THE PURPOSE DRIVEN CHURCH

By Rick Warren

This book is written for anyone interested in helping his or her church grow and most of the lessons are gleaned from the New Testament which is undoubtedly the greatest church-growth book ever written – it is the owner’s manual for the church – for the church is the body of Christ and belongs to Him.

One of the main reasons I waited twenty years to write this book was because I was too busy putting into practice these principles in my own church and nothing in this book is theory. Most of our successes as a church have been the result of trial and error and some of our discoveries were purely accidental. We have often grabbed the cat by the tail and we have the cuts and scars to prove it!

Vision – most people think of ‘vision’ as the ability to see the future, but in today’s rapidly changing world, vision is also the ability to accurately assess current changes and take advantage of them. Vision is being alert to opportunities. The true measurement of the health of your church is its sending capacity, not its seating capacity. How many people from your church are being mobilized for the Great Commission?

The life changing Good News of Christ is meant for everyone, not just Christians. If we truly believe this, how many of our services are tuned such that we can bring our unsaved friends to attend along with us? The church must offer people something they cannot get anywhere else. Jesus’ ministry attracted enormous crowds because the Gospel is good news! And though Jesus drew large crowds, yet he never compromised the truth. There were times when many stopped following him because they found some truths too difficult to follow. Jesus never lowered his standards, but he always started where people were and no wonder that “sinners” and other outcasts of his day found comfort in his company. Unfortunately, can the same be said of our churches today? Where have we gone wrong? Does it lie in the lack of sincere love for unbelievers? Growing cold towards other people?

If you want to draw others to Jesus, take time to learn the skills. Read and meditate His word, read good Christian books, attend conferences, observe and learn from other leaders. Christ’s message is unchanging and eternal, but the methods we need to use to communicate it changes depending on the people group we want to reach and we must be sensitive to cultural differences. The book of Acts has many examples of how the first Christians used different methods for different situations. Remember, the primary purpose of the church is to win the world for Jesus Christ.

A major challenge in today’s world for both the individual Christian and the church is to keep the main thing the main thing! Don’t try to do too much and become distracted by good, but less important agendas, crusades and purposes. No one is meant to do everything at once. Energy wasted on trivial issues is a tragedy. Efficiency is doing things right, but effectiveness (what is truly needed) is doing the right things!

Look at Christ’s ministry on earth. What did Jesus do while he was here? What would he do if he were here today? Whatever he did while here in a physical body, he wants continued in his spiritual body, the church. Two statements by Jesus summarize it all: the Great Commandment (Matt 22:37-40) and the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20). The purpose driven church must be driven by the Great Commandment (Love the Lord with all your heart and Love your neighbour as yourself) and the Great Commission (Go and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to obey).

The quickest way to discover a Christian’s and a church’s priorities is to look at their budget and calendar. The way we spend our time and the way we spend our money show what is really important to us, regardless of what we claim to believe. If we truly believe that reaching the unreached is important, it should show in our budget and calendar! Often, our fellowships become so close knit that newcomers are unable to break through and do not feel welcome. If all the
relationships we want to nurture are those of our believing friends, how can we witness to our unbelieving friends? While it is important to grow into spiritual maturity, this is not an end in itself! Maturity is for ministry!!

For your church to be most effective in evangelism, you must decide on a target. Discover what types of people live in your area, decide which of those groups your church is best equipped to reach and then discover which styles of evangelism best match your target. Why go through all this trouble? Because the more you understand someone, the easier it is to communicate with him. And each human being is of such infinite worth that God paid for and bought with His only Son.

Fishing for men (like for fish) is often a messy and smelly business. We have to get our feet in muddy water! How serious are we really about the Great Commission? Are you willing to go to any length and be uncomfortable in order to win people to Christ? Paul always allowed his target to determine his approach. He describes his strategy in I Corinthians 9:19-22. Jesus himself used no standard approach in evangelism. He simply started wherever people were. When he was with the woman at the well, he talked about living waters; when he was with fishermen, the talked about catching fish; when he was with farmers, he talked about sowing seed.

As Christians, fishing for men cannot be a hobby; it is to be our lifestyle. What else can we learn from Jesus who was called the “friend of sinners?” People could feel that Jesus loved being with them. Even little children wanted to be around him, which speaks volumes about the kind of person he was. Loving unbelievers the way Jesus did is the key! Without his passion for the lost, we will be unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to reach them. We must intentionally act in ways that demonstrate our love for newcomers in our church and those who don’t know Christ. Love is much more than a feeling; it is a behaviour pattern. It means being sensitive to someone else’s needs and putting them ahead of our own. Our world is filled with lonely people starving for love and acceptance. Changed lives are a church’s greatest advertisement.

When God’s Word is taught in an uninteresting way, people don’t just think the preacher is boring, they think God is boring! We do not have to make the Bible relevant – it already is! But we have to show its relevance. Jesus taught profound truths in simple ways. Today, we teach simple truths in profound ways. See how often Jesus used a simple story to teach great lessons. Stories hold our attention, stir our emotions and help us remember. Don’t be afraid to use new strategies to reach new people as long as your motive is right. Criticism from a section of Christians is guaranteed when we minister the way Christ did and this should not deter us. Remember that fulfilling God’s purpose for the church must be our priority, not preserving tradition.

In genuine worship, God’s presence is felt, God’s pardon is offered, God’s purposes are revealed and God’s power is displayed. This is a powerful witness to any unbeliever. Regularly create services that are intentionally designed for your church members to bring their friends to. Jesus said that he did not come to be served but to serve. This attitude of unselfish servanthood should permeate our hearts and minds if we are to make any lasting impact on others for Christ. Jesus did so much of his teaching when people were walking or eating with him. Could this have been intentional? When people are involved in activities where they are relaxed, they listen better and are more open to change.

Tuning our life and our church to reaching unbelievers can be hard work. We must know why we do what we do or else we will be defeated by discouragement. When we know we are doing it for Jesus’ sake, and whatever we can do for him is nothing compared to what he has done for us, then nothing can shake us. A church must grow larger and smaller at the same time – meaning the larger a church, more number of small groups are needed to minister to everyone. Every member is a minister. The church does not need spectators but participants. Every church needs an intentional, well planned system for uncovering, mobilizing and supporting the talents and utilizing the time and energies of its members. When you and your church members are involved wholeheartedly in serving God and reaching others for him, there is little time left to argue over trivial issues. The biggest complainers in any church are always those who are not seriously involved in any ministry.
Finally, don’t worry about the growth of your church. Focus on the purposes of your church. Purpose-driven churches are led by purpose-driven leaders. “When David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he died.” (Acts 13:36) God’s purposes for this church are also his purposes for every Christian. I am firmly convinced, as Ezekiel’s experience proved, that no matter how dry the bones may be, God can breathe new life into them. Any church/Christian can come alive if we allow the Spirit to infuse us with a new sense of His purpose. May each of us serve God in our generation. This is what the purpose-driven church is all about.