

Five Core Balanced Purposes of Church

Acts 2:42-47; Mt 22:36 – 40; Mt 28:16 – 20

Over the last few months we have been looking at the purposes of the church. We have studied a variety of functions of the church, from a wide number of angles. Today we look at some standard roles. I hope on this Thanksgiving Day – we find ourselves thankful more than ever for church and this gift from God to us.

The Bible gives us a number of images or metaphors about the church. It's a body, a flock, vine branches, God's people, or sheep needing a shepherd, and so on. One of the most common descriptions of church, which offers us warm feelings is: **The family of God**. But this image comes with all kinds of side tracks, implications, messages and humor. For instance: The man who seldom finds himself in hot water is the one with a wife, several daughters and one bathroom.

And who can ever forget and be inspired by Winston Churchill's World War II immortal words: "We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills." It sounds exactly like a family vacation.

And a thought on the theme of marriage, that brings me great comfort, because I have done most of the dishes since I've been married. An exhaustive study shows that no woman has ever shot her husband while he was doing dishes.

But today let's look at five basic purposes we can be thankful for this church. These are based on the example of the early Church as found in Acts, chapter 2:42-47. We have read this scripture a few times over the last months. Here it is again.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (DISCIPLESHIP – Learning) and to the fellowship (FELLOWSHIP – Encourage, Family), to the breaking of bread and to prayer (WORSHIP – Exalting). Everyone was filled with awe. Many wonders and miraculous signs

were done by the apostles (MISSION – Outreach). All the believers were together and had everything in common. (Community) Selling their goods and possessions, they gave to anyone as they had need (MINISTRY - Service – Equip). Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God (WORSHIP - Fellowship) and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (MISSION - Evangelism – Witness – Outreach).

In 1995, Rick Warren, pastor of a church plant, Saddleback Church in California, published the book, **The Purpose Driven Church**. It became an instant best seller. The book was targeted to pastors and church leaders and advises them to base their ministry on God's purposes, not their own ideas of ministry. That's the reason for the title, "Purpose Driven". Warren suggests these five purposes are Fellowship, Discipleship, Mission, Worship and Ministry. In this book Warren provides a guide to how to do church. He finds these purposes from the Great Commandment (*Matt 22:36 – 40*) and the Great Commission (*Matthew 28:16 – 20*)

Jesus was asked: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these 2 commandments." That's the **Great Commandment**.

The **Great Commission** that Jesus instructed before he ascended to heaven is: "Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven & on earth has been given to me. Therefore go & make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey every thing I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

I remember when Warren's book came out in 1995, and its impact. Church leaders were looking for help to reinvigorate congregations. There was a lot of interest in church growth. So the book received lots of attention and many pastors begin to preach about these purposes with the idea of focusing on the basics. It brought fresh inspiration and spiritual life to many churches and individuals.

Since then many people have used Warren's ideas and also developed their own purposes in their own format. Like one pastor uses these points and language to describe the church.
The Church is a Flock led by Shepherds.
The Church is a Fellowship fused by Unity.
The Church is a Body
 organized by Spiritual Gifts.
The Church is the Bride of Christ
 bonded by Love.
The Church is a Family
 forged by Relationships.

Warren's book was a bestseller and continued to be popular for many years. The Purpose Driven Church has been translated into over 30 languages. It is listed in the 100 Christian Books That Changed the Century and has been given many awards. The book and its author has received numerous reviews in the mainstream press. It's been the subject of much support and criticism in Christian blogs and newsletters. And I think some people have simply been envious of Warren.

But many have run with his ideas as well as produced their own, off of his ideas. In a May 2005 survey of American pastors and ministers conducted by George Barna, it was voted as the second book most influential on their lives and ministries, behind **The Purpose Driven Life**, a subsequent book by Warren which sold over 1.5 million copies in 2018.

What is even more impressive is that Warren is not just a pastor and author. He is doing what he wrote. The teaching of The Purpose Driven Church was taken from Warren's experience in leading Saddleback Church from its founding

in 1980 to over 10,000 in worship attendance in its first 15 years, becoming one of the fastest growing churches in America during this time.

Other writers and church gurus were writing about the slow decline of the Western church, including in Europe. And there were lots of studies, and research, and many more since. Warren's book, was timely with ideas of going against the wider decline of Christianity in western culture. So it received a lot of attention. Many people took his points and expanded them into all kinds of directions.

But more than focusing on the basic purposes of the church, Warren writes that **every church is driven by something**. These include, events, tradition, finances, personalities, programs, seekers and even buildings can each be the controlling force in a church. For example, I consulted with a congregation that allowed a pre-school to functionally control how, when and where the church could use the building for church events. Even worse, the preschool was staffed by non church teachers so there was no pipeline from the pre-school into belief and church membership. This is an example of a church losing its focus. It was offering a valuable community service but not outreach.

Rick Warren believes that in order for a church to be **healthy** it must build around the five New Testament purposes given to the church by Jesus. All it's decision making supports these purposes. Warren emphasizes, "The issue is church health, not church growth! If a church is healthy, generally growth will occur. Every church needs to balance the 5 biblical purposes.

Warren proposes that church leaders intentionally ask themselves,

"What is our purpose?"

"Why do we do what we do?"

"What should we be doing?"

and "How will we do that?"

In the Purpose Driven book, Warren provides a guide to answer these questions on how to do church. He further suggests that following the

principles he outlines in the book will enable a church to grow. The author emphasizes an intentional people-building process. He says, "If you will concentrate on building people, God will build the church."

And we realize that in some places some congregations can have all the right strategies and tactics for church growth, and even be healthy emotionally, spiritually, & relationally, but they don't grow in numbers. So we have to keep analyzing what's going on, but not despair. The church is God's – not ours. The Holy Spirit blows where, when & how it wills. The church is a gift from our Creator to us. This is easier to say than to live with, but – this is part of our faith and being spiritually healthy.

Warren shares with us that a healthy church needs to balance the five purposes. Also, he describes five kinds of congregations that get off balance. You could name others.

The first one is the **The Soul Winning Church**. Although this is an important reason for the existence of a congregation, if it's only reaching out to the lost – the other purposes receive less focus. For example, it's great to bring in new members, but we cannot ignore discipleship – helping people learn and mature in faith. Key terms you're likely to hear most often in this church are witnessing, evangelism, salvation, decisions for Christ, visitation, altar calls, baptisms, and crusades.

Then there is the **Experiencing God Church**. If the focus of congregational life is on sensing the presence and power of God in worship, key words you will hear frequently are worship, praise, prayer, spiritual gifts, spirit power, music, revival, and speaking in tongues, to the neglect of other purposes. But that church lacks a balanced approach to church life. We can find both charismatic and non-charismatic varieties of this type of church. The worship focus tends to only be vertical – up to God.

It's important to point out the **Family Reunion Church**. This is a church that focuses primarily

on fellowship. Like with any unbalanced congregation – the interests and gifts of the pastor are important. But so is tradition, biases and habits. Key terms for this church are love, belonging, fellowship, relationships, potlucks, small groups, caring and fun. In the family reunion church, the gathering and horizontal focus is more important than any goals.

Most churches of this type have less than 200 members since that's about all one pastor can personally care for. The majority of churches fall into this category. A family reunion church may not get much done - but it is almost indestructible. It can survive poor preaching, limited finances, no growth, scandal, and even church splits. Relationships are the glue that keeps the faithful coming. It's a wonderful church culture, but resists the other purposes, even if the members say they want to grow.

Another unbalanced church is **the Classroom Church**. This church often is proud that their pastor's gift is teaching. This causes the pastor and the church members to emphasize preaching and teaching and de-emphasize the other purposes of the church. The church may even have "Bible" in its name. The pastor and teachers serve as expert instructors and you will see members take a lot of notes. Key words for the classroom church are Bible study, expository preaching, Greek and Hebrew, doctrine, knowledge, truth, and discipleship.

The last church we will look at that needs more balance is, the **Social Conscience Church**. This is the church that is out to change society. It is full of activists who are "doers of the Word." It comes in both a conservative and liberal version. The liberal version tends to focus on the injustice in our society. The conservative version tends to focus on the moral decline in our society. Both feel the church should be a major player in the political process. There is always some current crusade or cause that the church is involved in. The pastor sees her role as prophet and reformer. Important terms in this church are needs, serve, share, minister, take a stand, and do something.

Please understand and remember that these descriptions are very broad. Generalizations never tell the whole story, and are usually incomplete. Some churches are a blend of two or three of these categories. The point is that unless there is an intentional plan to balance all 5 purposes, with some of the others purposes we have been looking at, most churches will embrace one purpose to the neglect of others.

So to express our thankfulness to the Almighty for the church, we need to be aware of these five basic purposes, and try to balance them out over the years. And there are other purposes of the church that we also must not forget. So each congregation needs to intentionally set up a strategy and a structure to force themselves to give equal attention to each purpose in order to be a healthy purpose-driven church. N.T. Wright wrote: Christianity is a team sport. We are thankful for something good to do together for the glory of the world's Creator.

To summarize:

1. Churches grow warmer through fellowship.
2. Churches grow deeper through discipleship.
3. Churches grow stronger through worship.
4. Churches grow broader through ministry.
5. Churches grow larger through evangelism.

By focusing equally on all five of the New Testament purposes of the church, the church will develop the healthy balance that makes lasting spiritual and numerical growth possible.

Which of these congregations are we?

How would you rank these five purposes from our strongest to weakest?

And what other purposes would you list as part of our historical and present skills?

Furthermore, why are you thankful for the church and especially this church and others you have participated in in the past?

Here are seven reasons to help you make a list to be thankful for this church. How would you explain each of these 7 from Lance Wallace and what would you add?

1. Support during crisis
2. Harmony despite differences.
3. Acceptance and love for my children.
4. Opportunities to serve.
5. Opportunities to give
6. Focus on worship.
7. Meaningful relationships.

Wes MacAdams offers these reasons he is thankful for the church

1. The church taught me about Jesus.
2. The Holy Spirit ministers to me through the church.
3. The church gives me a place to be challenged.
4. Being a part of the church means being a part of God's people.

We have much to be thankful for this special day. In a few minutes in our prayer time, we will have a chance to share our thankfulness with each other and with our Savior.