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**Cheeks in Seats Is Not Enough for a Church**

By Freddy Davis

For the most part, all entertainment venues are concerned about are cheeks in seats, heads in beds, fans in stands, and feet on streets. They want to fill their theaters, arenas, hotels, and stadiums in order to keep their operation going.

Churches, too, are interested in filling their auditoriums, but in the case of the church, there must be more to it than merely trying to acquire enough income to keep the organization running. Of course, you can't ignore that part of it. Without enough income to pay the bills, financially support the staff, and fund its ministries, a church organization could not continue operating.

But with the church, there is more – much more. We are not merely trying to run an organization, we are trying to bring the world to Christ. To do that, we must become effective in taking the actual message of the gospel out into the community. We need to be evangelizing, penetrating our local community with the gospel message, reaching out to share Christ with the rest of the world, as well as doing everything possible to grow our members spiritually. Simply getting people to attend worship services and church programs is not enough.

It is certainly a fact that a good pastor and faithful church attenders can usually do enough to keep the lights on. But that alone will never accomplish the actual purpose of the church – which is to build the kingdom of God. Accomplishing our purpose will require faithful disciples who are able to (and actually will) share their faith and bring in new disciples. These are people who are commit-

ted to "doing" the ministry. Undisciplined church members can run an organization, but only genuine disciples can be instruments to build the kingdom.

**So the question becomes: What does it take to become a genuine disciple?**

A disciple is one who follows a master in order to become like the master. And for Christians, Christ is our master.

What this means is that we MUST have an attitude that put's God's purpose above our own. God's purpose is to bring the world into relationship with Himself. If our personal life purpose is different from that, we are not actual Christian disciples – we have become faux disciples. Way too many Christians have as their focus prioritizing personal life goals. Our personal life situation should be our platform for accomplishing God's purpose, not the purpose itself.

There are far too many Christians who believe that the work of ministry is to be done primarily by "the professionals" – those who have been called into Christian leadership ministry. This would include pastors, church staff members, missionaries, chaplains, evangelists, denominational leaders, and the like. This is simply not true. The biblical model reveals that the work of the leaders is to "equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Ephesians 4:11-13). The implication of that, of course, is that the primary work of ministry in the world is the domain of the "saints" – which includes not only church leaders, but every other believer in Christ. The job of the leaders is to put church members in a position to effectively fulfill God's calling on their lives.

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When this model is not followed, what we get is what we see most commonly in churches. We see a lot of people who attend worship (to some degree or another), support the church financially (to some degree or another), but who consider the main part of their lives to revolve around family, work, hobbies, and the like.

But it's not an either/or situation. It is a matter of priorities. What is most important? Is it the purpose of God, or personal hopes and desires? Let's be honest. The priority of most people has to do with their own desires.

This does not mean that we have to go around beating people over the head with a Bible all day every day. There are many matters in life that every individual needs to pay attention to that are not overtly "religious" in nature. And every believer needs to take those things seriously. We need to take care of our own physical health. We need to support and build up our family members. We need to become the best at our jobs that we can possibly be.

It is certainly possible for a person to be a Christian, and even an active church member, without being a genuine disciple of Christ. So, the first thing it takes to become a genuine disciple is an attitude that puts the purpose of God above one's own personal hopes, dreams, and desires.

So what else does it take? The second thing necessary to become a genuine disciple is to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out God's purpose in the world. So just what does that involve?

In addition to having an attitude that prioritizes Christian ministry, Most church leaders have some kind of special training that puts them in a

position to effectively do the work of ministry. Besides the attitude portion, one of the things lacking with most church attenders (and others who claim to be Christians) is the knowledge and skills they need to be effective in Christ's calling on their life. And unfortunately, most everyday Christians don't have easy opportunities to get that kind of training.

In fact, even if they wanted it, just where and how would they get it? Most church members don't have the time or resources to go after a formal theological education. And truth be told, they shouldn't have to. There is a ready made opportunity already in existence that they should be able to tap into – their local church.

The Bible is pretty clear, as we examine Ephesians 4:11-13, that the focus of a church's leadership is to "prepare the saints for the work of ministry." And while most churches will have some kind of training opportunity here and there, precious few have any kind of systematic training to prepare their members to be truly effective in ministry out in the world. There are numerous reasons for that, and every church has its own issues, but it includes such things as church leadership not having a vision for this kind of training, leadership not having knowledge about what to teach, problems in scheduling training opportunities, and, of course, the lack of interest in participating in training opportunities by the church members themselves.

Obviously, it is not going to happen unless the various issues that prevent putting a priority on discipleship training are repaired. But what if there was a desire to develop something? What would that look like?

Honestly, there are a lot of things that could be included in equipping the saints for ministry. But there are some foundational issues that need to be prioritized.

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The first is foundational for everything else – an understanding of worldview concepts. While most Christians, and even most church leaders, honestly don't get what that is all about, the importance of providing it cannot be overestimated. We now live in a pluralistic society with scores of false religious beliefs literally swirling around us. In fact, these are so prevalent that many false beliefs actually seem invisible. While it may be hard to fathom, many Christians buy into some of these false beliefs without even realizing it. To help discern where these lie, an understanding of worldview concepts is key.

A worldview is a way of understanding what is real vs. what is fantasy. We need to be able to consciously make that distinction. It is key to us not being sucked in by false beliefs and for effectively sharing the gospel in our increasingly pluralistic society.

The rest of the equipping that needs to take place spins off of the first one.

- We need to grasp our own biblical worldview based on a worldview paradigm. This helps us discern the actual core of our Christian beliefs. There are many beliefs that Christians disagree about that, while important, are not essential in the sense of keeping us out of a personal relationship with God. Unfortunately, the biggest disagreements

within Christendom tend to be about these non-essential beliefs. It is okay to disagree about these things, but not to disfellowship one another over them.

- We need to know how to share the gospel message. When dealing with people who don't hold a biblical worldview, understanding worldview principles is critical. Grasping worldview concepts gives us the knowledge necessary to communicate the gospel message across that barrier. It also identifies for us the actual core of the gospel message itself.
- We need to know how to do apologetics. Traditionally, Christian apologetics has been done based purely on a defensive posture. This is fine if the questions about the Christian faith we are receiving

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are sincere. However, much of the flack we receive these days is nothing more than hateful attacks. Understanding worldview principles give us the ability to question a non-believer's attacks, and make our attackers give reasons why criticism based on their beliefs are even valid.

We need to know how to read the Bible in light of our biblical worldview. This not only helps us understand the Bible better and helps us avoid misinterpretations, it also gives us a solid foundation for applying it to daily life. With so many false beliefs swirling around our heads these days that are pretending to represent reality, Christians must have this skill.

No, cheeks in seats are not enough. We live in a day when we have to up our game. We not only need people attending our worship services and various church programs, we need equipped disciples. Feel free to contact us if there is any way we can help you create that for your church.