

December 2012



# The American Church Magazine

The  
American  
Church...



...is about to  
transform!

[TheAmericanChurchMag.com](http://TheAmericanChurchMag.com)

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## Welcome to our first issue! As a reader, get involved!



Welcome to the very first issue of The American Church Magazine! I think we have a lot to offer in this first issue, and many of the articles in this first issue should spark some discussions! I encourage you to get involved in the discussion. Visit [www.theamericanchurchmag.com](http://www.theamericanchurchmag.com) and click on the link to “Go to our Community to read Current/Back Issues”. Of course, you are already reading the current issue if you are reading this editorial. And, since this is the first issue, there really aren’t any back issues to read yet. So, why click this link? Join our community (where we also host Christian Computing Magazine and Christian Video Magazine)!

When you join our Online Community, you will discover many specific communities. We have created a new community specifically for The American Church Magazine. Join it, and leave your comments and questions there. That is much better than just sending me an email (to the editor). If you agree or disagree with a comment or article in this first issue, we would love to hear from you, and encourage you to share it with all of our readers.

### Help Us Spread the Word

Could you do us a favor? If you like this first issue and you like the direction The American Church Magazine wants to take, could you let others know! Subscriptions are free! Post it on Facebook, or use your Twitter account and send out a tweet. We would really appreciate it if others knew and were able to sign up. You can tell them to go to [www.theamericanchurchmag.com](http://www.theamericanchurchmag.com) to sign up for free, or to follow the link to go to our community and read the first issue. Or, even better yet, feel free to forward this issue to a friend!

I am excited about where this publication is heading. We have even more new columns lined up for next month, including a review of Lifetree Café from Group Publishing! I hope you will let us know what you think, and I hope you will help us spread the word!

Together We Serve Him,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Hewitt'. The signature is stylized and somewhat abstract, with several overlapping strokes.

Steve Hewitt  
Publisher

## The American Church is About to Transform

By Steve Hewitt



**T**he title of this article assumes a lot, and yet can leave us with more questions than answers. The church in America is declining. There are plenty of books, websites with graphs, statistics, surveys and church leaders that are sounding this alarm. However, the big question is why? Why are we in decline and why is it important?

I decided to publish The American Church Magazine because I have become a passionate student of the church in America for the last decade. I have spent time studying the facts, visiting with churches across the nation, and visiting with denominational leaders as well as pastors. And, two years ago, I started a church with just a handful of people and have seen it grow and had the joy of seeing people come to Christ and be baptized. We have had good times, and we have had our problems. We are not a perfect church, but one of the results of my studies of the church in the last decade has brought me to the conclusion that there IS no perfect church, but we can still start new churches and accomplish much for the Kingdom!

We all know there is no such thing as a perfect church. But I have also drawn the conclusion that there is no right way to do church for everyone. There is no single fix, method, or program that is going to turn the decline of the American church around. But there is hope! It seems that God is calling many people to help our declining churches as well as start new churches across our land. They are doing it in different ways, with different plans, calls, and methods. I applaud them all.

I already published a couple of articles in Christian Computing Magazine (a magazine I have published for over 23 years). It was a rant, intended to raise eyebrows, and it allowed me to blow off some steam. My goal was to get people talking about the problem, and I sought reaction from

those that read the articles. I reached my goal.

However, I want to start The American Church Magazine off in the right direction. So, let's make it clear. The purpose of this magazine is "To Pro-

***The purpose of this magazine is "To Provide Information and Instruction to Renew Dying Churches and Encourage the Birth of New Multiplying Churches in America".***

vide Information and Instruction to Renew Dying Churches and Encourage the Birth of New Multiplying Churches in America". This magazine is not about my agenda, nor is it about promoting a specific solution to the decline of our churches. I believe every attempt, every effort, every plan and every endeavor to renew our stagnant and declining churches

should be trumpeted. And I believe every effort to start churches, all types of churches, is to be embraced. We need to start traditional churches, contemporary churches, churches with buildings, churches without buildings,

home churches, mega churches, churches that establish in apartment complexes, meet in schools and theaters, etc., etc. We need more mega churches, churches that meet on Sunday, and churches that meet on other days of the week. We need churches with traditional expository preaching and churches that facilitate open discussion during their morning message. We need more churches with pews, and more churches with people sitting in a circle or on couches. We need more churches, period.

#### **So, what is a church?**

It's simple. The word that most English Bible's translate as "church" is ekklesia and is best trans-

lated as "an assembly" or "called-out ones"... God's people. So when in Ephesians 1:22-23 it says that "Christ is head over all things to the church, which is his body", we are not saying he is head of the building, or the organization, board or staff that runs the business of the building, but rather he is head of us, the assembly of believers! When he refers in Galatians 1:1-2 "to the churches in Galatia" he was not referring to a bunch of buildings scattered across the land with steeples and bells in their towers, but instead he was referring to the different groups of believers across Galatia that were meeting to worship and discipleship.

The church is not a building. Yet, we all refer to our church "buildings"

like they are the actual church. It is difficult to refer to starting new churches without some thinking of purchasing a new building, even though we might be referring to starting a new faith community of believers that will always meet in a home or in a store front in a small mall.

Some believe that the emphasis on buildings,

***Some believe that the emphasis on buildings, mortgages and the paid staff to run them, are one of the very reasons we are in decline.***

mortgages and the paid staff to run them, are one of the very reasons we are in decline. Having buildings tends to shape our focus on getting people to come "in" to our church instead of us going out to minister to the community. Yet, many of our churches that are not in decline but are growing in numbers and ministry have buildings! A building can be an asset, or it can be a

liability, depending on what it is being used for. If it is a gathering place to launch ministry and mission out into the community, it is an asset. If it has become a retirement home for those that are simply self-centered and pampered, it can become a liability.

#### **I Have Hope!**

The facts are depressing. Half of all of our churches haven't seen a single addition to their membership as a result of a conversion experience in 1 or 2 years. I simply don't understand how this is possible. Yet, those that report on such statistics tell us that over half of our churches have nothing but elderly members, the youngest

being 65 years of age. Over half of our churches no longer have children. And, one report states that over half of our pastors would resign today and take ANY other job offered to them if they were to make the same pay as they are receiving now. IF these statistics are true, some predict that over half of all of our churches now open will be closed within the next five to eight years. While our decline is having a major impact on our nation in the areas of morals, education, national goals, economics, and personal religious freedoms, more importantly is our lack of resolve in taking the message of Christ's salvation to a nation that is turning away from the message of grace and mercy through Christ's redemptive work.

Yet, I have hope. I have hope when I hear of denominations making new commitments to starting churches and renewing dying churches. I have hope when I meet with church leaders who are helping churches to rediscover their mission. We need to learn from them. I have hope when I hear of ministries committed to starting new churches. And I have hope when I hear of

*If we are going to turn our decline around, we are going to have to embrace each other.*

churches giving birth to new churches within their own church, using their present buildings to start new churches with different worship styles. I have even heard of denominational churches helping to birth non-denominational churches.

I believe that the church is the bride of Christ, and he loves us enough to help us turn things around. I know churches are growing in Africa, Asia, China and Eastern Europe. But I don't believe He has given up on the church in America.

### **Our worse enemy?**

I know that in my study on why people have stopped attending church, (even those that claim Christ as Savior) one of the main reasons is due to the way we fight amongst ourselves. We have fought and divided into thousands of different denominations. We have fought over things

like spiritual gifts (we must make God weep at times) and we have fought over the best way to worship. Our worse enemy is us. While it seems most of us all agree on the primary beliefs as important (God, three-in-one, Jesus is his son, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, and died for our sins for those that confess and repent. We believe the Bible is god's inspired Word, that the Holy Spirit indwells and seals us, and we are called to be His disciples, etc.), it is what I call the non-essential beliefs that we have fought over and allowed to divide us. It is interesting to note that whenever anyone makes the national radar as one who is reaching people with the message of Christ, you will soon find a variety of websites that oppose their ministry... and these websites will not be from the un-churched, but from those that claim to be followers of Christ as well! While I am sure many are sincere in their attempt to educate others that their way is the only right way, the message that has gone out to our nation is that we don't love each other, but rather are envious and hateful toward one another!

If we are going to turn our decline around, we are going to have to embrace each other. We are going to have to agree that God does things in different ways with different people. We need to agree that one type of worship isn't the perfect way for everyone. We need to agree that all our ways are imperfect and that the one thing we should be known for is the LOVE we have for one another. Instead, in America, we have become known for being angry, hateful, judgmental, etc. Check out this video on Crosswalk, <http://www.crosswalk.com/video/unlike-christ-video.html> and you will see what Americans think about us as Christians.

### **I believe.**

I believe The American Church Magazine can be a source where a large variety of information can be openly shared. And, as publisher, I will seek to allow a large variety of ideas to be promoted. I want to hear of success stories where declining churches have reversed course. While I don't think there is one solution for all churches, I hope that some declining churches can benefit from the success of others and apply tools, methods, services and ministries that would apply to their own church. And, during

the last year, I have heard from several ministries that are making great strides in helping declining churches turn things around. Any and all will be invited to share in The American Church Magazine!

I believe The American Church Magazine can help spread the news on efforts to start new churches. Again, there is no one method that will work for everyone. I know there are churches with a basic worship service (30 minutes of sing-along music followed by 30 minutes of one person preaching) that are growing. I know some are reaching new people, even those that are younger in age. However, these are rare, and I am of the belief that the concept of church starting centered around purchasing a building and hiring a staff may be past for many. I think new ways of starting churches need to be explored, centered around the basic definition of a church being a faith community of Christians sharing primary beliefs and a burden to take the mission of Christ

out to their community. And I believe that many of these new churches/faith communities can spring forth from traditional churches that catch a vision for a new direction!

*The one thing we need is a real commitment to "Love Others" as we all head into the future for the church in America.*

### So, is the church about to transform?

The one thing we need is a real commitment to "Love Others" as we all head into the future for the church in America. We need to be open to what others are doing in starting churches, renewing churches, and in exploring new ways to "do" church (or to "be" his assembly of believers). We need to set aside our differences when it comes to non-essential beliefs and begin to communicate, pray and join forces in reaching more people with the message of Christ. Together we are up to the task of turning things around.

Together we can lock arms and hands and join in taking the message of love, redemption, grace and mercy back to our nation. As publisher, I promise to lay my own opinions aside and to be willing to listen and learn. As a reader, I hope you will do the same! If we can accomplish this major step toward unity within the churches of America, I think we will indeed see a dramatic transformation, and God is in the business of transformations!

As I worked on this first cover story for The American Church Magazine, one evening after writing, I took a break and went to one of my favorite Christian websites, WorshipHouseMedia.com. I was browsing through different videos and ran across this one, which I think is a great conclusion to this article, and a great beginning for The American Church Magazine. I hope you enjoy it!

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# It's OK to be Stuck, Just Don't Stay Stuck!

By Max Strother

**R**eally it is OK. I have been coaching pastors for almost 20 years. Pastors experience a lot of heat as leaders. They exemplify the old saying, “you can tell who the leader is...the leader is the one who has all the arrows in his/her back.” The result is, those of us in ministry often feel that we cannot admit we are stuck, or missing the mark, or not sure of what we should be doing.

I am excited about **The American Church Magazine**. I sense that it is going to be one of those “gritty” publications that are real. That’s me. I am real. I love pastors. I love Jesus’ church. I am sold out 100% to the great commission. And, I am real. I will use the words of this column to be helpful, remove discouragement, remove guilt, remove shame, provide hope, and.... to be real.

OK... now to a reality moment. If the church you serve has been plateau for more than 6 months, you are stuck. That’s just real. There is no shame in that. It does not matter if you are a church plant, a country church, or Bill Hybels at Willow Creek. You are stuck.

Now here is the interesting part: Everyone knows you are stuck. The people in the pews know the church is stuck. The board knows the church is stuck. Your district superintendent knows the church is stuck. Worst of all, the first time visitor intuitively picks up in just a few minutes the church is stuck. The question is, “Pastor, do you see that you are stuck?” Remember it is OK to be stuck, just don’t stay stuck.

So, how do you get unstuck? First of all, let’s talk about what is not helpful. Excuses are not helpful. You know the excuses we like to use such as “I have been so busy with hospital visitation or funerals,” “People are

just not as committed,” and “I am praying for revival.” The last one of those excuses is probably the best because we now blame God for our church being stuck. So, what is helpful? It’s simple, admit we are stuck, be willing to grow and change, and get some help. I help pastors get unstuck all the time. The key to helping pastors get unstuck is to work inside their gifts, abilities, and their church’s abilities. Sure, it would be true that if the church could have music as good as a mega church and preaching like T.D. Jakes, it would grow. But that is not helpful. Each church is unique and each pastor is unique. That has been a mantra here at Maximum Impact Churches. We do not believe in the one size fits all cookie cutter, church growth seminar, or get another notebook approaches. We believe in the MacGyver approach which is to look around and take inventory of the assets that are available; then, build a solution out of those assets.

The first step is simply to admit we are stuck and declare we are not going to stay stuck. With that mindset, we can change one or two things and begin to move forward again. Yep, that is what I said. Change one or two things. The key is picking the right things to change, and that is where you probably need some outside help. Here is the truth, “Your current systems are perfectly designed to produce your present results.” Something has to change, if you want your results to be different than they presently are! Are you ready for another reality statement? The easiest thing to change is YOU!

What would happen if the average church pastor changed his/her focus from the problems in the church to the opportunities of serving and reaching the community, or simply from problems to opportunities? What would

happen if we changed who we ate lunch with twice each week, and used those strategic lunches to network with new folks in the community? Would our messages be more effective to reaching visitors if we simply asked this question, “What is the Good News of this message to the un-churched person?” What would happen if we invested 2 hours each week into connecting with healthy vibrant leaders? What would happen if I stopped asking for discounts from all the local businesses and started giving them things instead? What would happen if I started each day by asking God to let me meet one un-churched person this day?

We have been working with a small church in a rural town of 1123 people that was tired of being stuck at 50 people on a Sunday morning. They have grown now to about 240 in attendance over the last three years. This church has decided they want to make a difference in their community. They have built the only public softball field in the town on their property on the very area

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they had planned for a new sanctuary. They give to their local businesses. They take lunch to their fire department. Last month, they hosted a Trunk-or-Treat event with free games, candy, and hot dogs. Over 1500 people showed up plus the 200 or so from the church. When we started working with this church, we asked them a simple question, "If the church closed tomorrow, would your community miss you?" The congregation has leaned into that question. They have asked Jesus how they can be Salt and Light. Best of all, they have truly become "Good News" to their community. Here's the interesting twist. This congregation is very conservative. They are a part of a denominational tribe in which jewelry is avoided and women often wear dresses and not slacks. The leadership team of this church was at the local McDonalds after the trunk-or-treat. Others from the community were at McDonalds too. The people of the town were saying things like, "that is what a church needs to be." For years, this congregation had been praying for God to

send a revival. With just a little change of heart, they now pray that God would use them to be the hands and feet of Jesus and the bearers of Good News. I think revival had been there all along, ever since Acts Chapter 2. The church has made the transformation to being a true asset to the community. More people were at the church for trunk-or-treat than the entire population of the town in which they are located. Yes, they would now be missed by their community, if they closed tomorrow.

So, are you stuck? Don't stay stuck! Shoot me an email, and we can set up a time to talk.

*Max Strother is the executive director of Maximum Impact Churches. He has been a turnaround pastor, denominational leader, trainer, and coach. Maximum Impact Churches works with churches from 50 to 9,000 in size. They can help your church, too.*



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# Seven Common Ministries Identified for Successful Outreach and Church Growth

By Mike Turner

**B**efore I reveal the seven common ministries we've identified in growing churches, let me explain what is needed to assure that a solid foundation exists for the seven ministries to succeed and produce positive church growth results.

Before I reveal the seven common ministries we've identified in growing churches, let me explain what is needed to assure that a solid foundation exists for the seven ministries to succeed and produce positive church growth results.

Have you ever heard anyone say, "I'm just burned out and tired of seeing no results?" Well, today these words seem to be way too common with those individuals involved in ministry and church work. Have you ever asked, "Why is it that only a handful of people in our church seem to be concerned and committed to fulfilling the Great Commission?" Church members may talk about the Great Commission and make themselves available to do other things within the church. However, they rarely ever get involved or regularly participate in organized prayer ministries, church

outreach efforts, personal evangelism and witnessing, or just simply invite a lost person to attend church.

Also there are churches that are growing in membership and attendance that should think about this statement passed along by Ed Stetzer with the Lifeway research team, "Focus on the WRONG numbers (growth instead of disciples) and your church can be in trouble and you're still at peace."

I have prayed and asked God to give me wisdom and guidance for dealing with my frustration related to the majority of today's churches. I see a lack of passion in so many churches for reaching their communities for Christ, touching the lives of the lost, and for growing God's Church and his kingdom. However, after I spent many months in

prayer and observing churches, the major problem existing in so many of our churches today became obvious to me.

The major problem is this: the majority of the people attending our churches just do not understand why the church exists and what their purpose is for uniting with a church. Also, they are not taught and do not see others within the church model what the Bible teaches as our responsibilities for living a Christian life. Simply stated, most church members have no idea or understanding of the basic fundamental responsibilities for living a Christian life, and they do not understand the Biblical purpose for establishing a church. I realized that most churches are doing very little to help people understand the true biblical purpose as to why the church exists. It became obvious to me that a large number of church members and people attending church today share a primary belief that the church is just the place where you go for Christian fellowship. A large number of those attending believe it is where you go if you need spiritual motivation and blessings. Some believe it's where you go if you desire to have a more stable and successful family life. Some even believe that just attending church assures you a more financially secure life while on earth.

You know, I finally realized that many attending our churches just do not see the blessings of God as the result of their faith and commitment in accepting Him as Lord, then serving and following Him in their

daily lives. They do not grasp the true meaning of accepting Jesus as a personal Lord and Savior. They are expecting gifts and blessings from God in return merely for attending church, even if for only an hour or two each week, or even less.

The most important thing in someone's life is to believe and understand who Jesus is, and then be willing to accept Him as the personal Lord and Savior over their life. Second, before uniting with the church and being baptized, they need to understand the Biblical reasons for why the church exists, and what God's commission is for living a Christian life. Understanding the importance of what it means to

be a disciple of Christ, and understanding the responsibilities of Christians united within the church to reach, teach, minister, and lead others to be disciples of Christ is God's plan and purpose for everyone.

Let me share with you how I reach these conclusions.

In mid-January of 2006, I asked to be relieved of my obligations of serving in my home church for one year. Then in February, my wife and I began



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traveling and visiting churches every week. We went as unannounced guests to research the different approaches and styles to greeting and welcoming, outreach and follow-up, etc. We identified commonalities in those churches that led to success in their outreach and church growth efforts.

I know there have been many great books and articles written by others that help churches and their leadership with outreach and church growth. Many of these books focus only on specific ministries and special areas of interest. They are written by very qualified and educated Pastors or Christian theological professors. However, I believe as a Christian layperson with many years of experience in church work and benefiting from the results of my research in visiting churches, talking with Pastors, and interviewing denominational leaders and directors of missions, I can provide a different perspective based on churches that are showing positive results in church growth.

What came to light, and I think the most interesting thing I discovered about having success in outreach and church growth, is that it requires seven key ministries to all be working efficiently at the same time. The proof is this: when we examined the churches that are growing and reaching their communities for Christ through new conversions and baptisms, we found seven common ministries in place and all seven

were very active. I challenge you to look at any church you know that is growing in new conversions and baptisms and you will come to the same conclusion.

Without churches and their leadership having the right foundational understanding as to why the church exists, and without the leadership being totally committed to fulfilling the Great Commission (found in Matthew 28: 18-20), successful outreach and church growth is impossible. The numbers in salvations and baptisms will be few and not pleasing to God.

The seven common ministries we identified within every church that we looked at ourselves or discuss with Denominational leaders and church leadership personnel, which were showing positive results in outreach and church growth, are:

1. Vision Ministry (Uniting with a Vision and Purpose)
2. Prayer Ministry
3. Greeting and Welcoming Ministry

4. Care Group Ministry
5. Outreach Ministry
6. Communications Ministry (Member and Guest Communications)
7. Worship Ministry (The Gospel of Christ preached, taught, and lived)

These are the seven key ministries needed within the Church that we have identified as the key links to successful outreach and church growth. Every growing church has them in common and actively engaged. A church may have more than seven ministries in its organizational structure, but without these seven key ministries in place and linked together it is almost impossible for a church to be a Great

Commission Church within its community. You may call a ministry we've identified by a different name, but when any one of these seven key ministry links becomes weak or broken it will be impossible for the leaders and members to pull in the same direction needed for successful church growth. No matter the strength of any one of the rest, one weak or missing link breaks the chain of events required for church growth.

This article is written with much love and compassion for our churches. My prayer is that this article and the others I will be writing will expand the vision and commitment of many church leaders and church members. I pray that churches will become more focused on why the church exists and the importance of being a Great Commission Church. The excitement of seeing positive results in outreach efforts and ministry growth, reaching your community for Christ, and seeing lost souls come to know Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior will diminish personal burnout and will rekindle interest in those who should be serving Christ within your church.

In the upcoming monthly issues of "The American Church Magazine" CAA Ministries will share further on how you can structure, organize, and reach the expectations you desire. We will offer more in-depth insight into each one of the seven key ministries we identified as needed for successful outreach and church growth. In the next issue, join us as we address the first key ministry strategy: the Vision Ministry.





# 5 Ways the Church Will Change

By Thom Schultz

Is the American church fading away? Will the losses in membership and attendance lead to a marginalized church presence such as that in present-day Europe? What will the American church look like in ten years?

Church leaders, denominational executives, and religion researchers gathered in Colorado recently to examine the church's health and prognosis. The Future of the Church Summit was sponsored by Group Publishing.

After evaluating current trends, Summit members predicted a number of likely scenarios for the American church in the next ten years:

1. **Emphasis on relationships.** Whereas the church and congregational worship today are largely spectator-oriented, the new coming trend will prioritize spiritual growth through personal relationships.
2. **Return to Jesus.** The current church is preoccupied with the "ABCs"—attendance, buildings and cash. A Summit pastor said, "We need to deal with the idols of the church." The coming church will highly focus its mission, goals, measurements and message on Jesus.
3. **Community focus.** The church of tomorrow will be much more engaged in addressing the needs in the community. The church will be known more for its members' relational acts of compassion outside of church walls, taking ministry out rather than waiting for outsiders to come in and sit.
4. **Conversationally oriented.** The current church relies primarily on one-way messaging—from the preacher/teacher at the microphone. The new church will rely more on person-to-person conversation, sharing messages of God's love with one another. Churches will begin to trade pews for conversation tables.
5. **Rise of the laity.** Shrinking resources will trigger fewer paid ministry positions—and more



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reliance on unpaid ministry work. The concept of “the priesthood of all believers” will re-emerge.

Scott Thumma from the Hartford Institute for Religion Research shared [data](#) showing waning church attendance, the aging of congregational membership and the exodus of young people. The churches that are bucking the downward trends tend to be either small (fewer than 200 members), or very large (more than 2,000 members).

Thumma also cited that congregations’ financial health has declined significantly over the past decade. In 2000 31 percent of congregations exhibited excellent financial health. By 2010 only 14 percent showed excellent financial health.

Congregations with high spiritual vitality dropped from about 43 percent in 2005 to 28 percent in 2010, according to Thumma.

To transition to the future, Thumma suggested congregations take a number of actions: create a listening team; get rid of the concept of church committees; learn how to be the church outside of Sunday morning.

[Neil Howe](#), author of “Millennials Rising” and “The Fourth Turning,” told Summit attendees that aging Boomers are shaping churches in a direction that young adults in the Millennial generation reject. He said Millennials are looking for environments that emphasize a sense of authentic community, variety of experiences, doing good deeds together, and student-centered learning (not teacher-focused).

Summit participants heard author [Reggie McNeal](#) predict that no one model of ministry will characterize the church of tomorrow. Rather, several different models will emerge to connect with the diverse American culture.

And British church leader and consultant [Mike Breen](#) doubted that the American church would go the way of Europe, where the church has withered. He indicated that America’s entrepreneurial spirit will provide the drive and the flexibility for the church to survive and thrive in the future.



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## The Foundation

By Tyler Rominger

**W**e are going to be exploring the biblical truths that are rooted in the book of Acts as it relates to ministerial foundations—and ultimately—growth. In this particular installment you'll begin to understand what a clear biblical path we've been given to follow as church leaders and pastors when planting a church, or taking over or redirecting one that is dying. In this article I will give you an overview of the building blocks found in Acts and in the coming months explain each of them in detail. My goal with these articles is to equip you as pastors and church leaders by giving you an understanding of these truths and also providing you with the confidence needed to communicate and implement them into your daily ministry.

Let's start by taking a look at the two main reasons for Luke's authorship of the book of Acts. The first reason is that he wants to give his readers an understanding of God's work through Jesus as a way of informing and influencing their beliefs while establishing the first church. The second reason is that he wants to inspire his readers with life-changing examples of God's work through ordinary people like you and me to influence their lifestyle in hopes that they would re-examine their priorities and ultimately encourage them to become a part of the Christian movement. Or, when broken down into a much simpler form, to give us direction and inspiration as we fulfill the great commission. It is our blueprint. We know this because of the extraordinary detail and

time taken to explain miracles and accounts of the first church.

I mean let's think about it. Throughout the first several chapters in the book of Acts we see all kinds of exciting things happening—from huge growth of believers to great fellowship and selflessness within their community. We see Peter and John being arrested, jailed and persecuted for healing a crippled man to being freed from jail by an angel and in the end being able to show they are on a divine mission. In these chapters we experience the first church in its infancy. To me it looks like every other church start up: one person or a group of people running around with a million too many things to do and not enough time in the day. Sound familiar? If you've ever been

a Pastor, I'm sure it does. My prayer as I write this series of articles is to help you as a leader of your church to identify and focus in on the following ten building blocks that will set your ministry up for success for years and years to come:

**Power of the Spirit:** I come out of the tradition that, more often than not, has a hard time recognizing or maybe communicating the Power of the Spirit. I respectfully disagree with the perspective that it should not be communicated, understood or utilized. I feel like the Spirit is an intricate and often overlooked or abused part of the trinity mostly because there are so many different perspectives. My aim when addressing this will not be to present a case for either side but to clearly communicate the impact the Spirit can have on your ministry just as it did in Acts.

**Communication:** Communication is the key in all forms and areas of ministry from preaching and sharing with your congregation, to sharing with your leadership teams (boards, staff: both internally and externally). If strategic communication is not a focus of your mission no one will ever understand why you exist, where you are going, and what they should expect. You must communicate in a way that is clearly understood.

**Time with God/Prayer:** As a ministry leader this is most certainly the most important point I am going to address. It is so easy for us to get caught up in our day-to-day responsibilities that we neglect this critical part of our ministry. If we are not spiritually fit as leaders we will not be able to produce a healthy ministry.

**Fellowship and Hospitality:** Fellowship is one of the main reasons for a church to exist. If you are not creating a hospitable environment for fellowship you are wasting your time. People are naturally uncomfortable in new places. No one likes walking into a crowd of people where they know no one. If your community is not instantly making that new person feel welcome, your church is on a one-way track to death.

**Joyful Selflessness:** Being a part of a small church or church start-up requires you to sacrifice a lot! Everyone knows that. But that's just the point—everyone already knows you are giving up a lot.

There is no need for people to hear about it over and over. If you are in church leadership, you have responded to a call. How are you representing that call?

**Obedience and Truth:** Understanding and navigating truth and obedience can sometimes be a difficult task. Recently I've heard "truth" explained as a relative term, something that fits into your own perspectives and life experiences. In fact there is a whole theological system and movement built around that way of thinking. Unfortunately, that is blatant disobedience. Truth comes from the scriptures, not from experience and individual perspectives.

**Organization:** Organization is the backbone to any successful ministry. If you're not organized you can't keep track of what's going on. If you cannot keep track of what's going on you will make people feel unimportant and devalued. Who wants to spend time with a pastor who makes them feel unimportant and devalued? Not me! Organization is critical to success!

**Leadership:** If organization is the backbone, then

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leadership is the neck. With a damaged neck you will be crippled. Without good leadership, your church will be crippled as well. Leadership can be an all-encompassing term but can also refer to very specific scenarios.

**Consistency:** When casting direction for people you have to repeat yourself a lot of different ways. Not because you're not saying it well, but because people learn and pick up on things differently. Whatever you're telling them has to be consistent with your actions over a long period of time. Remember, nothing speaks louder than your actions!

**Humility:** It's easy to be humble when you are a small church pastor or church planter. But when things start going well and taking off, please remember that humility is directly tied to your character. If you are going to boast make sure it's about the things God is doing and not what you are doing.

I would be close-minded to say that these ten things are the ONLY things you need to have in place to start building a healthy, well-functioning ministry. Churches and ministries are intricate organisms with a lot of working parts and a million different variables. One of the largest variables is us—a bunch of imperfect people with our own idiosyncrasies, strengths and weakness, agendas and passions and so on. There are also tons of different things that you can do to promote, advertise and bring attention to what you are doing, which in my opinion is very important as well. In fact, I believe promotion and awareness are so important that after my many years as a staff pastor, where I helped grow a larger church, I've taken what I learned about promotion and communication and have started a ministry called MinistryDesigns.org to help provide churches with tools they need to effectively communicate who they are. I would argue however, that

if you don't have these ten things firmly in place, first in your own life and second in your ministry, you will not have the health of a good foundation needed to support the growth that good advertising will bring to your ministry.

I hope that I've presented a clear case as to why these ten things are vital and that you will check back next month as we dive in headfirst and continue to share these truths. [MinistryDesigns.org](http://MinistryDesigns.org)



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## Creating Lessons for Multiage Classroom

By Merri Dennis

**C**reating lessons and teaching children in a multiage church classroom requires both structure and flexibility. You will have to sway like the bendable willow while still maintaining a sense of order. With the majority of churches in America averaging 200 or less attendees each week, many volunteers are teaching a handful of children each week ranging in age from 3 to 10. By developing a structured routine and being flexible as needed, you can communicate God's truth in an age-appropriate manner to each of the children God has entrusted to your care.

Whether you are starting with a complete curriculum package or just have an idea of the Bible lesson you would like to share, it will be necessary to adapt and tweak the material to fit the appropriate faith development levels of the children in your class. The insights shared by Karyn Henley in her book, *Child-Sensitive Teaching*, provide a useful guide to follow. Many curriculum publishers also offer teaching tips for each age level.

### Teach One Key Point

Often prepared curriculum or our own knowledge about a theme or story will cause us to share more information than can be absorbed in one sitting. We do not have to share every detail of the story to communicate the message. Our personal Bible knowledge has grown over time and we need

to allow our students that same opportunity.

As you are preparing yourself to teach the lesson, take time to pray and consider the one key point of truth God wants you to communicate. This truth might be different from the lesson aim outlined in the teacher's guide. Consider the lives and needs of the children in your class. What truth do they need to hear? What key point is God conveying to you through a fresh reading of the passage?

As you make notes in your lesson outline, highlight places and activities throughout the lesson where you can emphasize the key point. Consider which parts of the story to share. Find a game or activity that will help your students remember this main point. Include the phrase while the kids are enjoying the craft project.

## Effective Storytelling

Moving away from the table to another area of the room helps to highlight storytelling as a special time. Each story lends itself to a few ways of telling that will best help the listeners remember the details. Be sure to emphasize the source and truth of the story with an open Bible in your lap. Discuss the two main parts of the Bible and scripture reference for the story.

When telling the story, consider which of the following options will work best.

- Use a picture from your curriculum kit or a children's story Bible
- Create hand motions and sound effects to define the actions of the characters and events in the story
- Twist up some pipe cleaner people or pull out some wooden peg dolls to act out the story
- Tell the story from the perspective of one of the characters in the story
- Use other visual aids – rocks, water, toy bird, pictures of items mentioned in the story
- Tell the story with finger puppets
- Put creative props in a story bag to pull out at the appropriate time
- Use interactive words by having children respond in a specific way every time you say a word or phrase

## Familiar Songs and Songs to Familiar Tunes

Simple songs with story details and reminders of the lesson's central truth are a wonderful way to help children remember the characters from the Bible story, pinpoint the central truth, and share the message with their families. A quick online search will provide lyrics to children's Bible story songs. If a favorite song or hymn does not fit your story or lesson aim, consider creating your own lyrics to a familiar nursery rhyme tune. The song I created for a recent lesson about Joseph's time in prison was set to the tune of 'The Farmer in the Dell'.

We can trust in God.  
We can trust in God.  
Even when times are hard,  
We can trust in God.

Joseph trusted God.  
Joseph trusted God.  
Even when in prison,  
Joseph trusted God.

We sang it through a few times after I told the story and the girls in my class continued to sing it while we completed our craft. It was also included in the parent take-home card that makes it simple for a parent to share the song with their child.

## Active Learning

People remember significantly more of what they have learned by doing than of what they have learned by listening. Encouraging kids to participate in the storytelling process and singing a song about the story or lesson theme are just two of the ways to include active learning throughout the lesson. Some stories lend themselves to a short drama. Other stories provide opportunities for hand motions and sound effects.

Games and application activities that involve movement and vocal response will engage different types of learners. Look for non-competitive games that will allow each child to participate at their level of understanding. Toss a ball or a beanbag with each recipient naming something about the story, reciting the next word in a memory verse, or stating the central truth for the day. Teach with hands-on tools like puzzles, blocks, or play dough and focus on guided conversation with each student to discover their understanding of the lesson.

To help students learn from an activity, they need clear directions, all the necessary supplies, time to complete the activity, and opportunities for conversation about what they are learning. Instead of the multiple learning centers that are available for a large group of students, present learning activities one at a time around a table. Keep regularly used art supplies organized and easily accessible. When all the materials for each activity are prepared and ready to use, the teacher can focus on the individual needs of each student and direct the conversation around the table.

## Copywork

Copywork or handwriting practice is a concept borrowed from the world of homeschooling that provides several benefits in a church classroom. The student gains a sense of accomplishment by copying or tracing the letters of each word. When offered at the beginning of the class, copywork activities introduce students to the key words from the story and any new words or concepts from the lesson. A handheld dry erase board is great for this activity. For beginning writers, the teacher can

create dotted letters for the student to trace. Older students can copy the words or phrase printed for them. Easily create copywork pages on a computer to help a student learn a memory verse or the one central truth. You can download the free Print Clearly font here - <http://www.bvfonts.com/fonts/details.php?id=45>.

## Crafts

Bible story coloring pages and word puzzles abound in published curriculum and on the internet. Although these resources can be useful and enjoyed by some children, crafts that are interactive and involve more skills provide time for guided conversation and a greater sense of accomplishment. Most of the time the same craft will work for a wide age range of kids. Precut paper pieces or prepare a part of the project in advance for younger students. Allow older students to add additional details to their project and write the words to the memory verse and story title on their project. Encourage creativity.

When a child feels that the craft has been a fun and creative experience, the project becomes something valuable to take home and useful tool to retell the story to a family member. Visit one of these websites to find craft ideas for many stories and themes.

- <http://www.bibleclasscreations.blogspot.com/>
- <http://kidsbibledebjackson.blogspot.com/>
- <http://handsonbibleteacher.blogspot.com/>
- <http://www.biblestoryprintables.com/>
- <http://biblecraftsandactivities.com/>

## Parent Communication

Clearly communicate to parents the title of the Bible story, the scripture passage, the one central truth, and the memory verse or other scriptures that help communicate God's truth. This information can be a part of the craft or as a separate take-home card or page. If your cur-

riculum does not offer a take-home page or if the one provided does not fit the lesson aim, create your own. Include the items listed above. This is also a place to add a picture to color and additional handwriting practice. Visit my Bible Crafts site to download templates you can use.

These steps provide an example to follow in preparing a lesson to fit the needs of your particular group of children. With prayer and experience, you will develop a routine that fits you and your students. Being well prepared for a variety of ages allows you to adjust as needed when the children arrive for your class. Understanding the needs of the students God has brought into your life each week offers you the opportunity to communicate with love and grace.

Merri Dennis has been serving in preschool and children's ministry for 25 years. To find more ministry resources and Bible craft ideas, visit her blogs at [www.MerriDennis.com](http://www.MerriDennis.com) and [www.BibleCraftsandActivities.com](http://www.BibleCraftsandActivities.com).



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## Does Your Church Need Change or Transformation?

By Bud Brown

**J**udas Iscariot was a changed man. In response to Jesus, Judas changed direction. He followed a new Rabbi. He heard an unlearned Galilean carpenter teach with authority. He witnessed miraculous deeds. He followed the debates with Israel's scholars. Judas' way of living changed. New behaviors were adopted. His hope for Israel's kingdom found a focus.

The eleven, in contrast, were transformed. They heard the same words, responded to the same call, witnessed the same works and attended the same debates. They too learned new ways of following God and eagerly expected David's kingdom.

But there was more.

They were new, different. New life was in them. They saw themselves in new light and God's mission as a worldwide initiative. No longer would they approach God through the Law, from a distance; they would speak to Him directly. Now their access to the Holy One was unmediated. They were confident in his grace.

### **CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION**

Change is external. A church changes when it adopts new or modified behaviors, revises procedures and schedules or updates the program

calendar. Change is visible but the congregation's views, values and assumptions remain intact.

Transformation is internal. It happens when people learn to see themselves in a different light, when they revise their view of the church's place in God's mission to the world and when they live new values in daily life.

### **CHURCHES NEED TRANSFORMATION, NOT CHANGE**

Churches don't need to change to survive. They need to be transformed.

In periods of rapid, tectonic cultural shifts, change leaves a church's basic assumptions, values and behaviors - once shared by the local community and the larger culture - intact. Anchored to discarded assumptions, values and behaviors now irrelevant to its mission field, the church watches helplessly as the community slowly drifts away.

The pain suffered while making changes insures people will fight to preserve them.

Change, unaccompanied by transformation, cannot prevent a church's demise.

If we fail to mark the distinction between change and transformation we will leave our churches in jeopardy. They will end fighting rear-guard actions that will not affect the outcome of the culture wars now being fought on a thousand fronts.

## CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION ILLUSTRATED

Let me illustrate the distinction between change and transformation with two issues confronting our churches. One is now past and the other is with us still.

Consider first the "worship wars" of a few decades back.

In some churches the addition of worship and praise music was a simple change. Churches that prize variety, creativity and spontaneity included the new worship genre with little fanfare. All they had to do was make a few changes here and there. Many didn't add new musical forms, they switched to them entirely.

In other churches the addition of worship and praise music required a painful transformation. Churches that cherish tradition, liturgy and a comforting stability had to undergo transformation before embracing new forms of worship. They had to wrestle with significant questions. What is the relationship between worship and our view of God? Do we exalt God's immutable nature by maintaining our worship traditions? Or do we exemplify God's creative nature by engaging in effusive, spontaneous worship habits? And how do we distinguish between personal tastes or preferences and worship befitting a Holy God?

The worship wars illustrate the difference. Change leaves thoughts, beliefs, feelings and values untouched. Transformation is marked by a deep shift in assumptions, values, beliefs and behaviors.

A current issue that illuminates change versus transformation is the financial pressures many churches face due to our nation's economic woes.

Many churches changed their budgets by trimming staff, freezing discretionary spending and suspending expansion plans. Those were needed and appropriate changes.

Some churches responded by reconsidering

their mission, auditing iconic programs (eliminating those no longer productive) and consolidating around core activities that advanced a refreshed view of mission.

Churches in the first group changed their budgets to protect their well-being. The changes worked but fundamental views, values and behaviors remained unchanged. It was status quo albeit in lean times. Churches in the second group were transformed into something different than they had been before circumstances overtook them.

## THE CRUCIAL DIAGNOSTIC QUESTION

If you're a regular reader chances are that you're a pastor or leader of a church that has plateaued or is in decline. Perhaps you're wondering if the choices before you will result in change that will postpone the inevitable. Or are you considering a move that will fundamentally transform the congregation so that it stands poised to succeed in the years ahead?

As an intentional interim pastor I've discovered an important question that helps me measure the options before the church I'm serving at the time: "does the church leadership see this proposal as a glide path back to 'normal', or is it designed as a way forward, to a 'new normal'?"

This column is written to help pastors and leaders determine where to start. Let this publication, its writers and this column be your coach, mentor and trusted counselor. My prayer for you is Ecclesiastes 4:9-10:

"Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up."

There are people who want to help you. Start here.

*Bud Brown is president of the Transition Ministries Group. He brings almost 40 years of ministry experience - many as an intentional interim pastor - to the task of training, coaching and providing resources for those who serve troubled churches.*

*To learn more about rescuing troubled churches check his website at <http://www.transitionministriesgroup.com>.*