us that “God desires that none should perish” it means he doesn’t want anyone to live this life, or the one to come, without him.

Because God is all in in loving us, he, as the great theologian Karl Barth put it, “Takes the initiative.” As the distressed shepherd, God leaves the 99 sheep to go after the lost one. As the desperate woman, God frantically turns her house upside down to find the lost silver coin. As the devastated father, God goes out to the highways every day to find his lost son.

The Response of Joy

In Luke 15:7, 10, and 32 Jesus tells us what happens when God is successful in his attempts to find us:

7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent...10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents...32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.

Triple Joy

Notice the responses when the lost sheep, silver coin, and son are found: rejoicing in heaven, rejoicing in the presence of God and angels, celebration on earth. This triple joy occurs when: (1) Heaven erupts with joy when even one person repents. (2) The person who repents experiences the ultimate joy of knowing Jesus. (3) The church experiences an exuberant joy because God has used it in the greatest miracle of all—bringing lost people home to him. This explains why the most amazing church are also the happiest. They have gladly invested the bulk of their Time, Talent, and Treasure to live out the Great Commission and Jesus’ personal mission of “Seeking and saving the lost” (Luke 19:10). In turn, God has blessed them with an abundant harvest of souls.

Ill-Finding the Golden Knob **Church-In-The-Wildwood**

Not far from that “Luke 15” church stood a picturesque kind of Thomas Kincaid “Church-in-the-Wildwood” church with a tall steeple, gorgeous stained-glass windows, and a white picket fence. When I passed it earlier in the week it had two cars in its parking lot which presumably, belonged to the pastor and his secretary. When I passed it on Sunday morning, there were only a few more cars. When I arrived at the “Luke 15” church moments later it took 20 minutes to find an empty parking space!

The contrast was stark: one church was built on God's passion to reach the lost while the other was not. I can't say for certain, but it was probably one of the 91% of all America churches that didn't bring one new person to Christ that year. Can everyone say, "That's not amazing!"

Conclusion

If you are a Christ follower this morning you are here because God loves you and sent someone to find you, whether it was your parents, preacher, spouse, or friend. How many do you know it's up to the "found" to find the lost, i.e., found people find people? I am now making an executive decision and proclaiming that Bay Point is a Luke 15 Church!

When we did our flash survey earlier, most of you signified that you wanted to belong to an amazing church. Well, here's your chance. This week do two things:

- 1) Ask God to give you his heart for the lost. You can even use the famous prayer of Bob Pierce, founder of World Vision, "Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God." Nothing breaks God's heart more than people that are far from him.
- 2) Make it your personal mission to invite one person, preferably someone you know that is far from God to next week's worship service. To make this invitation easier use invitational tools such as social media, texting, invite cards, or even our website. Face-to-face is always the best but whatever works best for you, go for it!

Let's work hard and be amazing together!