

General Topics :: 8 LIFE OR DEATH QUESTIONS YOUR CHURCH MUST ASK**8 LIFE OR DEATH QUESTIONS YOUR CHURCH MUST ASK - posted by Solomon101, on: 2013/4/2 11:25**

One of our core values at Grace Hills is: "We stay fast, fluid and flexible. There are no sacred cows. We embrace the pain of change for the win of seeing more people meeting Jesus."

I wrote that one knowing that of all of our other core values, it would probably be the hardest to honor over the long haul. It addresses the crossroads where theology meets psychology, where truth, mission and fear intermingle.

Change is hard.

The American evangelical church is in a rather desperate condition. You've heard that America is a "Christian" nation and that Christianity is dominant.

Perhaps it's the popular religion, but far fewer people are attending church than we realize. And we're only planting one fourth of the number of new churches needed to keep pace with America's current population growth and rate of decline in existing churches.

So churches absolutely must change and adapt if they will remain relevant to the culture.

I realize many Christian leaders don't like that terminology, so let me clarify that God's Word, the gospel, Jesus and the church as Jesus intended it to be have always been, are now, and always will be relevant without our help. But we often hold onto extrabiblical traditions and ideas that severely limit our ability to communicate with a young generation, an influx of immigrants, and a culture being shaped by its technology and entertainment more than its religious and historical roots.

In other words, if Satan's goal is to blind the minds of those who don't know Christ to the gospel, we often help by handing out blinders such as inauthenticity, racism, ethnocentrism, traditionalism and political power struggles driven by fear and selfishness.

But if God's desire to enlarge His family matters...

if people who are lost forever without the gospel matter...

and if the church of the future matters...

we will embrace the pain of change for the win of seeing more people meeting Jesus.

I don't have all the answers, but I think I have a few, and they are rooted in my understanding of the gospel's effect on a community and my experience interacting with thousands of pastors and churches in the last few years.

As I look at the landscape of stable or slightly declining existing churches who are fighting hard to stay afloat in the current of a rapidly changing culture, I see some common factors that must be addressed by church leaders.

Here are some tough questions I believe every church ought to honestly ask:

1. Are we really all about Jesus?

Is He the head? Does He have pre-eminence? Are we clear with people that it is to Jesus, and not to a consumer-oriented experience that we are inviting them? Attraction is good. Jesus was attractive. But are we honest about to Whom we are inviting people?

2. Will we hold tightly to our historical, biblical theology?

Will biblical inerrancy, which has survived a tough struggle in some circles, continue to thrive among evangelical leaders? Will we be faithful to the word of Him who is the one and only Way, Truth and Life?

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3. Will we place our need to control, which is based on fear, on the altar as a sacrifice and begin to rely on the Holy Spirit?

Will we trust His undershepherds without the red tape of boards, committees and votes? Will we listen to Hebrews 13:17?

4. Will we embrace people from other cultures and backgrounds?

Will we finally put to death the idea of the "white church," "black church," "hispanic church," etc.? Can we value our cultural heritage without the competitive idea that my culture is better than your culture?

5. Will we create a safe place for people to deal with their hurts, habits and hang-ups in the light of the gospel?

Can we ever assure people that we won't use their past against them and handcuff them to their shame?

6. Can we grow up and get over our demand for our own preferences to be met?

Will we be able to adapt our communication to the language of humanity instead of church-ese? Will we welcome newcomers with love and wisdom, and listen and learn from them rather than leaving the responsibility of adaptation to them?

7. Will we make prayer and submission to God the priority over polished productions and performances?

8. Will we take risks?

Spend money, change names, reconstitute, relaunch, help the new church plant down the street, and venture into new mission fields by faith rather than remaining safe and comfortable? Not all of these apply to everyone, of course, but will we take the necessary risks?

More than ever, we need to keep our passion hot for Jesus, His truth, His church, new churches, new mission fields, unreached people, uninvolved believers, unforgiven sinners, the least, the last and the lost. Pretty much everything else can be left behind.

END ARTICLE

original article at <http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/166125-brandon-cox-death-questions-your-church-must-ask.html?p=3>

I (Solomon101) would also add a ninth question myself. It would be

9. Are we willing to prioritize finances, leadership skills, people resources, prayer time, facilities and man hours to the children and youth ministries over other things?

The reason is quite simple. In study after study after study it has been found that about 80% of all people who ever make a commitment to following Jesus Christ have done so by age 18! Approximately 90% of folks that ever make that full and total commitment to follow Jesus Christ have done so by age 20! The most receptive target is that 9-14 year old range. About 80% of the 80% make that decision to follow Christ in those years. Astoundingly that means about 65% of the people that normally ever commit to Jesus Christ and become His follower do so between ages 9-14!

Well...if 80-90 percent of all the fish ever caught are caught in the pond of less than 20 years of age then we should make fishing there a very, very high priority on every decision level!

Surely we understand that in the natural! If 90% of all natural fish ever caught were caught in Lake Xyz then surely we would be smart enough to make fishing there a high priority if we actually wanted to catch fish!

In the spiritual that may mean the adults not getting things the way they wish or prefer.... but if you want to actually catch fish then you must fish for that type of fish!

If a person wants to catch crappie but is fishing with methods that are designed to catch giant lake trout or muskies they will catch virtually no fish!

The crappie were catchable.... but the method employed by the fisherman was incompatible with the fish he was trying to catch. People are much the same way. Each group has differences that must be taken into account to fish for them effectively! If we fish for children and teens the same way we fish for 50 year olds then the number of children and teens re

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sponding will be very, very, very low. Not because they weren't open and "catchable"....it's because the methods and lures used were not ones that could catch children and teens.

We must have at least as much sense in the church when fishing for peoples eternal souls as a natural fisherman has fishing for a natural fish!

A crappie is not a muskie (esox masquinongy if you want to look them up). You must tailor your fishing methods to the type of fish you wish to catch. The exact same principle applies spiritually in fishing for men!

It seems apparent to me after almost 30 years of ministry that the price tag of "change" or "personal comfort" is far, far larger than most people are willing to pay. They reach very few people for Christ because their desire to retain what is familiar to them and their personal comfort outweighs their willingness to embrace change or something different for the sake of reaching the unsaved. Many eventually begin to believe their personal preferences are actually "Godly and spiritual", rather than just personal preference. Often they begin to then proactively attack those people and ways that are actually reaching folks with the Gospel!

Very thought provoking stuff. Much needed discussions should be had around these thoughts with Christian leaders, church boards, councils, ministry staff, para church organizations, etc.

Re: 8 LIFE OR DEATH QUESTIONS YOUR CHURCH MUST ASK - posted by passerby, on: 2013/4/2 18:40

I agree, we have to be ready to give-up our the traditions, songs, sermons, core values, friends, mentors, our reputation, or a church.

And like in the past there are 'pre-conversion' and 'post-conversion' difficulties the church should recognize.

For example the young converts, how are we to take care of them for the Lord. These people are very mobile, they will face a lot of big temptations, belief crisis, moneys needs, job and career needs; big, big, worries and troubles from every side.

What are we going to do about them, just declare them either phonies or real?