

REPRODUCTION IS THE KEY

Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew 4:19)

Our Lord did not say for us to follow Him and He will educate us or teach us lots about the Bible. Those things certainly happened, but they are not the real test of Bible leadership and Bible ministry.

I have seen, in these three plus decades of pastoring, a movement of preachers who are more concerned about the Sunday morning attendance and offering than they are reproducing themselves.

I started our church by my wife's and my knocking on doors. Before our first service, I had a man going with me door to door. I had met him during the six weeks of door knocking and searching for prospects; I had found someone to train. Over these years, my goal has been to create an environment in which people were equipped for the work of the ministry, Ephesians 4.

We recently had a big day during which our people preached to over 8,000 people and saw over 1,700 trust Christ. (We do this every year or so by simply going into the community to take church and Thanksgiving groceries to the people who would not normally come to any church.) The preaching services are done almost entirely by my laymen. The vast majority of the soul winning is done by laymen. Our weekly bus routes are all run by laymen except for one route that is run by a female school teacher.

My young men are chomping at the bit to get to preach. I mean teens and young adult guys are excited and prepared to preach. Why is it some of the more well-known preachers in America have few, if any, young men wanting to preach? These larger but less productive churches are usually pastored by expository teachers who teach well, but reproduce little.

On 9/11, we had planned a couples retreat. We were in the mountains, everything prepared -- but our guest speaker could not make it due to the airline shutdown. On Thursday, I asked several of our laymen to do one session each on marriage or the family. They had less than 24 hours to prepare. It may have been the best couples retreat we ever had, and it did not cost me anything. We must create an environment in which our people learn to do the work of the ministry.

Someone asked me how a man could be so good at teaching the Bible yet have so few young men wanting to preach. The answer is not hard to comprehend: churches are seeking to reach the head more than the heart. They speak to educate, not to convict. While they are very attentive not to offend anyone, they are inattentive to holiness, standards, and separation from the world.

Bible preaching reproduces the leader. Bible-based ministries reproduce the leadership. Churches led by the Holy Spirit have young people, called by the Holy Spirit, who seek to serve the Lord. Do

not get caught up in the nice man in the pulpit or his amazing ability to open the Scriptures -- look at the fruit of his preaching. Just what is being reproduced?

Artificial flavors taste good, but can not reproduce themselves. A real peach will have a real seed, and that seed can grow more peaches. But those tasty peach rings can not grow a peach tree, no matter how sweet they are.

Let me show you the short version of the typical program of our churches today. We start going soul winning. We bring some people with us and teach them to win souls. As the church grows, we focus on keeping a crowd, and we change our music, soften our standards, bring in sound tracts and praise teams. Some or all of these things are going on while fewer and fewer members go soul winning. We do not want to pressure people. Soon just the staff go soul winning. Then there are only a few specialty staff members known as "great soul winners" going out. If you want someone to get saved, you send "ole' Bro. Soul winner," he just has a gift. No, he is just the only one who is still obedient.

We draw our crowd without the conviction of the Holy Spirit, but with a lot of comfort for the flesh. We fail to reproduce ourselves; but as long as the crowd is growing, it does not matter. Of course, there are people getting saved for a while -- our children, friends who come to visit, and those reached by good "ole' Bro. Soul winner." That is not the issue. The issue is this: we are not reproducing ourselves. We are not making fishers of men. We are cursing the next generation! Who will be the pastors? Who will be the missionaries? What is sad is how we draw young families to this warm and friendly church. They join our staff in sincerity, but the backslidden preacher ought to tell them, "Your children will have no desire to serve God, your boys will never have a desire to preach, and the divine potential of your children will never be achieved."

The reason we are not seeing changed and challenged lives is that we are not doing the work God's way. Even little country churches will have some young man surrender to preach now and then. As long as there is a preacher doing the work of God the way God directs, the Holy Spirit will change lives, and we will reproduce ourselves.

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Train your members to go out into the harvest field. I was led to Christ by a teenager who was trained to witness by a mechanic who attended a small country church. It is not the size of the church, but the perfecting of the saints to do the ministry that truly matters.

Ephesians 4:12 "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:"

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