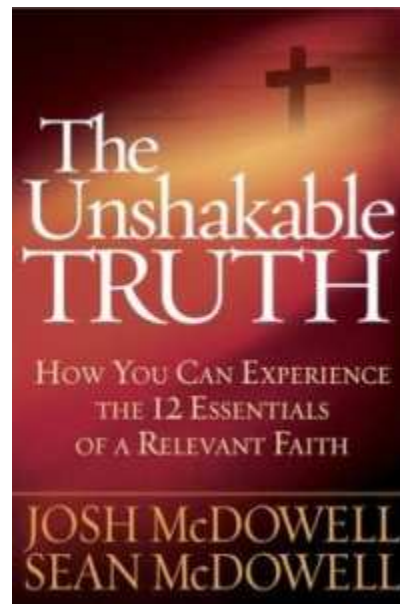


## Thoughts on Christianity and the Church

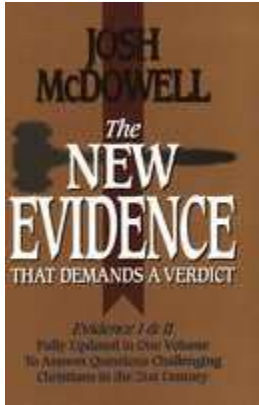
September 28 2010: Do-It-Yourself Apologetics Training

I got an ad/offer in the mail yesterday from Josh McDowell. He is flogging his new book, [The Unshakable Truth](#) [1], which looks pretty good. I might have to get it, to add to my collection of books by my heroes (Josh is one of them!). The ad says the book addresses twelve foundational truths:

- God Exists
- God's Word (presumably, reliability and authority)
- Original Sin
- God Became Human
- Atonement for Sin
- Justification Through Faith
- Living the Transformed Life (this might be particularly interesting; moving beyond theology and theory to practice)
- Jesus' Bodily Resurrection
- The Trinity
- God's Kingdom
- The Church (might be worth the price just to see what Josh has to say about this...)
- The Return of Christ



Now, this isn't really so unusual, coming from Josh. It's actually kind of refreshing; he's been on a project on evangelical books suitable for muslim seekers, so here he's returning to his apologetics roots.



I would hope this book would be a good follow-on to his seminal *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. But Josh advertising a book isn't so interesting as what he says in the letter:

"When frequently asking men and women what it means to have a Christian worldview, not once has someone given me an appropriate answer."

"This message is especially important for young people. Students and young adults are turning away from faith in record numbers. Much of this is happening because they don't understand the core truths of Christianity."

"Many Christians cannot give an answer for why they believe. They don't even understand the basics of the Christian faith."

Josh McDowell recognizes that there is a crisis of understanding, of living out a worldview, among western Christians, particularly young ones. And I got to thinking... I stumbled across *Evidence That Demands A Verdict* on my own. **The church didn't help me.** Josh is offering this new book on his own, through the Campus Crusade mailing list, directly to individual Christians and families, **not through the church.** Josh McDowell Ministries, and Campus Crusade for that matter, are para-church ministries that exist to do things that **the church isn't doing.** *Evidence That Demands A Verdict* helped me immeasurably. I hope this book does, too. I hope it helps more than all the Bible Study that our church-going families and young people are getting, which, *necessary though it is, isn't enough.*

So I'll help plug this book to other Christians, particularly young people that I know haven't been helped much by the institutional church.

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1. [www.josh.org/site/c.ddKDIMNtEqG/b.6098849/k.716E/Know\\_Why\\_You\\_Believe.htm](http://www.josh.org/site/c.ddKDIMNtEqG/b.6098849/k.716E/Know_Why_You_Believe.htm)

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## September 27 2010: Magic or Divine Sovereignty

Last Tuesday, we went to Dollar Night at one of the movie theatres to see [The Sorcerer's Apprentice](#) [1]. Of course, we saw the trailer at the previous week's movie trip and thought it was cool, and we all agree that Nicholas Cage is a pretty good actor, and it was a Disney movie, supposedly inspired by the "Sorcerer's Apprentice" segment of *Fantasia* (and sure enough, there was the scene where the apprentice animated a bunch of mops to clean up the room for him, they got out of control, and it took the master's intervention to avoid a disaster). It was pretty good, and remarkably free of gratuitous sex and language.



The premise is, the Arthurian conflict between Merlin and Morgan le Fey continues to this day, and Merlin's pupil Balthazar, having been charmed with non-aging, is seeking Merlin's heir, the "Prime Merlinian", who turns out to be the klutzy David Stutler, currently studying in New York City. Together they destroy Morgan le Fey who has survived all these centuries in a magical suspension and who plans to reanimate many evil magicians from all ages and conquer the world. The usual megalomaniac stuff.



The only thing that could be taken as "offensive" is the magic itself. In the context of the story, sorcerers are those (otherwise ordinary) people who are able to employ the (old, incorrect, but fictionally useful notion) 90 percent of their brains that most people never use. They can manipulate matter at the molecular level to achieve a variety of effects including

plasma bolts (per the above picture) and shields, go through mirrors to

a reverse dimension, levitate and move objects (including mops), and so forth. Most require the use of an amulet or ring or other object to focus the magical energy, but the "Prime Merlinian" will be the one who doesn't need to use his inherited Dragon Ring.

I haven't heard any evangelical reaction to *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* like all the fulminating and denunciation and boycotting of the *Harry Potter* franchise. Last year, we finally watched all the movies then available (the first installment of *Deathly Hallows* will be out this December) and found them quite good and utterly benign. Except for youthful lying and disobedience, all in the cause of saving the world. And the magic, of course. So for Christmas, we got the entire set of books as a gift for our children, and over the course of the last year, have read them aloud



together as a family project. The idea behind *Harry Potter* is that most people ("Muggles") are born without the innate capability of performing magic, but some are; the ability tends to be inherited in families, particularly old, inbred "Pure" families, and a magic wand is required for most magical activities.

In both cases, "magic" is a feature of the natural world, *not* an occult or demonic power (although the use of thaumaturgic circles and the like in *Sorcerer* come uncomfortably close), so the "church people" objection to magic as a public endorsement of the occult misses the mark. The genre of "exorcism" or even zombie or vampire films are much more explicitly occult than these "magic" movies are. In fact, the "magic" in the beloved Christian authors Tolkein and Lewis works are "natural" in much the same way as in *Sorcerer* and *Harry Potter* (although I'm sure there is some segment of the "church people" world that condemns *Lord of the Rings* and *Narnia* for the presence of "magic").

I suppose some could complain that the presentation of "magic" as something benign and fun could entice some, especially young people, into a pursuit of the real thing, like *Dungeons and Dragons* has been accused of. In some cases, like *D&D* and "The Force" in *Star Wars* (with some impressionable folk running around as present-day Jedi),

the point is deserved; however, I believe the problem is more one of some people having difficulty in distinguishing *fantasy* from *reality*.

I think, though, that the "church people" objection and rejection of "magic" works like *Sorcerer* and *Harry Potter* misses an opportunity to point out, to their own children and to unbelievers, a few Important Features incompatible with either an occult/demonic or a secular/atheist Worldview.

First, *there is good and evil*. Good isn't just a matter of preference - in both of these story settings, "Good" is fighting to preserve life and freedom, and "Evil" is fighting to obtain power and is more than willing to employ murder and cruelty. These are objective realities - and, true to literary patterns the world over, the heroes are "Good", and the villains are "Evil". And... **Good Triumphs**.

This is because *there is a Hand guiding events*. There is **DESTINY**.

In *Sorcerer*, the dying Merlin's prophecy of the "Prime Merlinian" is, like his remark that "we all serve someone", a suggestion of a guiding Power outside the realm of magic. It is no accident that the "Prime Merlinian" turns out to be a physics student who builds Tesla coils (yay!) and uses them to good effect. It is also no accident that he runs into his old childhood girlfriend in the right context for her to be instrumental in (a) removing the Dragon Ring from him, and (b) assisting in the overthrow of Morgan le Fey's plans. But most arrestingly - Balthazar discovers David after David chases a precious bit of paper being blown by the wind - not magic - across the city right into Balthazar's arcana shop.

In *Harry Potter*, a prophecy made before Harry's birth is behind his eventual confrontation with the evil Voldemort. In each episode, however, there is much "luck" and "coincidence" that enables Harry to triumph. Much of Harry's success is due to "mistakes" that Voldemort makes, or things he "forgets" or "overlooks" or "fails to understand". And Harry's ultimate victory is due to how circumstances granted him "ownership" of the powerful magic wand that Voldemort uses against him - and which therefore "backfires" with fatal results.

There is no "God" in either of these stories (although in *Harry Potter*, God is mentioned in various contexts, reflecting a vestigial British piety). But without a directing Intelligence arranging circumstances and guiding events for the benefit of the "Good" heroes and contrary to the "Evil" villains, there would be no story! This is a point that

Christian parents and leaders should not sacrifice in an unconsidered rejection of "magic".

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Just to say, since I was a committed *Dungeons & Dragons* player in my teen-to-twenty years, and a successful gamemaster: *D&D* can be played with no story, just as a sequence of undirected events whose outcomes are governed entirely by throwing dice. However, the tension with this mode of play and having "characters" with "personality", with whom the players come to identify and appreciate, makes this unsatisfying. On the other hand, players will often object with the gamemaster ("God") trying to direct events to make the game into more of an interactive story. So the problems with Fantasy Role-Playing Gaming (FRP) are structural, not due to the presence of "magic" (even though especially later editions tend to put the "magic" in a more occult light).

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1. [www.pluggedin.com/movies/intheaters/sorcerersapprentice.aspx](http://www.pluggedin.com/movies/intheaters/sorcerersapprentice.aspx)

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## September 26 2010: A Movement of God

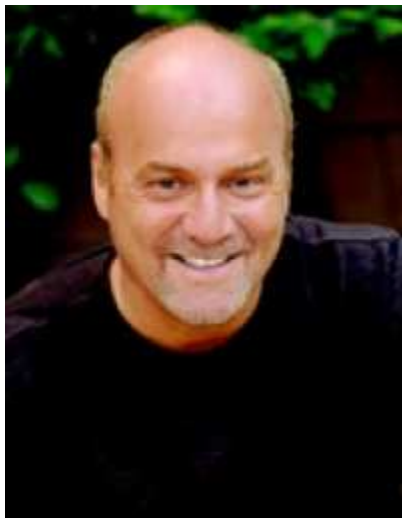


Many years ago, I came into possession of an eight-track tape of [LoveSong \[1\]](#), a Christian rock group. I wasn't really into rock that much, but it didn't matter, because the group was so mellow and so good and the message was so strong that I just about played that tape to pieces. Recently, I found that LoveSong was on a "reunion tour" and would

be at Calvary Chapel, where I am attending Sunday Morning "worship" service. So, out of curiosity, and the hope of getting the same music on a more updated medium, I and my family went. It was quite amazing, of course; all the five members (in the picture, top left-to-right: Tommy Coomes, vocals and guitar; Jay Truax, bass guitar; Bob Wall, electric

guitar; bottom left-to-right: John Mehler, drums; Chuck Girard, vocals and guitar and keyboard) were there, and could play and sing just about as well as they could when they were in their twenties, some forty years ago! But as I watched the video, and listened to Chuck Smith, the original (Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa) pastor who was touring with them, and read the booklet that came with the CD set (yes, I was successful in getting updated media!), I came to understand that LoveSong was a product of the Jesus Movement of the late 1960s, early 1970s, and was perhaps the *first* Christian band, that set the trend for all the groups who would follow.

I say "groups", because individual musicians, like [Larry Norman](#) [2], had already been on the scene. But the very existence of "rock and roll" musicians with a desire to inject their Christianity into their music indicates that something was going on. Many churches didn't accept what was going on; rock music was not traditional "church" music, and therefore "evil" and "of the devil". I note that Larry Norman (in addition to being abrasive on general purposes, which may or may not have been aggravated by his health problems and head injuries) had a rather negative view of institutional churches, pointing to their lack of fruit (in terms of meeting physical needs in the community) and not honoring the commands of Christ. But Larry Norman lived and participated in the Jesus Movement.



And so did [Greg Laurie](#) [3], who is also a product of the Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa branch of the Jesus Movement. Some years ago, I viewed his [Lost Boy](#) [4] autobiographical video, in which he describes the Jesus Movement from his perspective as a high-school student, and the phenomenal growth among younger people of his Bible study, culminating in one of the larger churches in America. The video also mentions that the (established, institutional) church where his Bible study met kicked them out

because they weren't "church members" and Greg wasn't a "approved" church teacher - no looking into what was going on, no discovering whether it was a move of God, just on an institutional rules basis.

So the end of this little story is that the Jesus Movement among teens-to-twenties in the 1970s was

- *Clearly* a movement of God
- Not understood, embraced, or encouraged by most institutional churches whose membership and leadership had a more traditional notion of what "church" was supposed to be

Unfortunately, it appears that also

- It had limited impact on the larger culture beyond those young people whose lives were changed by Jesus and a few news articles and magazine features by a popular media that was curious, but not overwhelmed, by the movement

And here we are today, again with an institutional church culture that is structurally incapable of engaging the opportunity, and a strong evangelistical component of Western Christianity that does not understand the importance of discipleship. I note that Calvary Chapel (Chuck Smith, LoveSong) and Harvest (Greg Laurie) are all about evangelism and Bible teaching. From what I see in Calvary Chapel Tucson, there is no *intentionality* about anything but "preaching the gospel", and no expectation for Christians to be anything but service-attenders. I wonder what would have happened if all those ex-hippies, fired up about Jesus, had been effectively disciplined and taught to apply their Christianity to every aspect of their lives - family, vocation, neighborhood relations, school engagement, political involvement - that is, a *WORLDVIEW*. The effect on the larger culture and even the institutional church might have been far greater than it has been. As it is, the Jesus Movement was not a civilization-wide sweeping *revival* that rescued the elements of society from decay for an entire generation.

That's what I'm looking for, of course. But if it happens, it will happen as *a movement of God*, not a church program, not even the creation of "ideal churches". Will it happen? Will it rescue our decayed society if it does? Or will society continue to decline to some sort of horrible "tribulation"-like dystopia?

The church - and the entire world - are in God's hands. He is the

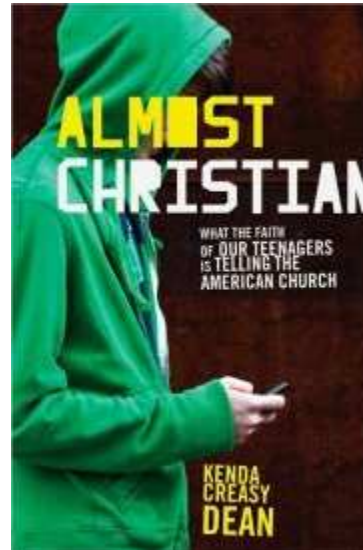
Author of this vast Story. **God is sovereign.**

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1. [www.thelovesongband.com](http://www.thelovesongband.com)
  2. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry\\_Norman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry_Norman)
  3. [www.christiantoday.com/article/greg.laurie.from.lost.boy.to.jesus.freak/20095.htm](http://www.christiantoday.com/article/greg.laurie.from.lost.boy.to.jesus.freak/20095.htm)
  4. [www.harvest.org/store/display.php?cat=27&zid=1&lid=1&psku=DVLOST3](http://www.harvest.org/store/display.php?cat=27&zid=1&lid=1&psku=DVLOST3)
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## September 25 2010: Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

I came across this article in [Youth Ministry Today](#) [1] about a book, [Almost Christian](#) [2] by Kenda Dean, who herself is quoting from the *National Study of Youth and Religion* from a few years ago. The central theme upon which the book is built is the concept of "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism". [Dr. Al Mohler](#) [3], also writing about the results of this University of North Carolina study, describes this concept as follows:



1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about ones self.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

Now, I had heard about Moralistic Therapeutic Deism ("MTD") before; the Mohler article is a good summary, and I've certainly seen it at work in all kinds of churches I've been in, even or especially in the youth group I led myself. What Dean brings to the table is a discussion of the sources of MTD in "christian" young people, and how to develop "consequential faith" (what Josh McDowell would refer to as [conviction](#))

[4]).

The source of MTD is - drum roll, please - churches and parents. Per the article:

The bombshell that the book unleashes upon the Christian world is that Dean asserts teenagers *are learning very well* the kind of beliefs and faith that their parents and congregations actually espouse and model

And in another place,

Too many parents have thrust the role of faith development upon church youth ministries and Christian education programs, and youth pastors and Christian education directors have been too happy to oblige by providing a syrupy-sweet version of Christian faith to the young people under their care.

Well, I've certainly witnessed this in my orthodox, "Biblical-inerrancy" Southern Baptist churches, both when I was a teen and when I was participating as a youth worker. The fact that Dean's book aligns with the "scientific" survey it is based on *and* my own experience validates the book in my eyes. Nor is it just a "the sky is falling" doom-and-gloom book, but it makes recommendations:

**Parents** must "catechize" their children. They must accept the primary responsibility to teach their children, and, most importantly, they must "model the radical, consequential faith they desire for their children to have".

**Youth Ministries** need to support parents in being the primary force for spiritual development of their children. This confirms my independent conclusion that a church youth ministry can only be as successful as it includes - or even targets - parents or whole families, not just the young people themselves. But what I've learned is that even when a youth pastor *understands* some aspect of the problem and *desires* to do something **different**, he cannot go further than what his church setting will permit. Therefore...

**Churches** must return to more of a first-century integrated and holistic Christian community that takes God, theology, and consecrated lifestyle seriously.

Now, up to this point in the review, I am nodding my head in

agreement, and a measure of hope. Then I read this remark:

For those looking for a quick fix to "benign whateverism" in teenagers, whether in new curriculum, a new youth program, or a new youth pastor, the thrust of Dean's book will be difficult to hear. Namely, there is no quick fix but only radical revision of the life and faith of the whole Christian community. This alone will be enough to send many congregations in search of a simpler solution - one that can be measured in dollars and hours rather than in the living of lives shaped by the self-giving love of Christ.

In other words, the only real hope is a fundamental transformation of Western church culture. I totally agree... but from what I've seen, I have no hope of seeing it happen, outside of a God-originated spiritual revival.

All that said, I appreciated this YMToday review, which has motivated me to get and read this book. And probably add some of its concepts to my own idea of "ideal church".

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1. [ymtoday.com/articles/article.php?aid=2666](http://ymtoday.com/articles/article.php?aid=2666)
  2. [www.ymbookstore.com/youth-ministry-books/332/Almost-Christian/9780195314847](http://www.ymbookstore.com/youth-ministry-books/332/Almost-Christian/9780195314847)
  3. [www.albertmohler.com/2005/04/11/moralistic-therapeutic-deism-the-new-american-religion-2](http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/04/11/moralistic-therapeutic-deism-the-new-american-religion-2)
  4. [www.campuscrusade.com/Josh\\_McDowell/beyond\\_belief.htm](http://www.campuscrusade.com/Josh_McDowell/beyond_belief.htm)
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## September 19 2010: Is Bible Study Enough?



One of the great constants of my Southern Baptist upbringing (and, I'd take odds, for any other evangelical) is an unmoderated diet of Bible study.

The Sunday Morning sermon? Bible teaching, either topical or expositional.

The Sunday Evening or Wednesday Evening teaching? Bible study.

The Sunday School lesson? If taken out of the denominational literature - a Bible lesson, either doctrinal or application.

Now, I'll be fair and state that I've been in Sunday Night classes where the subject was, for instance, finances (a canned series by Crown Financial) or a book study by Philip Yancey or Max Lucado or someone else, or *Experiencing God*, or a soulwinning strategy training program. Of course, even in these, the study is based in scripture, or at least peppered with Bible passages as if the author was trying to gain the approval of the church culture in a manner similar to how movie directors will pepper their films with ad-hoc profanities or sexual situations to gain the approval of the Academy reviewers.

I've never been in a class or heard a sermon intended to teach something that wasn't associated with scripture. For instance, in my "ideal church", Christian Education would include topics from apologetics, logic, and history. I've never been exposed to these in a church setting.

It's no surprise that young people get tired of Bible, Bible, Bible, and thus Ken Ham gives this evangelical fixation a part in the "[Already Gone](#)" phenomenon [1]. Church leaders may say, "All Truth is God's Truth", but they rarely or never teach any of God's Truth that isn't found in the pages of scripture.

Now, in proposing my "ideal church" that *intentionally* teaches extra-biblical God's Truth, I didn't ever expect an institutional church to attempt this, but I ascribed this resistance to mere church culture, that evangelical leaders were merely disinclined to do any sort of education or teaching or preaching outside of the traditional norms. Then I found this article by [Greg Koukl of Stand To Reason](#) [2], a (yes,

para-church) apologetics ministry. Apparently there are some evangelical leaders who actively stand against teaching anything in a church setting that doesn't come from the Bible. They firmly take the position, apparently with the same vigour of "King James Only" advocates, that the Bible is Adequate.

I disagree entirely. At the risk of offending some of my long-time church friends and associates: *The Bible is NOT adequate. Bible Study is NOT enough.*

Here are some of my reasons:

1. Here's a young person who asks, "Where did the Bible come from?" The answer is not in the Bible! Here's a skeptic who accuses, "The Bible books were just written by a bunch of guys and then the church leaders at the Council of Nicea voted on which ones would go into the Bible." The answer is not in the Bible! You would have to go to archaeology and textual criticism to learn the origins and the claims for authenticity of the Bible books, and you would have to go to church history to find out what really happened at Nicea. *The Bible is not enough!*

2. How do you know how to interpret the Bible? When do you take a passage literally or symbolically? The answer is the study of Hermeneutics, the technique of Biblical interpretation. But Hermeneutics is not in the Bible! The Bible itself does not and cannot tell us how to interpret itself. *The Bible is not enough!*

(Interestingly, Hermeneutics and church history are standard fare in theological seminaries where church leaders go to learn and to be "qualified" to be church pastors. I assume some of these "The Bible is Adequate" proponents are seminary-trained beneficiaries of extra-Biblical teaching. Clergy need this advanced training, but Bible teaching is enough for lay people. How medieval...)

3. If a young person has non-believing friends (I do; we all should) or encounters hostile atheism in school classrooms, how is he going to respond? Quoting Bible verses is not likely to have much effect. It is all very well for Michael the Archangel to be content with "the Lord rebuke you" (Jude 1:9[\*]), when both he and Satan know what's really going on, but the young Christian taking fire is going to need a grasp of Apologetics and Logic and fallacy-detecting training to defend against doubt, much less positively influence his opponents. But a course in Apologetics and Logic cannot be extracted from the pages of

scripture. *The Bible is not enough!*

(It makes me a bit mad for church leaders to dare to send their lay members out in the world, expecting them to engage and win lost people, and telling them "Blessed are you if you encounter persecution" without *equipping* them to face the world. *I've been there!* It's like sending your troops with swords and chain mail to face an overwhelming army with assault rifles and Kevlar body armour.)

4. Here's Ken Ham's beef (and mine, too) - Science. The unbelieving world has its Creation Myth - evolutionism. Nobody is going to accept merely quoting Genesis Chapter 1 to defeat evolutionism and advance creationism. Some church leaders affirm the literal truth of Genesis Chapter 1, and appreciate the efforts of creationist scientific organizations like Answers in Genesis and Institute for Creation Research - but those scientific answers are not in the Bible! The only other position is the one taken by other church leaders (apparently, now including the Assemblies of God denomination, and the Roman Catholic church) that we can't really know how Genesis Chapter 1 is to be interpreted, and therefore we can accept secular science (obviously NOT in the Bible) to guide us how to interpret the Bible! WOW! **Either way, the Bible is not enough!**

Therefore, I have some reasons to believe that *the Bible is not enough* for effective Christian discipleship in the contemporary, secular, Western culture that we are to engage. As a result, church leaders who do not equip their church members with extra-Biblical understanding not only fail to obey the Great Commission to "make disciples" but also relegate their churches to ineffectiveness and irrelevance. Worse are those church leaders who advise or (in a denominational capacity) enforce "Bible-only". Small wonder young people (and others) are giving up on the institutional churches.

I'd like to be clear on one point, however. **Necessary** versus **Sufficient**. I absolutely affirm that Bible Study - or, rather, effective Bible Study that remains in the mind of the students and is evident in their lifestyle - is **Necessary** for Christian discipleship. What the "Bible is Adequate" party is saying, however, is that Bible Study is **Sufficient**. *This, I deny.*

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\* Look! I just peppered my essay with a scripture reference! Now it should be acceptable for "church culture"!

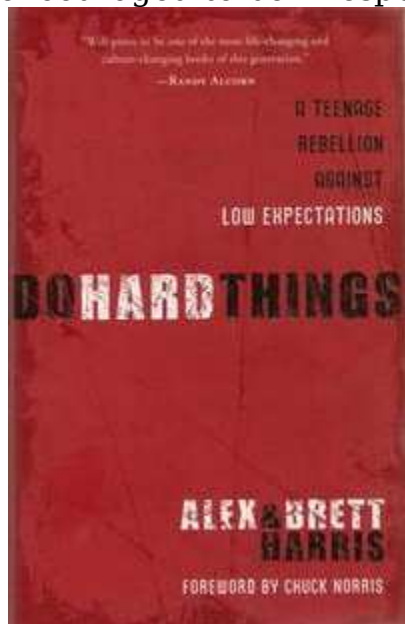
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1. [www.wnd.com/?pageId=100324](http://www.wnd.com/?pageId=100324)
2. <http://www.str.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5370>

## September 17 2010: Do Hard Things Conference

Last weekend, I and my daughter Faith went to Scottsdale, along with my brother's and sister's families, to attend the "Do Hard Things" Conference at Scottsdale Bible Church.

This was my idea; I dragged a willing Faith along, but before she went, I had her read the book [1] so she could be primed. I also had her sister read the book before she started the term at Northern Arizona University. The idea is (and the subject of the first of four sessions) that young people today are labelled by the culture as "adolescents" and excused, even encouraged to be irresponsible.



"Adolescent" is a term that didn't exist until the demographic was recognized long after it was created as a side-effect of child labour laws and mandatory education laws in the early 1900s. This includes teens... and people in their twenties and thirties who continue to live with their parents, hold inconsequential jobs (if any), and waste their time with media, video games, and pop culture. The book, and the first session, gave examples of teens in the past that aspired to greatness because the culture expected it of them - teens like George Washington (surveyor, militia commander, general, President), David



Farragut (midshipman, prize ship commander, admiral), and Clara Barton (nurse, founder of the American Red Cross).

The Conference was led by the book's authors, Brett and Alex Harris, two energetic young men, twin brothers, homeschooled, whose father challenged them in their teen years with a pile of books to read and the expectation to do something with it. Inspired, they started the [TheRebellion.com](http://TheRebellion.com) [2] blog, and lived it out as Alabama



Supreme Court interns and political campaign directors - as teenagers! The website and the concept "went viral", and now they circulate all over the world with the Conference. The nature of this Conference, in the American West, was aimed at the teens themselves - in attendance were mostly youth groups from smaller Phoenix-area churches, a good number of homeschool families from all over Arizona (like, say, Tucson), and a few older kids from places as far as Houston, Milwaukee, Seattle... even *France*! In character, it was like other youth conferences I've been to, with a praise band (led by the youngest Harris brother, Joel), sales of books and tee-shirts and CDs, and "freebies" awarded via shooting a Nerf rocket into the crowd at intervals. They had a system of voting on survey questions, with the question being displayed on the overhead screen, teens selecting their answers on little wireless pads, and the results being captured and processed and displayed almost in real-time.

### The Good Stuff

The brothers traded off presenting the material for their four sessions. The first session was a recap of the book, what "adolescence" is, what it robs from young people, and examples from history and the recent influence of the TheRebellion.com website of young people who refused to settle for being mere "adolescent" consumers and made the effort to "Do Hard Things".

The second session presented six ways to "Do Hard Things":

1. **Fight Sin** - Giving in to temptation is the easy thing to do. Fighting against personal sin is *hard*.
2. **Don't be Discouraged or Complacent** - Some people find a particular activity (for instance, athletics or academics) difficult,

while others find it easy. Those who find it difficult may compare themselves to those who find it easy, and become Discouraged. Don't give up; recognize that the effort to struggle with things you find difficult (like, say, calculus) *exercises* you *more* than the person who finds it easy. On the flip side, people who find an activity to be easy can become Complacent, and settle for what they can already do rather than to fully realize their potential.

3. **Exceed Requirements** - Don't settle for what is merely required (e.g., making your bed or cleaning your room or what the teacher expects for an assignment) but rather, push beyond in pursuit of *excellence*.
4. **Don't Fear Failure** - Too many people give up after the first failure. "Get back on the horse", pick yourself up and try again, recognizing that you learn from your failures and the repeated attempts *exercise* you and make you stronger. The usual Thomas Edison anecdotes apply here.
5. **Do the Small "Hard Things"** - Don't fall into the notion that only BIG, noteworthy "Hard Things" (like political involvement or other public achievement) are significant. Practice the smaller "Hard Things" (like homework and family chores) that are right at hand, and be *exercised* by repetition, rather like the Vikings, who rowed their dragon ships themselves rather than relying on slaves, and developed tremendous upper-body strength as a result.
6. **The Hard Life is the Best Life** - Like Theodore Roosevelt would say about "The Strenuous Life". Working toward your potential is the far better way to spend your life than settling for mediocrity.

The fourth session presented seven techniques or motivators to "Do Hard Things":

1. **Select a "Hero"** - Discover someone who has achieved or excels at what you are aiming at, and make them your model.
2. **"Make friends with Dead People"** - *Read old books*. Learn from what smart or experienced people in the past had to say.
3. **Follow [TheRebelution.com](http://TheRebelution.com)** - Join the community, be encouraged and inspired and advised by other young people who "Do Hard

Things".

4. **Look for other hidden Rebelutionaries** - Be sensitive to other young people in your school or church or neighborhood who might also be wanting to "Do Hard Things".
5. **Ask older people about their regrets** - Find out from people who have "been there" what they did right... and what they would do differently if they could.
6. **Seek the Lord** - Strive for God's fellowship and power. Yes, devotions; yes, church involvement, but more.
7. **Make a structural change in your life** - Don't just talk about making a change; **Do it**. Don't just resist temptation; **Get rid of the opportunity** (examples: throwing away your ice-cream, smashing your television). Don't just try to "Do Hard Things"; **Make a plan and get someone to hold you accountable!**

The day was well worth the exposure to *practical worldview for teens*. I left thinking, "this is Great Stuff... if any of it sticks".

### The Not-So-Good Stuff

Well... unfortunately, I don't know how much of it *can* stick. It was pretty much formula, and in my experience, young people have gotten pretty resistant to formula. I've been in church youth groups long enough to recognize the cynical look in the eyes of kids passing by. The message was *good*, it was *novel* and *refreshing*; it was *how it was done* that may make it less than effective.

1. It was aimed at teens. Not their parents. Yes, I know; this is an old saw with me, but the composition of the audience underscored this principle for me. There were two kinds of kids there - (a) church youth groups, and (b) homeschoolers. The church youth group kids were there with their youth ministry leaders, not their parents; as is typical with this scenario, the young people's parents have "dumped" their kids off on the youth leader in the hope that something will stick. Even though the best way for anything to "stick" would be better family life and reinforcement of the principles in the home. Which is the case for the homeschoolers! Homeschool kids already get higher expectations from their parents. In fact, the Harris children are themselves homeschooled; this higher expectation is what put Brett and Alex on the trail in the first place! So we have two groups - one is resistant to

the story, and the other is already in on it. One group *needs* the message, but can't accept it because their life setting militates against it; the other group doesn't need it so much because they're already doing it to some extent.

I can't blame Brett and Alex so much for this; it's just the way it is. I wonder, though, if the Harris boys understand what they're up against with "church youth groups", since they are coming from a homeschool paradigm themselves. Yes, I know the Harris father is on a "How to raise kids that Do Hard Things" tour that is aimed at parents, but I can't help but think it will be the same thing: church-people parents who "dump" their kids off on the youth ministry and don't care enough to come to a "Do Hard Things" conference themselves with the youth pastor are unlikely to come to a "Do Hard Things - The Parents' Edition". It will be all just homeschool parents! In fact, there were as many church youth at this youth conference as it was because there were youth pastors who cared to bring them. It is unlikely that senior or adult pastors will bring (or seriously expect) parents in their church to attend such a conference. And *that* is really the problem. Talk about *expectations*...

2. "But David, you left out the third session!" All right, then, here's the third session: It started out well - You can't really do meaningful Hard Things unless you're plugged into God. Okay, true, good. Then they did a series of wireless-keypad surveys to discover that, in an audience of maybe 1,000 teens, as many as a quarter (a) don't read their Bibles for themselves, (b) don't pray to God on their own, and (c) don't obey what they know God wants them to do. Okay, we've established that there are a lot of young people who call themselves Christians but probably really aren't. So what's the formula path from this point? Yep. Joel comes out and starts playing soft piano music, and Brett makes a series of progressively reinforcing emotional appeals culminating in an altar call. And a lot of that quarter of youth present respond to the altar call.

I'm sorry, but I've seen the formula too many times to be giddy about "what God has done". What I see is a bunch of young people who make an emotion-based "commitment" that isn't likely to survive the next three weeks, at least, not without follow-up and a family or church-based discipleship plan. And there won't be any - that's *why* these youth pastors are here with all these parent-less kids, because *that's the church formula*.

So at the end of the day, it comes down to this: It was a great practical

lesson in Christian Worldview for young people, and shone a light on our broken culture and how teens don't have to stay in the rut. I'm very glad that Faith and I went, and I'm taking it as my challenge to expect "Hard Things" from my kids. But the message is less effective than it could be because of our evangelical church culture of low expectations - for "adolescents", for their parents, and for God's work in salvation.

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Update (18 Sept): It occurred to the next day, that the Harris Brothers' ministry is... para-church! It seeks to help Christians (young ones) with a Worldview perspective, but it has to go *around* the church to do it! Yes, the Conferences are hosted in church buildings, and church leaders may promote it and send their youth groups to it. However, the "Do Hard Things" ministry is doing something that they institutional church *will not* do itself!

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1. [www.therebelution.com/books](http://www.therebelution.com/books)
2. [www.therebelution.com](http://www.therebelution.com)

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## September 4 2010: An Ideal Church: You Can't Always Get What You Want

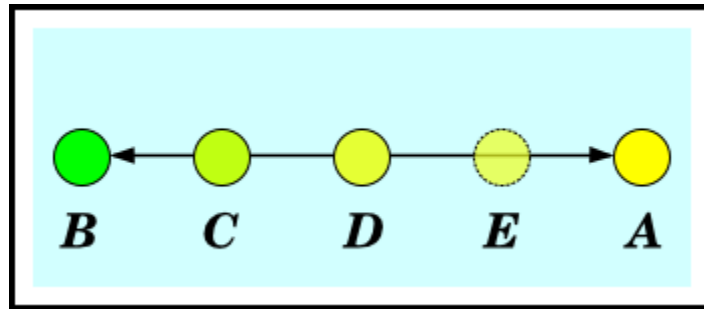
So I've got this idea of the kind of church I would want to be part of. A church where I could be confident that we were most likely to accomplish God's will for our community. A church where I would be pleased to recommend to my Christian friends, and invite my unbelieving friends. A church where I could settle in, roll up my sleeves, and plug in full-bore.

The problem is... it doesn't exist.

So what do I do? Do I give up my analysis and my dreams and just settle for whatever is there? Or do I give up on the institutional church and sulk at home? If I did the latter, I would merely join the large group of people (especially men) who have a gripe with the church and just stay home. These guys don't have a positive contribution to make to anything, and have a negative effect on their families. They probably also develop health problems like ulcers. They become known as

"grumpy old coots". I've known a few. I don't want to be that way.

So what do I do? Let me start by getting the situation in perspective. Here's a spectrum of "churches":



**A** is the "perfect church". This is where you would want to be if you knew it, where your own potential could be maximized and God's glory would be most fully revealed. But with human involvement and the pervasive sin in the world... it doesn't exist.

But the opposite of the "perfect church", **B**, is not an incompetent or malfunctioning Christian church, it is a non-Christian organization. A muslim mosque. A buddhist temple (like the one that has moved in down the street from us). Even a Mormon "church" or a Jehovah's Witness "Kingdom Hall". The object of the eternal game is to get the people out of **B** and get them in somewhere else. Almost anywhere else.

But maybe not **C**. This is the mainstream Protestant church that has turned away from Christianity to pursue a social agenda or a more enlightened religious philosophy. Most Presbyterian, Methodist, and Episcopal churches fit in here, and probably quite a few Lutheran ones. Maybe even some Baptists (maybe like Westboro Baptist, the "church" of the hater, Fred Phelps). Historically, it has been fashionable for Protestants to identify the Catholic church as **C**, and of course, the official Catholic position is that anything other than Roman Catholic is **C**. This last bit is largely specious, I think, for in the spectrum of churches, I'd say most Catholic churches are further to the right of Protestant churches who not only misinterpret but outright reject essential doctrines of the Christian faith. Finally, as I've noted before, there are a lot of true Christians in those **C** churches that are hanging in for loyalty's sake. The object of the game is, if those churches can't be reformed (and so far, they can't), the people need to get out and go somewhere else.

And where would all these **B** and **C** people go? Most likely, where I've been most of my life - **D**, the Christian church that is doctrinally okay

(outside of some nonessential quibbles like "alcohol is evil" and infant baptism), just methodologically troubled. Even though a **D** church has trouble making disciples (or very often, even converts), can't hang onto their young people, and is irrelevant to their community in practical terms, it is still a *far* better place for people to be than **B** or **C** churches!

So, in perspective, existing institutional **D** churches aren't such bad places to be. HOWEVER, *this isn't a glowing recommendation, either!* We should NOT be content with the status quo, when the status quo has recognizable problems. We ought to *want* for our **D** church to be closer to **A**. That is, we ought to want our church to be **E**. In fact, the reformation or revival I am longing for would move our **D** churches to **E**.

But until God grants in His sovereignty for this revival to occur, what can we do? There are only two choices:

- Work to convert existing **D** churches to **E** churches
- Start a new **E** church

Now, what I have learned is, it is extremely difficult to turn a **D** into an **E**. Only the established leadership has a chance, and if the entire leadership team is not on board or the lay membership isn't handled very carefully, a church split will result. Now, maybe this wouldn't necessarily be a *bad* thing if part of the split church actually became an **E**, and left the other part to remain the same **D** that it had always been, that the members had been comfortable with. But what I've learned is that a lay member has ZERO chance of even getting the ball rolling. A lay member who tries to agitate for fundamental change in a church will either be frustrated by the total lack of response, or else be viewed as a troublemaker and be asked to leave. If he approaches the ordained leadership in this endeavor, the former is most likely, and if he approaches the rest of the lay membership, the latter is most likely. So, all those books about church transformation? The ones I've been reading? Forget them. They are written for church pastors, and church pastors are the only ones who can act on the suggestions.

So the only real option is the church-start path. Again, there are only two alternatives:

- Start one yourself
- Wait while looking for one to start

The first path is pretty difficult. Unless God has called you to be a pastor, it would be presumptuous to attempt a church start with yourself as the pastor. The alternative would be to look around for someone who *is* called to be a pastor who is also called by God to start an **E** church in your area. One would hope that this would be the case; if God has impressed upon *you* that He wants an **E** church in your area, then He has a plan for making it happen, and you will be part of it! **That's my hope, certainly!**

But that alternative is merely a variation on the second path: Wait. So the only practical path to an **E** church for someone who is not called by God to start one himself, is to Wait. Keep your eyes open. Keep looking around. Keep your fingers in the various pots.

But what do you do while you're waiting? We have already established up above that checking out of the institutional **D** church is only *negative*, not at all *positive*; in fact, such negativity will probably close your eyes to noticing a potential **E** church starting. So checking out is not good. You need to stay in your **D** church.

At the same time, if you stay at the **D** church and get too involved, say, in a ministry, like the Youth Ministry, (a) you will be too distracted to be looking for a potential **E** startup, and (b) you would be too deeply embedded to extract yourself to participate in it if you noticed it. So you can't really get involved in a **D** church.

Sounds pretty bad, doesn't it? Well, considering that the ministries in a **D** church, if they are methodologically incompetent, it won't matter if you are involved or not. In fact, it might be better if you are not! The "[Already Gone](#)" [phenomenon](#) [1] research suggests that Children's Sunday School may be a net negative influence. Furthermore, if members content with their **D** church want to prop it up, they are free to do so. If *you* do, you may find yourself *enabling* a defective church that God and nature has destined for dissolution and replacement. Finally, not getting involved in a **D** church's ministries is not necessarily failing to use the gifts God has given you: There is likely a para-church ministry in your community where your gifts would find better employment. Keep in mind also that your first responsibility for using your spiritual gifts is in the nearer context of your family, rather than an institutional church setting.

**In Summary**, then, the recommended strategy is as follows:

1. Recognize if and how your church is a **D** church, that is not working well but is not going to change because you aren't in any sort of leadership position to make it change.
2. Disconnect from ministries or other involvements in the church, and reconnect with a para-church ministry or simply focus on your own family.
3. Continue to be lightly involved with your **D** church - attend services, interact with other members, recommend the church to seekers.
4. Watch for church start-up activity in your area, and use your lightly-connected opportunity to investigate them. Beware that most start-ups, particularly those supported by an existing denomination, will be motivated or structured to reproduce another **D** condition.
5. Pray. Pray. Pray. Pray. Pray. Pray. Pray. Pray. Pray. Pray. Pray.
6. If your investigation reveals real **E** potential, switch over and help out. If it takes off, you will be in an **E** church, a real step up. If it doesn't, then you can drop back to your **D** church where you were likely not missed (not having gotten embedded) and you can resume your watch.
7. Don't expect to find an impossible **A** church. Remember, they don't exist. You are just after a methodologically *better* (not *perfect*) **E**.

This is now what I'm doing. I'm *attending* a big church (it's easier to sit in the auditorium and get lost in a crowd in a big church than a little church) and keeping my eyes open. The primary identifier of a potential **E** church (either a **D** church in transformation, or a **E** start-up) is the existence of a serious prayer meeting, *not* a stupid flashy Sunday morning service. Even if my wife prefers to stay at the big church, I am free to check out possibilities in the community, and if I find a keeper, she can either stay where she is or come over; she has to decide for herself if a small, challenging **E** start-up is worth the loss of her comfortable, traditional **D** institutional church.

That said, if anyone out there knows about a potential **E** transformation or start-up in Central Tucson, or you are a pastor who either wants to transform his Central Tucson **D** church or start an **E**, or you are a lay Christian living in Central Tucson at a **D** church and you want to join my prayer and search for an **E** in our area,

**Please Contact Me!**

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1. [www.wnd.com/?pageId=100324](http://www.wnd.com/?pageId=100324)"

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## July 31 2010: An Ideal Church: Preaching



This is a topic that I'm conflicted on. Is the Sunday Morning "worship" service a *necessary* thing that *must* be retained in an "ideal church", or is it a *good* thing that would be advisable to retain, or is it a *distracting* and *ineffective* thing that ought to be discarded?

What I'm not conflicted on is the fact that pretty much *all churches do it*.

Now, I can't speak for hoouse churches, since I haven't visited any; I suspect that they would tend *not* to have a "formal" preaching service (although if their teaching time is anything like a smallgroup or Sunday School class, I would expect it to suffer from the same defects as the traditional preaching service, per below). But every single institutional church I've ever been in has a similar order of service in their Sunday morning (or Sunday evening, or Saturday night) primary meeting:

- A music service, either traditional (piano/organ, maybe a choir) or contemporary, with a bunch of songs sung by the congregation led by a music leader (either from hymnbooks or an overhead projector), often special music by a choir or soloist
- A "greeting time", where everyone is supposed to smile and shake hands with those near them (I think this is one of the dumbest behaviours adopted by the contemporary church - visitors either don't wish to be so recognized, or get ignored by the regular members who are much more focused on each other. Much better to have the "worship" service focused on *worship* and make meet/greet arrangements before and after the service, or have ushers/greeters deliver visitors to a regular member family who will give them special attention and answer questions and the like)
- The Preaching Time (sometimes called the "Teaching"), consisting

of an 30-45 minute lecture by a preaching pastor (either a topical, "life-application" message or an expositional verse-by-verse teaching through a scripture passage)

Historically, the "greeting time" is a recent development. Even I can remember the time before it became a popular (but usually ineffective "let's show visitors how friendly we are") practice. The music service is a cultural thing, with traditional or contemporary styles, and some traditions disallowing instruments and singing a capella; other traditions sing only Psalms, and still others don't have music at all. The one constant over all traditions and since early times is the preaching service. *Everybody does it.*

The first question is, is it a *necessary* feature of the church? I. e., is it a scriptural command to the New Testament church? If you do a search on "preach", you will find that almost everywhere, whether it is Jesus doing it, or Paul or the Apostles, "preach" is in the context of proclaiming the gospel message of salvation to groups of unbelievers. So in the case of Mark 16:15 ("Go and preach to all creation"), where Jesus is giving one version of the Great Commission, the intent is clearly in the sense of proclaiming to unbelievers. So when Paul is instructing Timothy to "preach the word" (I Timothy 4:2), is it in the sense of proclaiming the gospel message to unbelievers, or addressing a weekly lesson to the believers in the church? Presenting a lesson to the church is more in the line of "teaching", and per Matthew 11:1, where Jesus does both "preach" and "teach", both words are in the same verse, and therefore are not the same. And yet, Paul is "preaching" to the church at Troas (Acts 20:7), when Eutychus falls out the window; however, in the NASB, it is just "talking to them". So the most that can be honestly claimed from scripture is that some individuals (apostles, evangelists, pastors) in the church are gifted and obligated to proclaim the gospel message to unbelievers. This is obviously different than what we Christians are used to (culturally acclimated to) in our church buildings on Sunday mornings.

Now, I have read comments from a good many traditional-style pastors, theologians, and analysts insisting that "what is wrong with the church today is a failure of preaching". What they mean is, the kind of Billy Graham or George Whitefield preaching of previous generations. To the extent that the preaching of Graham and Whitefield was addressed to unbelievers, I agree - and therefore acknowledge that "preaching" is a *good* thing that ought to be retained *in this role* in the "ideal church". But of course, these traditionalists are actually referring to the preaching in church buildings on Sunday morning to gatherings of

Christians and church members but very few unbelievers.

And that's where I have my problem. Another thing that I am not conflicted on, and supported by good evidence from Barna and church experts and denominational studies, is that Christianity is in decline in the West, in Europe and the United States. Preachers have been preaching for the past hundred years, and still the church is imploding. We are seeing an unmistakable "[Already Gone](#)" [phenomenon](#) [ref] in spite of all that preaching... or perhaps, because of it. All the statistics of divorce, infidelity, homosexuality *among Christians*, in spite of all that preaching. Clearly, the preaching isn't doing the job. Why might that be?

I think it's entirely cultural. We Christians - Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelicals alike - have come out of fifteen centuries of church culture in which the primary feature was the Sunday Morning sermon. No wonder the theologians and pastors raised and trained under those cultural expectations have the opinions they have. No wonder that, faced with those dire statistics, their reaction is, "*we just need to do the same thing harder and better*" - which is, of course, *insanity*. It isn't only the leaders, either; Christians who have been raised and trained in this ancient culture have the *expectation* of a sermon on Sunday morning - even though to the vast majority it is only an occasion to applaud or critique the rhetorical gifts of the preacher, and a few hours later, any life-changing virtue of the message is forgotten.

The thing is, if these theologians and pastors would consider the ontology of the question - is the "preaching" on Sunday morning supposed to *teach* the Christians - then the question becomes, "is a once-a-week lecture the best way to teach?" If professional educators understand that a simple lecture is *not necessarily* the most effective way to teach, then why is the suggestion of doing something different so repugnant to these Christian leaders?

Per this analysis, the preaching service is largely *ineffective*. It is also *distracting*; too many Christians in the western culture identify their Christianity with Sunday morning "worship" service attendance. If they come, sing a few emotion-stirring songs, shake hands with their other once-a-week friends, and listen to a speech from the pastor, they've done their duty. Unbelievers who visit a church (that is, attend a "worship" service) come away with the same impression - Christianity is an hour of singing and preaching on Sunday morning. That's what the culture says.

It is in this sense that the preaching service is *bad* and ought to be discarded. My "ideal church" would be composed of Christians who understand - and have this understanding reinforced by the planning and teaching of the leadership - that Christianity is **NOT** identical with the Sunday morning service. It is connecting with Christ, maturing as a disciple, practicing practical love to each other and their unbelieving neighbors. They should understand that the church is a fellowship to help them achieve these things, that expects them to be achieving these things, and *will not be satisfied by their mere attendance at a weekly Christian entertainment event!* An event that they understand is *ineffective* and can *distract* them in their pursuit of Christ.

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So what am I saying? Am I saying, abolish the worthless Sunday morning "worship" service? Not necessarily. It may be necessary for a church to *set aside* the traditional-format "worship" service for a while, to get the members (and maybe the community) over the culturally-derived expectation for the service. I don't know if an established church could do that; quite likely, too many members would object, and leave if it were attempted. It would be hard for a church start-up to do that, when the denomination-approved method for starting a church is to put on a good show on Sunday morning to entice enough people to come and build up critical mass. But in my view, this situation just underlines the concept that our churches are based on something other than a passion for God and a reliance on His power. Starting a church (or revitalizing an established church) is something done in a prayer meeting, not a "worship" service.

Then, later on, a more traditional-styled Sunday morning service could be set up. Not for the members; this would NOT be a "worship" service directed at the members, who should at that point understand the purpose of the service. It would be directed at *unbelievers*, brought by Christians or their own curiosity. Unbelievers still operating under a cultural expectation of "church == worship service". Yes, it could be "seeker sensitive", since the purpose of the service is for seekers - but the preaching by the evangelist/prophet/pastor would be **PREACHING** - clearly and unashamedly proclaiming the gospel message of salvation. Then, as unbelievers are won by the power of the gospel and the testimonies of their disciple-Christian friends, they could be introduced to the *real* life of the church - which all the members would understand occurs outside the Sunday morning service.

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## July 2 2010: An Ideal Church: Intentionality

I've been in a lot of churches, particularly Southern Baptist ones. Growing up as an Air Force brat and moving around, I was a member of a lot of churches as a child and a youth. On two occasions of being "between churches" or "church shopping" with my family, we've visited a lot of churches in Tucson. As I travel on business or visit relatives, I look for opportunities to visit churches in other cities. So I've seen a lot of churches, and they tend to fall into three categories.

The most numerous are the *traditional churches*, which exists for the purpose of complying with a historic or denominational culture, usually embodied in a standard calendar of weekly activities and ministries performed in a standard way, and a standard order of services for Sunday "worship" service, in which the components are performed in a standard way. Then there are the *churches with an agenda*, with purposes at odds with serving the Kingdom of God; these may include preserving the power of some dominating individual in the church (usually the head deacon) or a family dynasty or a pastoral staff nepotism, or it may be an inward-focused social club. But finally, I have noticed a few *intentional churches*, which have a clear idea of how they are supposed to serve the Kingdom and have a (more or less) objective plan for accomplishing this.

The instance of this kind of church we most recently visited is [The Cool Church \[1\]](#), or more officially, Tucson Community Church. Their extensive visitor packet sets out their purpose - to reach the nonbelieving people of Tucson and disciple them - and the detailed structure of their strategy. Now, I need to mention that many, even *most* traditional evangelical churches would *claim* to have this as a purpose, but they don't have an objective plan for carrying it out; they will adopt denomination-recommended evangelism strategies (reported to work in a few other churches), and maybe they will put on special events (like city-wide "revival" meetings), but in general, the effort of maintaining the *traditional* elements of the church and meeting the expectations of the large portion (almost certainly the majority) of the membership who are *tradition*-minded, gets in the way. The same could be said for the term "missional" - there are many traditional churches that would *claim* the "missional" label, but their very structure prevents them from actually being so. I have not been in a Tucson church that claimed to be "missional" and could produce a clear strategy. I suspect that established, *traditional* churches,

whether large or small, would find it extremely difficult to transition to being "missional" or *intentional*, and it really takes a fresh start, a church plant, such as The Cool Church is. I will also say that I don't agree with everything The Cool Church stands for - but that is part of the blessing of the *intentional church*; you can tell where they stand, and make an informed decision about them. I found this experience refreshing, even *bracing*!

The cardinal example of the *intentional church* is the [Purpose Driven Church](#) [2] strategy, best represented by Rick



Warren's [Saddleback Church](#) [3]. When I was working in the youth ministry of First Southern Baptist of Tucson, the youth pastor had successfully rebuilt the ministry on Purpose Driven lines (that was the *best*, most fruitful year I have ever experienced in youth ministry). Saddleback Church was putting on a regular (possibly annual) Purpose Driven Church or Purpose Driven Youth Ministry conference, and we went with our newly-trained volunteers. So Saddleback and its youth ministry is one of those many churches I've visited. I got an up-close look at what an *intentional mega-church* looked like! It wasn't the size that was so impressive (I've visited other mega-churches before) as how all the members knew

- What the church was supposed to do, and
- How they were going to do it.

Now, I am aware of the controversy around Purpose Driven, and how some (*tradition-minded*) pastors identify PDC tactics inspired by Peter Drucker and other secular business strategists and therefore denounce it as being unscriptural and contrary to God's will. I don't hold with a few things in PDC myself; I think the "mission statement" part is unnecessary. However, it seems to me that any church that intends to be *intentional*, and comes up with a plan (however they do it) for

- This is what God wants us to do
- This is how we are going to do it
- This is how we are going to determine if we are successful
- This is what we will do if we are not being successful

is going to look a lot like Saddleback. It also seems like what those pastors are tacitly preferring over the Saddleback model,

- This is what we have always done
- This is how we have always done it

- If we just do what we interpret what God wants us to do, He will make us successful
- If we are not being successful, we just need to do it harder

is pretty hard to defend.

[I've also learned that *traditional* and *agenda-driven* churches will often claim to be Purpose Driven, and adopt some of the superficial trimmings, like stating the Five Purposes in their bulletins or holding 101, 201, 301, 401 classes. It's hard to tell what they're *really* about without spending time there, asking the people what they do and looking for signs about what they *really* do. If a church has a clearly stated strategy (such as, in their visitor packet or the church website or on posters hanging on the walls), and members will enthusiastically confirm the strategy when asked, then the chances of this being an authentically *intentional* church are pretty good.]

Step 2 in David Ormand's Recipe for a Successful Church is

### Commitment to an Intentional Strategy

**1. What Are We Supposed To Do.** In most cases, this isn't hard to figure out. Christ gave us the Great Commission very clearly (however much denominations, even my own Southern Baptist one, tend to twist it):

- Make *disciples* (i.e., more than just converts, more than just getting someone to recite a "magic prayer")
- *Baptize* them
- Teach them *to obey* what our Lord commanded (i.e., the Great Commandment and the Second Commandment, Matthew 22:37-40)

Also Communion (probably more regularly than most churches celebrate it). And the Pauline instructions which are found at the ends of many of his Epistles, notably family relationships and duties.

In some cases, additional, special, and unique instructions and challenges for a church will be determined by direct enquiry from God in prayer, a la *Experiencing God*. Note that Step 2 here can't really work without Step 1; **church-wide prayer** is foundational to a successful *intentional* strategy.

Beware of adopting popular or contemporary definitions for terms in our church objectives. For example, "baptize" is a denominationally

loaded term. Is it immersion or sprinkling at a font? Is it for infants or believers? Search the Scriptures, enquire of God in prayer, and consider denominational traditions without feeling bound by them. More seriously, what is "making a disciple"? Certainly there is an educational component; Jesus and the rabbis *taught* their disciples, and so should we, but "being a disciple" is more than having an education. Jesus set His disciples to obtaining practical experience and "on the job training". A disciple "knows", but he also "does".

### Write it down

Capture the Mission of the Church in an objective, permanent medium. Don't rely on assumption or verbal training. Provide something that visitors and potential members can refer to in determining what the church is really about.

### Get "Buy-In"

*Every member* should understand and agree to the Mission of the Church.

The best, most appropriate way to do this is to involve everyone in the process of discovery. In a church start-up, this is easier; the "core group" is fairly small and interested in the direction. The worst, least appropriate way is for the senior pastor (whether of an established church or the "church planter" of a new start-up) to determine on his own what the Mission of the Church should be and then descend, like Moses from Sinai, to deliver his determinations to the lay-people as the Oracles of God.

### Repetition and Promotion

Constantly reaffirm the Mission. Keep it fresh in human minds that are prone to forgetting and corrupting things. Introduce it to visitors and candidates and new members... and nonbelievers. Make sure everyone, *even the surrounding community*, has the opportunity to know **why** the church is there.

**2. How Are We Going To Do It.** What methods will be employed to carry out the Mission of the Church? Again, this project should be a combined effort of the pastoral staff (even if a single "church planter" individual) and members who are Gifted by God with different specialties. Possibly the pastor(s) should set a broad outline for components of the strategy - Education, Ministry, Fellowship, Worship,

and/or others as determined at this phase - and then step back and allow the other members to step forward with implementation, but be ready to fill in holes.

As with the first step of Establishing the Mission, the principles of

- Write it down
- Get "Buy-In"
- Repetition and Promotion

apply at this phase as well, and for the same reasons.

### David Ormand's Ideal Strategy Components

I'm not a "church planter" or a staff pastor, but if *I* were part of a fellowship or a "core group" or a strategy-implementation team, these would be *my* suggestions. And besides, *I'm* the one writing my thoughts here!

**Education:** The objective of Education is to impart the knowledge and the critical thinking required to manifest a *Christian Worldview*. Additionally, since the direct involvement of a church will be limited (e.g., once-a-week hour-long "Sunday School" classes), the church should involve *families* in the training process, not *isolated age-groups*. Training age-groups in isolation is a common denominational standard approach, but as the ["Already Gone" phenomenon](#) [4] is connected with this practice, it should be avoided. At the same time, different age-groups have different learning capacities; [Focus on the Family](#) [5] is a pretty good model for helping families with different age-group children. In fact, para-church ministries like Focus on the Family are likely to be a better resource for training methods and literature than denominational publishers, who have a record of producing shallow, "Bible Story" materials identified as a contributor to the "Already Gone" phenomenon.

Education therefore should be an age-appropriate, family-inclusive training on a variety of subjects ("All Truth is God's Truth"):

- **The Canon** - important historical figures, the stories, the doctrines; the books, their order and origin
- **Apologetics** - *why* we can believe that *what* we believe is true
- **Theology** - Who is God, What is He like, and How does He do what He does - Salvation, Justification, Sanctification, etc.
- **History** - Especially church history, but also world (and American) history to counter the agenda-driven material taught in secular

schools

- **Science** - what is it, how does it work, what are its limitations, and what are the *real* or *full* application of science to the study of Origins (Genesis) (Creationism/Evolutionism)
- **Logic and Critical Thinking** - the proper use of propositions and conclusions, and how to spot logical fallacies and avoid them
- **Sociology** - or, specifically, how to live Christianly in a fallen, hostile world, and how to correctly view issues such as marriage, family, homosexuality, liberty, tolerance, vocation, etc.
- **Religion** - what do the prominent religions in our community believe and practice (e.g., Islam, New Age, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses) and how to answer them

**Ministry:** The church should provide for the establishment of lay-led practical expressions of our faith. Ministries and programs might fall into a number of categories:

- **Relational Evangelism** - Meeting people where they live, for the purpose of forming relationships that can lead to evangelism. Saddleback and some other churches in Tucson are pretty good about this: a Sailing ministry, a Surfing ministry, a Motorcycle ministry. I keep thinking about a Computer/Electronics Geek ministry...
- **Meeting Physical Needs** - Maintaining a Crisis Closet, or partnering with the Rescue Mission or teen rescue ministry. Getting involved with para-church ministries would probably be better than forming church-unique ministries.
- **Practical Worldview** - Living out one's faith in community. This could include starting accountability "clubs" in members' workplaces, and political activism, and cultural involvement in music, dance, and the arts.

**Fellowship:** Christian love must be more than casual friendships or shallow social connections (e.g., shaking hands with neighbors at some point in the "worship" service) or potluck dinners. Connecting with other believers may not be too hard in a small church or start-up, but as it grows, smallgroups or cell churches will be necessary. Accountability partnerships and adult-teen mentoring pairs are other expressions.

**Worship:** The notion that "worship" equates to the music in the weekly service should be absolutely discouraged! This is another of those terms with loaded "church culture" meanings. The church should explore together what "worship" means, and how to implement it - it

will likely include such things as family and individual devotions, attending or hosting conferences and concerts, giving money to charitable causes and para-church ministries, even going to religious summer camps for families or teens! Worship should be more participative than spectative.

These activities should be *promoted* by the church (rather than just mentioned in the bulletin or on the website), and participation should be *expected*, not optional. Also, you might note that I did not include the usual "Evangelism" purpose in the list. This is because (a) I am convinced that a disciple, properly trained, *will* share his faith much more effectively than any church-wide "evangelism" program could, and (b) a member of a church where God is visibly at work in answers to prayers and changing lives will "witness" to what he has seen without being goaded by a church program. Not that a church "Evangelism" purpose would necessarily be bad, but I have too commonly seen it take over and become the One Purpose of a church.

**3. How Do We Measure Success.** I put my engineer hat on - for a process to be *controlled* and *stable*, there must be a feedback control network. If a church exists for a *purpose* or *objective*, rather than just for the sake of existing, then it needs to determine whether it is reaching those objectives. This means measuring success, or *collecting metrics*.

The usual metrics that a church collects are the number of attenders, the number of baptisms, and the amount of money given. If the objective is *size*, as is common in the evangelical world, these aren't necessarily bad metrics. If the objective is *making disciples*, these are useless metrics. Better metrics might be a grade distribution in training classes (Education), percentage of members involved in smallgroups or accountability partnerships (Fellowship), or percentage of members reporting a personal devotions pursuit (Worship).

Possibly, indirect metrics could be useful, such as number of new believers resulting from personal evangelism encounters. However, while this might be a good indication of the overall success of a Discipleship process, it could be subverted into a measure of the church's Evangelism, and then be used for the wrong corrective action in the next step:

**4. What Corrective Action Shall We Take.** From time to time, the pastoral staff or a process control team should review the metrics for trends regarding the methods for accomplishing the Mission of the

Church. If trends indicate that a method is not working very well, then the team may follow up and investigate what might be happening. They may conclude that the method should be altered (perhaps a meeting time adjusted, or a leader moved) or replaced with a different method entirely. All these activities (interpreting metrics, considering corrective actions) should be done with much prayer for God's wisdom and perhaps (depending on the extent, such as a change to the published strategic plan) a larger group of church members should be involved.

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1. [www.thecoolchurch.com](http://www.thecoolchurch.com)
2. [www.purposedrivenchurch.com](http://www.purposedrivenchurch.com)
3. [www.saddleback.com/](http://www.saddleback.com/)
4. [www.wnd.com/?pageId=100324"](http://www.wnd.com/?pageId=100324)
5. <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/>

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## July 1 2010: An Ideal Church: Prayer



When I was a child, the churches that my parents belonged to always had a Wednesday night Prayer and Bible Study meeting. I don't remember too much about them, I'm not even sure I was always there (or off in some children's activity, like Royal Ambassadors or Children's Choir). But we had them. It was traditional.

When I came to Tucson and joined First Southern Baptist Church, they had a Wednesday Night prayer meeting, too. I attended this activity for years, and remember that, after the Bible Study part (limited to 45 minutes to an hour), the men and women separated into rooms for prayer time. There were a *lot* of men, a significant portion of the membership, and a fair number were elderly. The time was not restricted, and it often went for more than an hour. The subject of prayer included sickness and jobs and "travelling mercies", yes, but it also included lost people and blessings for ministries and government officials and policies. This continued until

not many years ago, when the church started an AWANA program on Wednesday night, and many of the adults that had been attending the prayer meeting became AWANA workers.

When we joined Central Baptist Church, they had a prayer meeting. A few people attended, including the pastor(s), some of those were elderly, it was open-ended and not time-constrained, there was no real organization, and the subjects of the prayers were predominantly the sick. Then the lay person who was really responsible for the prayer meeting moved away, and the pastor didn't see the value of continuing the prayer meeting. I attempted to keep it going, or tried to do a Sunday Night Prayer and Bible Study, but first all the men dropped out, and then all the older ladies dropped out, and there were too few to keep it going.

Since we have been visiting other churches, I have noticed that *almost NONE* have a regular weekly prayer meeting. Two or three of the tiny handful that do have the practice of a men's prayer meeting at one time (in the morning, presumably before the workday starts) and a women's prayer meeting at another time (in the evening, presumably after the dads get home and can watch the kids while the moms are away). When I ask about the prayer meeting policies, I get dismissive answers (clearly indicating that the pastor places no value on prayer meetings) or excuses, such as, "our older members find it too difficult to get out at night".

This seems to be a new excuse, as I remember older people at Wednesday night prayer meetings in my younger day. Travelling at night was not a problem back then, so why should it be now? Unless this is really a statement of priority, and what the older people are really saying is, "I don't believe the prayer meeting is worth the trouble and risk of getting out at night." Really, the same could be said about Sunday Evening services; at one time, all churches did them, and the older folk were present.

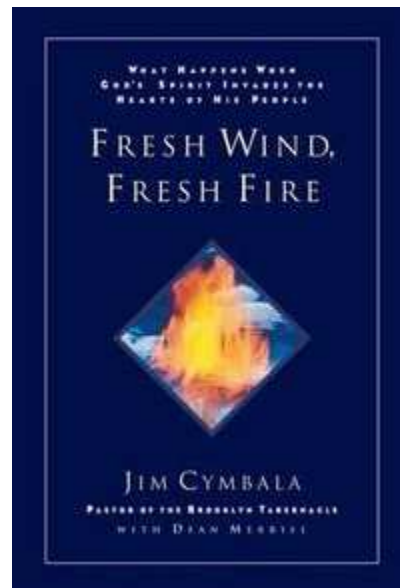
I observe another practice/excuse - "We don't need to have a church-wide corporate prayer meeting because we have a *Prayer Chain*". That is, a phone or e-mail network alerts people that they should pray *individually* for the listed concerns. I don't see how this can really work, because (a) people tend not to pray (or do anything else) without personal accountability, and (b) it loses the *corporate* power of prayer and the promise that our Lord Himself states in Matthew 18:19-20:

Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.

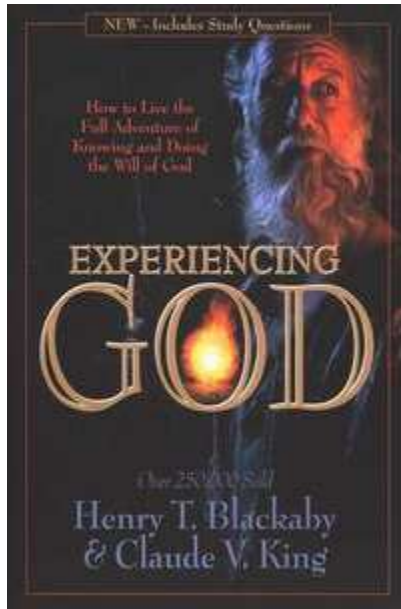
Another practice I've observed in a few churches we've visited is that they have a "prayer meeting", but it is an hour or half an hour before the Sunday Morning "worship" service. In some cases, it is stated that the purpose of the meeting is to pray *for the service*. Well, that's not *for the church*, and most members will not be able to attend, and it will be time-constrained by the beginning of the service itself.

Now, it is a subjective assessment, but seems to me that there was a warmer spirit, more successful ministries, more people saved and baptized, fewer problems and obstacles when the churches I attended had prayer meetings, and things went downhill after the meetings ended or were cut back. In the case of Central, I witnessed occasional new-believer baptisms while the prayer meetings were going on; after they ended, *not a single one*.

In this same timeframe, I was driving back to Tucson from a TOW activity at Yuma Proving Ground. I was alone, I had the radio on, and the program featured an interview with Jim Cymbala of the [Brooklyn Tabernacle](#) [1]. I was so moved, I got his [Fresh Wind Fresh Fire](#) [2] book, in which he describes the path by which he led Brooklyn Tabernacle to become a prayer-driven church, and some of the fantastic things they witnessed.



Somewheres I came across a booklet that linked the Great Revivals of the past with a movement of prayer. I can't find it now, I must have loaned it to some pastor somewhere. It includes the story of some 19th Century men, impressed by God, who started praying in a New York City church. The prayer meeting grew, spread to other churches, and then other cities and states, and a great revival resulted. It also includes a description of the South Korean megachurches, and how a great prayer movement preceded their formation.



Last year, my wife and I and another couple went through the [Experiencing God](#) [3] course. I get the impression that this course, in a small-group context, is intended to help the *individual* discover God's will; however, the best examples that [Henry Blackaby](#) [4] gives, both in the student book and the video "lesson", is how his church, [Faith Baptist of Saskatoon](#) [5], experienced amazing answers to prayer when they sought God *corporately* in *church-wide, pastor-led prayer meetings*.

[However, from what I've seen myself, if a church conducts *Experiencing God* as a church-sponsored class (like any other Bible Study), it is almost certain that, after the

twelve weeks of the course are over, *it will be over*; it will be entirely up to the individuals whether they apply the principles or not (again, without an accountability function, most will not), and without pastoral leadership, there will be *NO* inclination to follow the example of Faith Baptist of Saskatoon in "experiencing God" as a *church* by seeking for God's will *corporately* in some form of *church-wide, pastor-led prayer meetings*. After all, *Experiencing God* has been around for some while, and at least in Tucson, there doesn't seem to be any increase in church prayer meetings or evidence that God is responding to their prayers and leading them into powerful expressions of His will for them.]

And then we have the examples from Scripture, such as Acts 4:23-31, in which the church responds to the persecution by the Jewish authorities of Peter and John with a prayer meeting, asking God for boldness - and the prayer was answered by an earth tremor, a filling of the Holy Spirit, and the boldness they asked for being granted. And again, in Acts 12, particularly verse 12, where Peter escaped from prison by an angel as an answer to an open-ended, persistent, church-wide prayer meeting. This story in Acts 12 sounds just like some of the stories from Cymbala's *Fresh Wind* book!

Now it's true, I don't see any *commands* or *instructions* by Christ or Paul that the church should pray. Maybe given their Jewish background it is assumed that the church *would* pray. Certainly by the examples in Acts, the church *did* pray. *Together*. And the bottom line is, unless we think we can get along without God's power, and we really don't need God's help in doing what He wants us to do, and we

don't really need to know what He wants us to do outside of the (very skinny) Biblical instructions and our own denominational traditions, **then we need to be praying together about these things**. So, Step 1 in David Ormand's Recipe for a Successful Church is

### Commitment to Corporate Prayer

- **Corporate** - Members gather together at the appointed time. Prayer Chains are nice, but are NOT a substitute for church-wide corporate prayer.
- **Pastor-led** - If prayer is going to be the cornerstone of the life of the church, then the *primary authority* of the church must lead it. Lay ministers can and should do many things, but the senior pastor must take the role of prayer leader.
- **Regular** - It must be a scheduled, regular, weekly occurrence. Special seasons of prayer, say for upcoming events, are important, but they cannot advance the overall mission of the church.
- **Promoted** - The members (and visitors) need to know that the prayer meeting is a significant, even foundational part of the life of the church. Hiding it in the bulletin or the web site is not enough. It needs to be promoted *by the pastor* from the pulpit, and attendance at the prayer meeting should be as much or more an expectation of members as attendance at any other service.
- **Unconflicted** - There must not be any other activities that would prevent church members from attending the prayer meeting. Not children's activities; children and youth should participate (although infants will probably need a nursery). Not choir practice. Nothing "good" should give competition for "the best".
- **Open-ended** - No time limits. Prayer is communication with God, and communication with the Creator and Director of the Universe must not be constrained to a schedule.
- **Intentional** - praying for sick people and personal needs is all very well, and embodies our love for one another and our honour for other people who God created and Jesus died for. However, we are commanded to pray for our country and our leaders and our pastors and missionaries, and certainly we should be passionate about discovering God's will for our church and seeking His blessings for our ministries, and for the lost people He died to save and placed us here to reach. The prayer meeting must be more than an "organ recital".
- **Passionate** - If a church really wants something, to know God's will and see His power at work, their prayers will be serious, more than traditional Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting prayers, more

than formal congregational prayers in Sunday Morning "worship" service.

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Apparently, there also needs to be some persistence in a church's program of serious prayer. I notice that Faith Baptist of Saskatoon fondly recalls Henry Blackaby's pastorate, but does not indicate any emphasis on their current prayer activities. I also note that Brooklyn Tabernacle schedules other activities during their famous Tuesday Night Prayer Meeting. It seems the Choir is their primary attraction now.

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1. [www.brooklyntabernacle.org/church](http://www.brooklyntabernacle.org/church)
2. [www.brooklyntabernacle.org/storeSearch.aspx?catalog=262&searchtext=fresh%20wind%20fresh%20fire](http://www.brooklyntabernacle.org/storeSearch.aspx?catalog=262&searchtext=fresh%20wind%20fresh%20fire)
3. [www.blackaby.org/resources/bmistore/egbooks.asp](http://www.blackaby.org/resources/bmistore/egbooks.asp)
4. [www.blackaby.org](http://www.blackaby.org)
5. [www.faithsaskatoon.ca](http://www.faithsaskatoon.ca)