

*If your actions inspire others to dream more,  
do more and become more,  
you are a leader.*

John Quincy Adams



## ***Challenges of Leadership***

**The Kinds Of Leaders God Needs In  
The Home And In The Church**

**Eastside Church of Christ  
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**“The Kinds of Leaders God Needs In The Home And In The Church”**

Sat AM Session 1: **The Ladder of Leadership**

This lesson will define leadership, clarifying what it is and what it is not.

Sat AM Session 2: **Shepherds, Sheep and Soul-Seeking**

A study for men who are leaders and for those who aspire to be leaders.

Sat PM Session 1: **The Critical Need for the Right Kind of Leadership**

Leadership determines whether a church will rise to be what God wants.

Sat PM Session 2: **More Than Followers**

The present generation of leaders must prepare the next generation.

Sunday AM: **Leadership In The Most Unlikely Places**

A study about unexpected leaders for both men and women—young or old.

Sunday PM: **He Began To Build**

Leadership is not for quitters; it is for finishers. We will learn how to finish!

**Addendum:** Additional Materials on Leadership, Evangelism and Cultural Change

1. Appointed Servants—The Biblical Model For Deacons
2. Lack Of Proper Leadership Hinders Growth
3. What Leaders Must Know About Cultural Change
4. How Leaders Must Respond To Cultural Change
5. Surviving And Thriving In The 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Part One)
6. Surviving And Thriving In The 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Past Two)

Introduction:

1. Across our nation churches are in crisis. Some mainline denominations are collapsing from within. Others are stagnant or uncertain about the future. Should we also be pessimistic about our future?
2. We are not doomed to repeat the errors of the denominations. We firmly believe in God's plan and pattern for His church. God's kingdom is a kingdom of greatness and success (Daniel 2:44).
  - a. Men and women must step up and be the kinds of leaders that God needs in His kingdom.
  - b. God needs leaders today like Timothy, Priscilla, Aquila, Phoebe and Ephaphroditus. All of these were servant-leaders. That's what leaders are—*servants* to God and to His people.
3. There is a leadership ladder that exists. Knowledge of that ladder is fundamental to our success.

The Lesson:

**I. The First Rung: Learning about the need for leaders.**

- A. Without effective leaders, everything breaks down.
  1. Lack of leaders spells doom. Everything rises or falls based on leadership (*Maxwell*).
  2. Old Testament Israel met its doom because of a lack of good leaders, Ezekiel 34:5-6.
- B. The need for leaders among God's people.
  1. There may be no greater need in the church today. It is not difficult to see that need.
  2. Leaders have vision, goals and objectives. Leaders influence people in the Lord's way. Leaders are able to see what needs to be done and then do it!
- C. Hear what Jesus said about the need for leaders, Matthew 9:36-38.

**II. The Second Rung: Learning what leadership is.**

- A. There are many misconceptions about what constitutes leadership.
  1. *Intellect* doesn't necessarily make one a good leader.
  2. *Achievement* is not to be confused with leadership.
  3. *Management skills* do not always translate into leadership skills.
  4. *Position* doesn't make a man a leader. Some believe if a man is given a position, that makes him a leader. Saul was given a position, but was a poor leader, 1 Samuel 14:45. He made foolish decisions and misdirected the nation of Israel.

B. “Leadership is Influence.”

1. Jesus is the greatest leader of all time. Jesus has influenced millions to follow Him. He has no equal. He has been, and continues to be, the greatest influence on human history.
2. The essence of influence involves getting others to follow. If no one is following you, then you are not a leader—regardless of your intellect, achievement or position!
3. “Leadership is influence.” That definition was first given by J.O. Sanders in his book *Spiritual Leadership*. “Leadership is influence.” It is nothing more or less than that.

**III. The Third Rung: Learning from Lord about leadership.**

- A. Bookstore shelves are filled with leadership books. Some may be helpful for God’s people.
- B. But the one book that is most important is also the most neglected book in the world.
  1. The Bible is a book about leaders—about prophets, priests, princes and kings; it is about apostles, deacons and shepherds—all leadership roles.
  2. The Bible shows us good and bad leaders. It shows how leaders were trained. It instructs us about mentoring and selection of leaders, and what part leaders play in God’s service.
- C. Do we believe 2 Timothy 3:16-17? If so, then the Bible is our leadership book!

**IV. The Fourth Rung: Learning that leadership requires growth.**

- A. We are not born as leaders, but we are born to be leaders.
  1. Becoming a leader is a process, not an event. An event may give a person a *position*, but it requires growth to become an *effective leader*. Remember King Saul.
  2. By contrast, look at some leaders in the Bible who did grow.
    - a. Josiah was king at age eight, 2 Kings 22-23. His life is about personal growth.
    - b. The Apostle Peter grew as a leader, overcoming his impulsiveness and impatience.
    - c. Young Timothy began his work as a boy, but achieved much as a man. His life is about learning, of being mentored by Paul—until he became a mentor, 2 Timothy 2:2.

- B. The story of Joseph is a classic example that demonstrates leadership requires growth.
1. He had to overcome obstacles in order to be second in all of Egypt (Genesis 41:40).
  2. We must understand that Joseph *became* a great leader. He was not born as a leader. Numerous obstacles in his life had to be overcome for him to be what he became. In spite of all these obstacles, Joseph rose to a position of leadership in Egypt.
    - a. He had developed and demonstrated competence in Potiphar's house.
    - b. He was unswerving in his faithfulness to God. He believed God's way was best!
    - c. He consistently demonstrated patience and integrity in dealing with others.
    - d. No single event in his life qualified Joseph as a leader. Rather, it was a long, slow process from age 17 to 30 (13 years) that equipped him to be a leader.
  3. God worked behind the scenes to make him a leader! When you go through disappointments, maybe God is using those things to prepare you for leadership in years to come. If you would be a leader, have faith, persevere, live right, and grow!

Conclusion:

1. Joseph shows what can happen when the right things are consistently practiced. It was his faithfulness and consistency in what he did every day that made him the leader that he was.
2. Calvin Murphy (Houston Rockets, 1970-1983) at 5'9" was an NBA star. His *skills were the result of growth!* Growth doesn't happen overnight. Like Joseph, his success came from what he did every day. *No single event* made Murphy a star. It was on the court that he showed he *was* a star, but he *became* a star because of his daily routine. It happens that way with every leader, even you!

**Introduction:**

1. When we think in terms of those men who are chosen to lead the local church we almost always use the term “elder” (a scriptural term – Acts 20:17) to describe that office. While there is nothing wrong with that term, we may have used it almost to the exclusion of other terms. There are several other words that are used to describe this same worker in the church. One of those terms has not been given the attention that it needs in many local churches.
2. God uses the term “shepherd” (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2) to describe, not just the worker, but the function of this worker in the local church. He is a shepherd because he shepherds the sheep. I am convinced that we need to reexamine the role this man plays in God’s arrangement.
3. Everywhere I go I try to urge men to prepare themselves for the eldership. It is one of the great needs in the Lord’s church today. But, when I talk to men, I don’t want to merely talk about men filling an office; I want to talk to men about truly being shepherds.
4. Typically, when the Bible mentions shepherds, it’s not talking about elders. Most often, it is talking about literal shepherds who tend flocks of sheep in a field. Yet, from those passages about shepherds, we can learn what shepherds in the church are supposed to do. God chose the term *shepherd* to describe the elder because his work is so much like the shepherd who tends his flock in the field.
5. When Paul left Titus at Crete, he gave specific instructions that were designed to arrange the local church in the way God wanted, Titus 1:5. If Paul were to write a letter to us today, he might still find some things lacking. It is not just a matter of appointing men as in the days of Titus. It is more a matter of those men serving God and the local church in the way that God intended.

**The Lesson:****I. Sometimes, local churches do not have the order God intended.**

- A. While a local church may have men who are called bishops, deacons, and evangelists (Philippians 1:1; Ephesians 4:11), those men may have their roles poorly defined or even confused.
- B. Sometimes evangelists have taken up the work that primarily belongs to the shepherds.
  1. That is, the preacher seeks after the straying sheep. He may make periodic reports to the elders about the status of wayward members, but the primary care, feeding and nurturing of the sheep belongs to the evangelist.
  2. In some churches, attendance may be falling and members straying. The elders call the preacher in and ask, “What’s going on?” They expect him to shepherd the sheep.
  3. While no one would deny that a preacher can and should be concerned about straying souls, the shepherds of the local church have the primary responsibility for this.

- C. In some churches, elders do work that should go to deacons. They unlock and lock the building, turn lights on and off, set the thermostat, and make sure everything in the building is in order.
  - 1. Their work is directed more at the facility in which the sheep meet—and not the sheep.
  - 2. Shepherds have concern for the facility, but this cannot be among their primary concerns.
  - 3. When prayers are prayed for the elders, what is their primary content? “Lord, please help the elders to make good decisions.” Or, “Lord, please help the elders to oversee these funds wisely.” Is that what God’s shepherds have become? Has their work been reduced to being business managers and decision makers for the local church?
  - 4. There is no evil intent on anyone’s part that has created what has to be called a situation that is “out of order.” No evil intent, but still something that is less than what God wants.
- D. When the preacher does most of the work of shepherding, and the elders do most of the work of deacons, the deacons may be left uncertain about what they are supposed to do.
  - 1. We must be careful not to paint with too broad a brush. God has some terrific local churches where everything is in order and these “out of order” problems do not exist.
  - 2. In churches where things are not in order, the deacons rarely act with initiative on any matter. Every direction, every assignment, must come from the elders. Deacons are not empowered to act without a decision first being made by a meeting of the elders. Every decision about anything that happens in the local church must go through the elders—even to the smallest matter of buying a new broom to sweep the building.

**II. When “out of order” situations exist everything in the local church is hurt by it.**

- A. When roles are confused, nobody functions in the way God intended. This ultimately hurts the sheep who are of that flock; they will not get the kind of care, feeding and nurturing God intended.
- B. But, it will also have a negative impact on evangelism. While such a church may be evangelistic in its outlook, it will have only limited success in its work.
  - 1. Why? Because it often comes down to a one-man show in evangelism. The preacher is expected to seek the lost, teach and convert them. Once they are converted, the care of the new convert is also his responsibility. After a while, he finds that he can’t keep up with the new sheep; they begin to fall away; he begins to get discouraged.
  - 2. He is also expected to visit every sick person, do every wedding and funeral, make regular house calls, attend every meeting—and soon becomes incapable of doing anything else. He gets spread so thin that he doesn’t do anything well.
  - 3. The preacher (and even the elders) may want the church to do more evangelism and to be more effective, but it rarely happens. The preacher would like to set a pattern for others in the local church so they will follow his example. But he can’t keep up. Evangelism suffers mightily in this arrangement.

- C. But it is not just evangelism that suffers. The sheep suffer. Biblical shepherding (pastoral care—it is elders who are pastors—not the preacher) is critical for the well-being of the flock, and for the individual sheep.
1. One person (a preacher) cannot adequately care for the needs of much more than 100 people—if that many. The challenges of our time are just too great.
  2. The problems of our culture are reflected in the local church. There are more family issues with kids, more troubled marriages, more financial crises in the lives of Christians than ever before. That is what is found in our culture. That is what is found in local churches. That means more attention must be given to the needs of the sheep.
  3. Add to this, the fact that our culture is biblically illiterate—and that, too, has impacted the local church (Christians today know less than previous generations), people lack the Bible knowledge to deal properly with the issues they face. Thus, the need for shepherding is greater than ever before. And the work is more difficult than ever before.

### **III. Only a return to God's order will help us face the challenges of our time.**

- A. When the roles are as God intended, the work of evangelism, as well as everything else in the local church, should produce far greater results. I am happy to tell you that is what is happening in many churches across the land. A Scriptural change is taking place that has long been needed. It is a new day in church leadership that carries much promise.
- B. Preachers leading in evangelism, 2 Timothy 2:2, equipping others to follow in his footsteps.
- C. Deacons who are “over this business,” Acts 6:1-7. This is the “Jerusalem church model.”
1. The problem: widows were not properly cared for (verse 1). The solution: appoint and authorize capable men to manage the distribution (verses 2-4). The results: the results are two-fold. The problem is solved, but see the effects (5-7). We have a happy church (5-6). The grumbling and complaining ended. Evangelism continued to increase (7).
  2. Why deacons' work is so critically important: Their work made the church function well!
  3. Elders can decide what works belong to deacons. Whatever work is deemed appropriate by them with respect to building and maintenance, lawn and landscaping, budgeting, seeing to widows, transportation, benevolence, recording and PA systems—let them do their work.
  4. Churches that are doing well have deacons who are functioning well.

- D. Shepherds who have the primary care of the sheep—of the feeding and nurturing the sheep, and of seeking the straying sheep, Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-5; Luke 15:4.
1. One goal of shepherding is to be close to the sheep, to build relationships where the sheep trust them and turn to them in times of need. If we have not developed a caring relationship with the sheep, then none of the other things we are trying to do will be very successful.
  2. Shepherding principles run through the entire Bible—Old and New Testaments. God has always needed faithful shepherds. Scripture shows what a faithful shepherd does. Historically, shepherding has been looked on with disfavor. It wasn't good to be a "shepherd" in the old west. The same was true in old Egypt, Genesis 46:34b. "Shepherd" sounds gentler than "shepherd," but the meaning is the same. God's people were often shepherds, and though it was a lawful calling, it was dirty and smelly. Shepherds smelled because they were close to the sheep. God's shepherds today smell like sheep!
- E. Respecting roles is critical for success. In the big-picture sense, the local church is engaged in the work of soul-seeking, evangelism, winning the lost from outside the church to Jesus.
1. While this is a work that all can do, let the evangelist be a leader in this work.
  2. Let the deacons lead in those special areas of service that are given to them.
  3. Let the shepherds tend to the needs of sheep. That is fundamentally what they are called to do. That is why it is important for others to do their own work and do it well. When the various roles are respected, then elders are free to shepherd the flock.
  4. When everyone is in their proper place, the church can function well in saving souls. But if things are out of order, it can result in confusion, resentment, and lack of success.
  5. May God bless those men who respect God's order and who function accordingly.
  6. Today, let shepherds nurture the sheep; let evangelists lead in converting souls; let deacons be "over this business" that would otherwise hinder elders and evangelists.
- F. The bottom line of all of this is that elders must focus on the care and nurturing of the sheep. God intended for shepherds to be shepherds. If men like myself—and the shepherds at this church— are not seeking the sheep and their well-being, then we are not truly shepherds at all. Let us heed the call of God that is upon our lives and model ourselves after the Great Shepherd.

Conclusion:

1. Possibly the greatest benefit of the biblical model is that it fulfills Hebrews 13:17. Faithful men must do this critical work.
2. Let those men look into their own hearts, and then serve to the glory of God!

**Introduction:**

1. One key to success in a local church is found in having good shepherds, Acts 20:28-32.
  - a. God expects these leaders to be of high character and sound moral fiber.
  - b. What is true of leaders in the church is true of leaders in every place—the home, work, in parenting, and in the community. “Everything rises or falls based on leadership” (John Maxwell).
2. There is a critical need for leadership in the church—a critical need for the *right kind* of leadership. Whatever one’s leadership role might be, there must be the right character within the heart of that person in order to be the kind of leader God wants him to be.
3. There is a man in the Bible who was not an elder; he was not even part of the New Testament church. Yet he demonstrated that he could fill the critical role of leadership. He had the character a leader needs. The man was a father, and as a father, he serves as a model for those who would “rule well their own houses, that they might also take care of the church of God,” 1 Timothy 3:5.
  - a. Joshua was not only a great military leader, he was a great family man, Joshua 24:14-15.
  - b. His statement in this last sentence shows his determination to lead his family in the right way. There are lessons for leaders today to be learned from Joshua.

**The Lesson:****I. Five lessons for fathers from Joshua.**

- A. Concern about danger. The danger Israel faced was spiritual in nature--idolatry. God’s leader has the same concern whether leading nation, family or church.
- B. Courage to think for himself. The world looks with disfavor on a man who thinks for himself. A father must think independently of current fads and opinion.
- C. Conviction to stand alone. Joshua was one who was able to march to the beat of a different drummer. A godly father not only exercises authority in the home, but does so in the fear of God. He is not independent of God’s influence.
- D. Commitment to influence others. Joshua took responsibility for what others would do with their lives. Good fathers don’t let their kids run without direction.
- E. Confidence to speak for others. Joshua is not a boaster; this is a humble statement of commitment and determination, that as far as he can influence his family, he will do so. We must learn to express confidence that our children will do right. We cannot say with absolute certainty what our kids may do, but we can expect them to serve the Lord.

- II. **Five lessons for leaders in the church**—particularly those who shepherd the church. Qualities that make good fathers--make good bishops in the church, 1 Timothy 3:4-5. Character exhibited in one's own house prepare him to lead God's house. These points extend beyond the eldership.
- A. Concern about danger. He is not merely concerned with physical things, but about spiritual things. In the early church elders guarded against dangers from Judaizers, Gnostics, pagan influences, etc., 2 Corinthians 11:2-3; Acts 20:28-31; Titus 1:9. There are countless modern dangers that elders must be on guard against. The devil has not quit making his assaults on the church. This is the elders' first responsibility. We pray, "help the elders...good decisions." But, decision-making is not the main thing they do; to be alert and watchful is!
  - B. Courage to think independently. They are under pressure; they live in your world. They watch TV, read newspapers and face the same pressure to conform as you do. They are under pressure of family. Elders may make a decision, go home, and face family pressure to change the decision. He goes back and says, "We can't...." He would rather face three other elders than his wife and kids. He is under pressure from preachers. An elder who allows a preacher to control him is unworthy to be an elder, though he mustn't be self-willed. They are under pressure from brotherhood papers. Will papers pull his strings? They are under pressure from other churches. He can't ask what other churches will think, but "Is this right or wrong?" God's will must rule him.
  - C. Conviction to stand alone. God's leader concedes matters of judgment. This is not the place to take a stand. But, the elder has no right to compromise what God has said--matters of faith! The church is not a democracy, but a kingdom. In a democracy, authority comes from people, from beneath. In a kingdom, authority comes from above. (This isn't to say that elders give no ear to the people; they must, in matters of judgment.) But, in matters of right and wrong, the voice that is listened to is the voice from above, 1 Peter 5:2-4; Acts 20:28. Elders must be assertive in insisting that God's will be done. Timidity is not modesty. Lack of leadership is not humility. Shepherds need to be in the forefront of leading in the way that is right.
  - D. Commitment to influence others. God expresses what the elders' goals must be in Ephesians 4:11-16. They are to prepare the saints to be ministers to edify the body of Christ. To bring to the unity of the faith; to make the body a united, working unit. To bring to Christlikeness; that all may imitate Christ and be mature in him. To bring to stability in conviction; that all may know and do what is right. To bring diligence in teaching. This causes the growth of the body unto edifying of itself. When this happens, those shepherds are successful. No matter what else may be said of a church--its attendance, contribution, plans--if this isn't happening, the eldership is less than God wants. Elders are responsible to see to it that God's house is faithful to God.
  - E. Confidence to speak for others. He must be willing to say, "This congregation is going to be loyal to God." There needs to be encouragement, not berating. The congregation needs to see itself as a united

body of people who love God and one another. Just as a child has an image of self, so does a church. Churches have to have faults pointed out, but constant berating benefits little.

Conclusion:

1. What is the why of it all? Just so the church can run efficiently? The bottom line has to do with souls.
2. Elders are in the soul business, Hebrews 13:17. It is a love for souls, a desire to see souls in heaven. That is why elders not only care for the souls already saved, but must encourage the church to be aggressive in evangelism. Let us all seek souls.

**Introduction:**

1. In Luke 5:27 Jesus said to Levi, "Follow Me." Levi—also known as Matthew—followed Jesus.
  - a. But, Matthew and all the apostles, were *more than followers*. They *equipped others to lead*.
  - b. Among the last words spoken to these men was the great commission, Matthew 28:19–20.
  - c. These disciples obeyed Jesus and were eminently successful in impacting the world for Him.
2. What caused them to be successful? That's the question we will explore in our study.

**The Lesson:****I. Jesus, the apostles, and you and me.****A. *What Jesus Did.***

1. In three and one-half years of ministry—He did not focus on merely gaining followers. If His mission was only to gain followers, He wasn't very successful. When He left earth, He had about 120 disciples who seemed to be loyal to Him. Not a very good showing.
2. Instead, Jesus focused on training a few men to do His work after He left earth. (Matthew 10:16, 27; John 17:14, 20 show us something of how Jesus prepared these men.)
3. Three and one-half years were consumed in equipping these men for the greatest task of all time. Only after these years of training did He send them out, Matthew 28:19-20.

**B. *What The Apostles Did.***

1. While Peter, Paul, James and John taught thousands to follow Jesus, they were also involved in something else that was just as significant—training others to be leaders!
2. Consider the work of the Apostle Paul. From Acts 13 onward, Paul never seemed to go anywhere or do anything without having someone at his side.
  - a. On his first journey he ventured out with Barnabas and John Mark (Acts 13:2, 13).
  - b. On his second journey he travelled with Silas (Acts 15:40).
  - c. Paul had barely begun his second journey when he chose young Timothy to be at his side as he travelled and preached (Acts 16:1-3).
  - d. As Paul and his party were about to go over into Macedonia, it is apparent that Luke was part of his group (Acts 16:9-10).
  - e. At Corinth, it was Priscilla and Aquila who labored with Paul (Acts 18:1-3).
  - f. At least seven men are part of Paul's company as he headed for Troas (Acts 20:4-5).
3. Were these other Christians merely co-workers with Paul, or were they something else?
  - a. Read 2 Timothy 2:2. Paul did the same thing as Jesus. He mentored others.
  - b. Now Paul tells Timothy to do as he has done. Timothy was to train others!



C. *What We Must Do.*

1. For three and one-half years Jesus mentored and equipped His disciples. For more than 20 years Paul mentored and equipped others to do the work of God.
2. The task now falls to us. The task, not just of teaching others, but of mentoring and equipping others to do the Lord's business. We are building kingdom leaders.
3. We have a mission to equip the next generation, Ephesians 4:11–13. Are you a teacher? Teach another to teach. Are you an evangelist? Instruct another in evangelism.
4. There is a genuine need for more workers, Matthew 9:36-38. We have a worker shortage. If you prepare more workers to do some of what you are doing, you will make a ton of progress. One man, or a small group of men and woman, cannot do the work by themselves. Did someone take time to train you to serve? You were trained, now train others.

II. **You can impact the future.**

A. *That's what leaders do.*

1. We mentor others to do what we are doing. Each of us who serve should do that.
2. Jesus changed the world through 12 men. He impacted the future. What are we doing?
3. Moms and dads need to mentor kids. It's called being a parent, Ephesians 6:1-4.

B. *That's what shepherds do.*

1. Bishops in the Lord's church impact the future. First, they impact the eternal destiny of men and women. Second, they are deeply involved in the training and equipping others.
2. Elders must replicate themselves. They are leaders who lead others to be shepherds!
3. Why do some churches no longer have elders? They did not prepare the next generation.

C. *That's what Jesus did.*

1. Jesus planned beyond the present—with a plan to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).
2. He thought long-term! Here are seven things Jesus did as He mentored His disciples.
  - a. **He saw their potential.** He saw, not what they were, but what they could become. He took deeply flawed men and changed them by His life and teaching.
  - b. **He focused on the best potential leaders.** Jesus did not try to make everyone an apostle. Why not? Because not everyone would make a good apostle (or qualify).
  - c. **He was patient with those He trained.** He knew their weaknesses, but didn't give up on them when they fell short of His expectations. See Peter in Matthew 16:21-23.
  - d. **He treated them as individuals.** He gave the apostles individual counseling and guidance. Jesus did that because individuals have differing needs. See John 14:5-9.
  - e. **He Invested time in individuals.** While Jesus often dealt with large crowds, it is equally true that He spent private time with the apostles. See John 13:1-5.
  - f. **He asked for an enormous commitment.** Jesus did not soft-sell what would be required of them. He sought a massive commitment from them, Mark 10:28.

g. **He prepared them to succeed.** Jesus believed in the success of His kingdom, Matthew 16:18.

He believed in the success of the work of the apostles, Acts 1:8.

D. We can use every one of these things as we train and mentor others. Elders, deacons and teachers need to mentor others to serve. You need to mentor someone to take your place.

Conclusion:

1. What is your place of service in the kingdom? You *do* have a place, Ephesians 4:11-16.
2. If you recognize that you have a place, then mentor another to fit into that place.

**Introduction:**

1. Some of the great leaders in history are those who would never have been thought to be leaders.
  - a. Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison before becoming president of South Africa.
  - b. Abraham Lincoln, born in a log cabin and raised in abject poverty, became our 16<sup>th</sup> president.
  - c. Moses, at age 80, became the leader of God's people, setting them free from Egypt.
2. These are special men who are known around the world. But there are other leaders who also come from very unlikely places. These leaders may not be in the history books, but they are leaders, nonetheless. They are leaders used by God for His purposes. We are talking about leadership in the Lord's church—what we call "Leadership in the Most Unlikely Places."

**The Lesson:****I. Leadership is for Saints.**

- A. Let us address a fallacy: "Leadership in the Lord's church means being an elder." That sentence works if inverted: "Being an elder in the Lord's church means leadership." But, there can and should be many leaders—both men and women—in the church who are not elders.
- B. Leadership is for saints.
  1. We cannot emphasize too strongly the need for leaders in a dozen areas of service.
  2. Do we need leaders in evangelism? Both men and women can lead in evangelism.
  3. Do we need leaders in caring for the sick and shut-ins? Women are often the best leaders when it comes to planning and carrying out this kind of work.
  4. Do we need leaders in teaching children? What were Lois and Eunice in 2 Timothy 1:5?
  5. We need to see leadership in a very different light than what we have traditionally done. Leadership isn't strictly just for elders and deacons.
  6. Can you be an influence for good among your circle of friends in the church? If so, then by the definition we are using ("Leadership is influence") you are a leader.
- C. Be convinced that leadership is for saints—and is not limited to a few select people.

**II. Leadership requires Sight.**

- A. Someone has to see the need that a friend has for the gospel. Someone has to see the need to care for a shut-in. Leadership requires sight. It often involves *seeing* what others don't see.
- B. Consider Nehemiah—a leader in the huge task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.
  1. Yet, when we first meet him, he is the cupbearer to the King of Persia (Nehemiah 1:11).
  2. When he learned of the condition of the walls of the city, he acted, Nehemiah 1:1-4.

3. But what could he do? He was no construction worker or foreman or stonemason.
- C. But Nehemiah was a leader. Leadership requires sight. He could see what others could not see. Before Nehemiah ever left Persia he knew what his task was.
1. He saw **farther** than others. He saw Jerusalem's place in the plan of God. Can you see your congregation's place in God's plan of God? Do you see your part in the plan of God? *You do have a part*, [Ephesians 4:16](#).
  2. He saw **more** than others. He saw what could be done. God is looking for those who see possibilities—and not just in building projects! What do you see in evangelism?
  3. He saw **before** others. When he went to Jerusalem, he convinced others to work with him in building the wall. Maybe you can show others the possibilities you see.
- D. But why Nehemiah? Why not someone who was already in Jerusalem? There were thousands of Jews who already lived in Jerusalem. Why had they not rebuilt the walls? Maybe instead of making brick and mortar they were making excuses.
- E. Rebuilding the city walls was a massive undertaking, but it was accomplished in only 52 days (Nehemiah 6:15). An amazing task! But Nehemiah, rather than being a dreamer, was a realist.
1. He knew what could be done and did it! He began with the end in mind—a finished wall.
  2. In order for Nehemiah to be successful, he needed the ongoing support of others in his work, [Nehemiah 2:17-20](#). Maybe you can be one of those who supports others!
  3. Nehemiah—what an incredible story of leadership in the most unlikely places!

### III. Leadership is about Servantship.

- A. That's what Nehemiah was. He was a servant to God and to His people.
1. Jesus is both the greatest leader and greatest servant of all time, [Matthew 20:25-28](#).
  2. We call Paul a great leader. Why? Because he saw himself as a servant, [Romans 1:1](#).
- B. The story of a servant: sister Lourie Suits. A story of leadership in the most unlikely places.
1. She was loved by everyone at the Emerson Avenue church in Indianapolis. She was an elderly woman who had numerous handicaps but was a leader in the church!
  2. Sister Suits was looked up to—respected—by every member of the congregation. Both young and old would go to her for advice. Preachers and elders sought her counsel.
  3. Our churches are filled with women who serve God with the same dedication as sister Suits. You can name several in your congregation who are godly, kind and generous.
  4. Not every leader in a congregation has a formal position of leadership!
  5. Sister Suits was a gentle soul who *reached out to others* and touched many lives. In spite of her many handicaps, she helped numerous people find their way home to God.
- C. When you are a servant and reach out to others, others will trust in you and seek your guidance and counsel. You can help them find their way home to God. It is about servantship!

Conclusion:

1. Indeed, leadership is sometimes found in the most unlikely places. We serve a God who is able to do things with people—things we would not expect or anticipate.
2. Will you let God use you? Set your heart on being a servant. Live a godly, humble life so you can influence others for good. Imitate the Master.

**Introduction:**

1. There is a man in the Bible who is a whole lot like you and me. Read Luke 14:28-30.
  - a. This man is like us, because he did what most of us have done.
  - b. At some point in life, with good intentions, we started something, but didn't finish it.
2. You've got to give this man some credit, because some of the things I didn't finish, I never even started. At least he got started. Can you imagine what his friends and neighbors must have said?
  - a. "Whatever happened to all your plans? Why did you stop? I thought surely you would finish..."
  - b. In this case, it is plain what happened: he ran out of money. Everyone runs out of something when they don't finish—money, time, conviction, energy or patience.
  - c. I am asking folks—whether young or old—will you be like this man? Will you be a quitter?

**The Lesson:**

- I. **Some examples from the Bible of people who started but didn't finish.**
  - A. Demas, 2 Timothy 4:10. He was once a faithful worker, Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24. What happened to Demas? He began to build, but ran out of something. It wasn't money.
  - B. Peter, Matthew 26:31-35. Everyone knows what Peter did, Matthew 26:69-75. Peter ran out of courage, conviction and determination.
  - C. Saul, Solomon, Samson and others are men who had a good start but encountered problems.
- II. **Some examples outside the Bible of people who started but didn't finish.**
  - A. Will *you* be an example? Millions are! Multitudes plan great things, but don't do: "I'm going to read the Bible through." "I'm going to teach the gospel." "I'm going to be a song leader."
  - B. "Whatever happened...?" Those are sad words. People plan great things, but don't do. Now they only look back and think of what might have been. Will you be among those?

III. **What really happens when folks don't finish? Text: Philippians 3:7-14.**

- A. *They didn't really mean it.* Some talk, but aren't serious about what they say.
1. In the 1960s the old TV show, *Route 66*, inspired many to say they wanted to live a carefree life, traveling across America in a new Corvette. How many were serious?
  2. See Philippians 3:13. Like Paul, you must be serious.
- B. *They didn't have a plan to do it.* People who don't plan don't do.
1. Alice (in Wonderland) asked the cat, "Would you tell me which way to go?" The cat said, "That depends on where you want to go." Alice replied, "I don't much care where."
  2. You've got to care which way you are going in life, then develop a plan to get there. With no plan, you have no direction. You must have a plan and direction, Philippians 3:14.
- C. *They didn't count the cost.* Unlike the man building the tower, you must count the cost.
1. Some folks plan, but run out of money, conviction or zeal. Work for God is left undone.
  2. Paul counted the cost and took a loss on things that didn't matter, Philippians 3:7.
- D. *They delayed the plan.* People get satisfaction saying, "Someday..."
1. It makes us feel better that we have good intentions. Good intentions don't count in life.
  2. Successful people develop a *do it now* habit, Philippians 3:13. Will you?
- E. *They got sidetracked.* Some folks don't have discipline to stay with it.
1. I was painting the garage but stopped to watch golf on TV. What happened to the garage?
  2. You must have personal discipline to stay with it to make it to heaven, Philippians 3:13-14.
- F. *They became discouraged.* Sometimes people just give up and quit.
1. They quit because of self-doubt; maybe others threw cold water on their plans.
  2. Never give up. Never. Paul was a man who pressed on, Philippians 3:12. You can do that!
- G. *They were afraid to try.* Fear is powerful—it is the great immobilizer, Matthew 25:25.
1. You are better off to try something great and fail, than try nothing and succeed.
  2. Don't live in fear, Revelation 21:8; Philippians 3:10.

#### IV. Don't wait for the day when you say "It's too late."

A. Good news! Whether young or old, it's not too late to make changes in your life.

1. Some folks buy into the "too late" philosophy. "It's too late for me to study...etc." You are created in God's image. No other creature on earth has the potential you have!
2. You will never have more of your life ahead of you than you do at this present moment.
3. Some older folks say, "I'm too old. I'm past 50." So what? You may have 30+ years ahead of you. You don't know how much time you have. You can't just sit and wait for death.
4. For those who are older, remember great things have been accomplished by older folks!
5. Don't let it happen to you, that you come to the end and have accomplished nothing in life!

B. So, what will you do with your life? There can be great things ahead in your future, but you have to make the right choices now—whether you are young or old.

- |   |           |                              |                             |
|---|-----------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. <i>You can</i> be a Christian (even today).    | Will you? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. <i>You can</i> grow in faith and knowledge.    | Will you? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. <i>You can</i> be an effective Bible reader.   | Will you? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. <i>You can</i> teach someone the gospel.       | Will you? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. <i>You can</i> be a servant to God and others. | Will you? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. <i>You can</i> get out of your comfort zone.   | Will you? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. <i>You can</i> go to heaven—you really can!    | Will you? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

#### Conclusion:

1. In eternity, how will the story of your life read? "He began to build..." The kind of choices you are making right now will determine how the rest of the story goes.
2. In the day of eternity, what will God say to you? Will you let it be the words of Matthew 25:23? You decide. Your decision determines your destiny. It may also determine the destiny of others!

***Challenges of Leadership******Max Dawson*****Introduction:**

1. A number of elderships recognize a need for change in their leadership model. But it is not always easy to know how to make it happen and monitor the change to measure its effectiveness. Churches across America have implemented the necessary changes in a number of ways. The most fundamental part of that change has to do with the work relationships of shepherds and deacons.
2. A lot of elders are doing work that ought to belong to deacons. Would you agree that it would be good if deacons oversaw all building maintenance and operations? What about budgeting issues? What if deacons did the majority of benevolent work within the congregation? It is Scriptural for elders to relinquish much of that kind of work and give it to others. For what reason? So they can be freed to do their most important task: seeing to the needs of sheep (Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28). There has never been a greater need for shepherds to do that work.

**The Lesson:**

- I. **Acts 6:1-7 provides a good model in respect to work relationships. Note these things:**
  - A. There was a serious problem (v. 1). Widows were not properly cared for. The church at Jerusalem had been under an assault from Satan almost from the beginning. Most of the attacks had come from the outside. But this matter was an internal threat.
  - B. If the problem was not solved, there would be ongoing dissension. Furthermore, the apostles would be hindered in their work (v. 2).
  - C. A solution was presented: Seven men could be chosen who would be “over this business” (v. 3). Whether you call these men deacons or not, the principle is unchanged—men were given responsibility to handle an important matter without distracting the church leadership.
  - D. This would free the apostles to continue their work unhindered (v. 4).
  - E. The whole multitude was happy that a workable solution was offered (v.5). This group went from complaining and division to a happy unity.
  - F. And so, the plan was carried out (v. 6).
  - G. The ultimate result was that effective evangelism continued (v. 7). This was a win for everyone.

## II. Three changes took place.

A. This example from Acts 6 seems to be abrupt.

1. It was a change for these seven men. They have been appointed to do something they were not doing before. A change—both Scriptural and effective—was made. And it was for the better.
2. It was a change for the leadership. Prior to this time, the apostles might have had some casual interest in this matter. But now the issue threatened to divide the church. The apostles had to act. Their action was to prevent further damage to the congregation. It would also assure them that they would not be burdened with this matter any further. They could continue their work.
3. It was also a change for the congregation. There would be no more going to the apostles with their complaint. There would be no more grumbling and complaining that some folks were not being properly cared for. Something that could have been a continuing sore spot and the subject of gossip was dealt with. And everyone was happy. There are not many church problems that turn out that way.

B. Some churches today could benefit from the same kinds of changes.

1. Would it be a radical and abrupt change? For some, it would. It might be a substantial change for the men appointed as they recognize that they are to be “over this business” that was given to them. It might mean a transition with respect to benevolence (the issue in Acts 6), budgeting, property maintenance, etc. In Acts 6, there seemed to be an eagerness to get the work done. I have seen similar eagerness in a number of congregations. The deacons were eager to do the work—a vital element for success.
2. It might also be a substantial change for the elders of the church. They would not be hindered with things like “a light is out in the ladies’ restroom.” It would mean they could focus on those things God has called them to do—shepherding the flock of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3).
3. It would also mean a change for the congregation. The congregation would look at preachers, deacons and elders in a different way. The church would not report to the preacher or the elder things like a dripping faucet. The church would also feel more secure knowing that its shepherds were focused on them, rather than on bug sprays or painting the classrooms. Properly understood, Hebrews 13:7 and Hebrews 13:17 give comfort to God’s flock.

### Conclusion:

1. Some churches need a Scriptural realignment. Most churches receive this very well.
2. A new day is dawning for many congregations as they awaken to a Scriptural model for their officers.

General discussion of the biblical model for deacons.

Introduction:

1. The things I will discuss with you in this lesson may not look like leadership issues. They may just look like church problems. And, indeed, they are church problems.
2. But it requires proper leadership to get a church beyond these problems and to effect the change that is necessary to be successful. The things we will present are true whether a church has shepherds leading the congregation or not. The principles are the same.
3. We will begin by looking at some critical things about success.

The Lesson:

**I. How you define success may determine what your future will be.**

A. Here are five different approaches:

1. "Success is impossible in modern America. No one wants to hear the gospel, so there is nothing we can do." With that attitude, you have just voted success off the island.
2. "Success means we keep our little group going as long as we can." With that thought, you don't have to do much. Just let things run their course—and one day close the building.
3. "Success means that we maintain this church by finding people like ourselves (ethnically, socially, economically) who will accept things as they are." You will probably find a few of those and may survive, for at least a while.
4. "Success means we add more people to the Lord's church. We want that, but we can't change any of our means or methods." Remember one of the definitions of insanity...?
5. "Success means we will grow numerically and spiritually, giving glory to God. We will do so by adapting some of our means and methods to the time in which we live—without ever compromising the gospel." That approach just might work.

B. Can you see that it takes proper leadership to get beyond the negative things in this list—whether you have elders or not? Can you see that?

1. Sometimes I hear church leaders say, "We are not that interested in growth." Or, "We don't think growth is that important." Can you see the validity of our lesson title?
2. Or sometimes Christians may ask, "What's wrong with small churches? Why are you so obsessed with converting people?" Because we have a mission (Matthew 28:19). But also this: Sometimes Christians go all hyper-spiritual and act like church growth is a bad thing! (The thinking is, "Small churches are spiritual; big churches are not.") I don't see the logic there. Jesus came to seek and save (Luke 19:10). But we are going to be real careful and make sure we don't save too many of those lost folks.

3. Sometimes we make life to be a real mystery. That is true with respect to evangelism and church growth. There are things we just can't understand why they are the way they are. That's true with life generally, and with winning souls.
  - a. People ask, "Why do I keep getting speeding tickets?" (Why me, God?) The simple truth is you speed every time you are in your car. What a mystery!
  - b. "Why are my friendships always troubled and conflicted?" Are you a gossip?
  - c. "I just don't know why my kids won't talk to me!" Maybe the answer to the mystery is that you have never spent enough time with them to build relationships.
4. Often problems whose origins seem mysterious to us are really not that mysterious. We just can't see the truth for ourselves. The same is true for many of us who want the church to reach new people. We are puzzled about why it just isn't happening. Maybe it's not as mysterious as we think. Maybe there are some things going on that we are not aware of. Or, things are happening in our churches that we don't realize how seriously they are hindering us.

## II. Why your congregation may not be growing.

- A. This may be another of those brutal moments and may engender unpleasant feelings. But, please hear me out. Here are ten things that may hinder you. All have to do with leadership.
  1. *You are in conflict and your leadership is not properly addressing it.*
    - a. Have you ever been in someone's home and the couple began to argue with one another? What did you want to do? Sometimes you can sense the tension in the home even if you are not present to hear the argument.
    - b. Churches are no different. People can sense tension. And they want to get out. The Bible is a manual on conflict resolution. See Philippians 4:2; 2:13, Matthew 18:15-18. Good leadership insists on handling conflict biblically and with humility.
  2. *Your leadership is more in love with the past than with the future.*
    - a. Some of the means, methods and traditions of the 1950's, 1980's, or 2008's don't work anymore! You know I am not talking about the message! The message must never be compromised, Galatians 1:6-8.
    - b. Have you ever heard, "Let's party like it's 1999"? Some churches do church like it's 1999. No website, no social media—and if they do have these they don't tell anyone!
  3. *You are not so great to be around, and no one seems to be aware of that.*
    - a. The world constantly judges us. They don't want fake, hyper-critical or hypocritical.
    - b. They ought to see people whose lives have been changed by Jesus (Romans 8:29). We need to ask ourselves, "Have we let Christ reshape our character, individually? Is our light shining in our community?" People don't gravitate toward those who are unkind, harsh, angry or judgmental. Examine yourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5). Leadership needs to take the lead in demonstrating the character of Christ. We need to be great to be around.



4. *You are focused inwardly, and everyone likes it that way.*
  - a. The members are focused on satisfying their own wants, preferences and desires.
  - b. Many churches are self-focused organizations filled with self-focused people. Outsiders are not valued, desired, welcomed or included. A life devoted to self will ultimately leave you alone—all by yourself. Being outwardly focused has to begin with leadership. Our great leader got that started (Mark 16:15).
5. *You think culture is your enemy—and you constantly attack the culture.*
  - a. While we acknowledge that culture presents challenges, but if all we are is just angry about it, how are we going to reach people in that culture? If you think about, Christians who expect the lost to act like the saved are a mystery. If you treat your unchurched neighbor like an enemy, how will he ever be your friend? If you say to him, “People don’t go to church anymore like they should. People just don’t live right. People don’t read the Bible like they should....” how can you expect to reach him?
  - b. Leadership must set the pattern for reaching out into our culture. We are not the only ones who see problems out there. Many of the unchurched see that also. Invite them to this place of refuge.
6. *Leadership is afraid to risk the status quo for the sake of what might be.*
  - a. Most churches are at least getting along; still meeting; still paying the bills; still have our core group. “Let’s leave well enough alone. Let’s not do anything.”
  - b. First of all, this shows a complete lack of faith in God and His plan for seeking the lost. Second, if we are not willing to do anything challenging, would someone please cue the funeral music! We have great possibilities before us. We have to take advantage of the things God has given us. I learned a long time ago that we are better to try something great and fail, than try nothing and succeed.
7. *Your leadership can’t make a decision.*
  - a. This happens in elderships and in men’s business meetings. “Well, most of us thought it was a good idea, but old brother Glueshoes objected, so we didn’t decide on anything.” We must get past this thing of “every man’s approval.” We object to majority rule, and then wind up with minority rule!
  - b. I don’t know how to fix that man, but if you are that man, I want you to think about how much you are hindering the work of God over matters of judgment (not faith!). I think the Lord wants you to stop what you are doing. Don’t be the obstinate objector.

8. *Your leadership is more about talking than acting.*
    - a. Lots of church leaders like to debate issues—even when there are no real issues. Debating an issue may have its place, but effective leaders do more—they act!
    - b. In most matters that we face, we overthink and underact! We can do better. I like the story of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15 (verses 36-41). They debated, disagreed, and then both acted—and acted for the good of the kingdom! We need men of action! Today, Paul and Barnabas would still be in the men’s business meeting for the third month—getting nothing done!
  9. *Your leadership doesn’t think there is anything wrong with their church.*
    - a. Some people love their church but can’t understand why no one else does. “After all, we’ve been here for 68 years doing the same things as in 1950. What’s not to love?”
    - b. When it comes to means and methods, some say “We’re not gonna change!” I can understand that. We become comfortable doing the same things in the same ways. But if we can’t find some better way of doing things, we will soon be a small club for the already convinced who also feel comfortable doing things the same way.
  10. *Your leadership is not really focused on God.*
    - a. Sometimes we just forget that ultimately this is all about God and His mission. When we begin to think it is all about ourselves (and our way), then we miss the mark.
    - b. We are in the business of leading people to Jesus and, thereby, giving glory to God through Jesus Christ, John 15:8; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 3:20-21.
- B. I debated with myself about these ten points. Should I include them in this series or not? I think some of these brutal truths can hurt people’s feelings. But, on my part, I think the risk of hurt feelings is worth it. Why? Because these things are true in so many churches. And, until we come to grips with these truths, we will never be all that God wants us to be.
- C. Note also that all ten of these points have something to do with leadership in one way or another. Leadership (whether a church has elders or not) must tackle these issues. It is time to raise the bar.

Conclusion:

1. How will we react to these things? Will we react in a way that moves the church forward?
2. We need always to remember what is at stake.

**Introduction:**

1. Across the board, in all kinds of churches, attendance is falling. People wonder why. It comes up in conversations among preachers and elders. No one seems to be sure how to respond to it. Even among people who seem to be otherwise committed Christians—there is not a strong commitment to church attendance. This isn't an issue about folks leaving church and religion altogether—though that is also happening. If your church still has a high percentage of people who attend every service, you are above average. What are you doing to make that happen? I ask, because it is not happening in many places.
2. While church attendance isn't the goal of the gospel in itself, attending less is an indicator of some serious things that are going on in the lives of Christians. As a primary solution to this, I am convinced that more teaching must be done that emphasizes [Matthew 6:33](#). I am not convinced that we should just give in to cultural trends. I am convinced that we should fight back with the power of the gospel.
3. There are several cultural trends that impact how people view church attendance. If they are cultural trends, their effect will not be limited to the denominations. They will affect us. It will require understanding and action by strong leaders for us to be successful in the face of these trends. We cannot be leaders in God's kingdom if we do not understand the territory in which we are leading. We have to know why churches are failing and attendance is declining if we are to do reverse these trends. Thus, this lesson.
4. These challenges are seen in local churches with elders, and in churches without elders. Whether your congregation has appointed leaders or not, you will face most (or all) of these issues. It is unlikely that you will be an effective leader in today's church if you do not understand these cultural changes.

**The Lesson:****I. Increased prosperity.**

- A. Having lots of money gives people lots of options. While it seems to be a habit of human nature to want to talk poor, we typically have more affluence than we might care to admit.
- B. There are simply more people with more money than 20 years ago, which may explain why so many ordinary folks have designer kitchens and baths, drive luxury cars, and take several vacations (and mini-vacations) a year—even though they do not count themselves among the wealthy. Would you agree that [Matthew 13:22](#) might apply here?
- C. People with money have lots of options. Technology options. Travel options. Options for their kids. And, it just may be that their money is one of the things moving them away from a commitment to the local church. Maybe it is even fueling some of the factors listed below.

**II. Increased focus on kids' activities.**

- A. A growing number of kids are in sports. And a growing number of kids are playing on teams that require travel. Many of those sports happen on weekends.
- B. Parents with money are choosing sports over church. It's that simple. See [Matthew 13:22](#).

### III. Increased travel and vacation time.

- A. Despite a long recession and a weak recovery, travel was unaffected—for both for business and pleasure. More and more families of various ages travel for leisure, even if it's just out of town to go camping or to a friend's place for the weekend or a weekend at the lake.
- B. And when people are out of town, they tend to not be in church. (Can you see that when these first three things increase, attendance decreases? Cue Matthew 13:22 once more.)

### IV. Divided allegiance.

- A. The three previous points lead to this point in the lives of many people—both in the denominations and among the people of God.
- B. America is a materialistic and pleasure driven society. To think that we are untouched by this is folly. The constant pull of this world produces an ongoing conflict in Christians, Matthew 13:22. These Christians may never leave the church, but they are dead weight as far as helping the church bear fruit for God's glory. They don't attend all the services; they are typically poor givers—even though they may have plenty of money; they often complain that the church requires too much of them.

### V. The new normal for families: blended and single parent.

- A. Our culture has more of these families; so more of them will be in the local congregation.
- B. How does this impact attendance? Church leaders need to remember that when custody is shared in a family situation, perfect attendance for a teen might mean he is gone 26 Sundays a year.
- C. People with money might not be at worship because they have transportation and travel options; single parents (who typically struggle financially) might not be in church because they *lack access* to reliable transportation. That seems like an easy problem to solve, Galatians 6:2.

### VI. Online options.

- A. Many churches have an online presence. More and more churches stream their services over the internet (for shut-ins, nursing homes, evangelism, etc.). While there are advantages to this, it too is easy for a person to stay home and watch a service rather than being an attender and participant.
- B. Community evangelism is a powerful reason for online presence. The hope is that people in the local community will watch, learn and be converted—and be a participant in the local church.
- C. Whether or not your church thinks streaming a live service is a good idea, the issue is not going away. Anyone who attends your church has free access to those websites that do stream. Church services that are livestreamed online are here to stay, whether we like it or not.

### VII. Lack of Bible knowledge.

- A. Today's Christian knows less than those of generations past, making them more susceptible to false teachers, and more likely to be unstable. People—our people—do not study as they once did. See 2 Timothy 2:15; Ephesians 4:11-14.
- B. This increases the work of shepherds, preachers and Bible class teachers. It also points up the need for more leaders. Lack of Bible knowledge also allows for more problems to creep into the lives of Christians.

### VIII. Lack of Conviction.

- A. Americans (of all faiths) tend to be less convicted in religion. We may convert people from denominations, but they are often weak. They are like those in Matthew 13:21.

- B. Once again, this cultural fact reflected in the church makes everything in the church more difficult. People don't attend services like they once did because their commitment level to Jesus is low.

**IX. The cultural disappearance of guilt.**

- A. When my generation grew up, we felt guilty if we were not in church on Sunday. But the number of people in our time who feel guilty about not being in church on Sunday is shrinking daily.
- B. People today in our culture hardly feel guilty about anything. (They should feel guilt – Romans 3:23, 6:23). To think lack of guilt doesn't impact our church members is to bury our heads in the sand. If we are just relying on guilt as a motivator, we need a new strategy.

**X. Self-directed spirituality.**

- A. People are looking less to churches and leaders to help them grow spiritually, and more to other options. We live in an age of self-directed medicine, self-directed investing, etc.
- B. Before you take your kid to the doctor's office, you will likely Google his symptoms and have a pretty good idea of what is wrong. You may have already decided on a course of treatment. It drives doctors mad. Google is not an adequate replacement for someone who has been to medical school. If you bought a car in the last five years you probably researched it online first.
- C. In an age where we have access to everything, more folks are self-directing their religious experience—for better or worse. Going online to direct my spirituality has positives and negatives.
- D. Add to this, that modern Americans have a growing mistrust of religious leaders and institutions.

**XI. Failure to see a direct benefit.**

- A. Folks make time for the things they value most. If they're not making time for church, that tells you something. Even among folks who say they love God and say they love *your* congregation, if declining attendance is an issue, chances are it's because they don't see a direct benefit in attending regularly. They don't see the value in being there week after week. That could be because there isn't much value. Or it could be because there is value that they simply don't see?
- B. Either way, failure to see a direct benefit always results in declining engagement and lower attendance. Is there something you are doing or not doing that leaves people feeling like there's not that much value there?

**XII. Valuing attendance over engagement.**

- A. We must value attendance. It is a time of corporate worship and Bible study (Acts 2:42, Hebrews 10:24-25). But, when someone merely *attends* church, the likelihood of showing up regularly or even engaging in the work of the church declines over time. The old line is: "I showed up; got my ticket punched; went home."
- B. The most engaged people—people who serve, give, invite and who have strong connections in the church—are the most frequent attenders. Engagement—involvement—has to be a goal. Ironically, if you value attendance over engagement, you will see declining attendance. Folks must be engaged.

**XIII. A massive culture shift.**

- A. These trends make us probe deeper. Our culture is shifting. Here are some examples.
  - 1. Internet, Wi-Fi and smartphones have changed how folks live, interact and get information.

2. While people interact with their iPhones, they are still looking for interaction with people. But, increasingly, they want two-way interaction. A church without conversation is a church without converts. Whether it is small groups, Bible classes, prayer meetings or individuals who gather for social and spiritual activities, people want to talk, not just listen.
  3. Mass media doesn't have the impact it once did. It is now *social media*! One study showed the following results across all forms of advertising. Personal referrals: 92% of people trust recommendations from friends and family above all other forms of advertising, up 18% since 2007. Online reviews: Online consumer reviews are the second most trusted recommendations with a 70% rating. Mass media: TV ads are trusted by only 47%, down 24% since 2009.
  4. There was a day when we could do a mass mailing or TV ad and we could get folks into the church building. That is much less effective today. Word of mouth and social media have taken their place. It appears that nothing is more powerful to get first-timers to come to your services than personal invitations. (Data above sourced from unseminary.com.)
- B. Church leaders who fail to recognize these things will not be able to change rapidly enough to respond to the shifts that are happening. Change is very unkind to the unprepared.

#### **XIV. A sense of restlessness that produces high-maintenance Christians.**

- A. I am not sure where this point belongs in this list. Perhaps it should be first. Or maybe last—so that's where I placed it. It is something that is seen almost everywhere in our culture—both in and out of churches. It is not always easy to define.
1. I have observed this: We have all that money can buy. Yet, it is not enough. There is *general dissatisfaction with life*. Maybe this has always been present among humanity, but today it seems more pronounced than ever. As a result of this restlessness, there is more immorality, more unfaithfulness in marriage, and more problems among most people.
  2. There is a connection to technology that impacts interpersonal relationships—and creates more restlessness. As a result, people often lack the supportive relationships that generally help people to be well-adjusted.
  3. This sense of restlessness—coupled with some of the other cultural issues on this list—produces more personal problems than in any generation we have known. Many Christians are “high maintenance.” There are more family problems, financial issues, and moral dilemmas found among God's people than ever before. Disciples require a great deal of handholding and personal attention.
- B. Consider also that we are becoming more of an isolationist society. People in our generation tend to isolate themselves from others in a way that past generations did not.
1. While we are forced out of our homes because of work or school, when we come home we lock our doors and close out most of the world. We communicate with those outside through TV, Internet, texting and social media.
  2. Some are isolated to the point where they live in a pseudo-fantasy world that is dominated by interaction with characters in video games like *Call of Duty*, *Super Smash Bros.*, or *Gears of War*. These (mostly young) people tend to have poor social skills. A person today may have 500 Facebook friends, but have no intimate friendships. Communication has also contributed to isolation. We communicate through texting, but do not talk to the person sitting next to us.

3. Complicating all of this, isolationism turns people more inwardly—that is, they focus more on themselves and their own wants, needs and problems. As a result, they often become more sensitive to slights and hurts. Past generations, because they had more real social interaction and were more socially adept, were less sensitive to slights. There was more of a sense of community and that we needed to help each other more. Today, if people feel neglected, they tend to withdraw even further and not interact with others. These (often younger people) may have been raised in the church. Or, they may have been converted from the community. But, whatever their background, they *need more attention and careful handling* than people did 30 or 40 years ago. Workload of leaders is increased.
- C. Some other cultural factors that lead to Christians being high-maintenance.
1. Political correctness has led many Christians to be easily offended by certain words. It is almost to the point that anything you might say in Bible class or from the pulpit is going to upset someone. Why are people so easily offended (upset)? It is because as a society, we wear our feelings on our sleeve. “You have no right to say anything I don’t like.”
  2. People have become more about self, self-willed and selfish. This began decades ago but has blossomed like a grotesque creature in our time. While wanting to restrict what others say or do, folks think they have a right to do anything they want to do—without repercussions. “It’s all about me.” More and more people think that way.
- D. The point is, this sense of restlessness and discontent requires that leaders (and all Christians) work harder to help these Christians grow. With some, it seems that whenever we take one step forward with them, they take two steps backward. The answer for this person—and for virtually all the issues on this list is that people need to be more like Jesus, [Ephesians 4:11-13](#); [Romans 8:29](#). How to accomplish that is the challenge we face.

Conclusion:

1. We have seen that challenges. Now we have to do the hard part: find workable solutions.
2. So, what is the answer? It is the same as it has always been. Men and women, old and young, must be taught to “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). But the teaching must be done in such a way that engages people. It cannot just be a matter of people showing up at services, sitting and listening and then going home. Leaders (shepherds and others) must be feeders of the flock. Their work will be harder than ever; it will be more time-consuming and more energy-consuming. But it is what must be done. While it is harder than ever to get into people’s homes to teach personal studies, there must be more personal, individual interaction with Christians to ground and strengthen them.
2. Jesus said, “What is a man profited...?” (Matthew 16:26). You know the rest of that verse. But, for the moment, just take the first part. We look for profit in everything we do. People need to see profit in attending worship rather than going to a kid’s ballgame. Folks need to see personal benefit in attending every service (and even finding a good place to worship when out of town). They also need to see that they are missing valuable personal interaction when they opt to stay home and view a service online. They need to understand what the will of the Lord is (Ephesians 5:11, 17) with respect to being an engaged part (Ephesians 4:16) of the body of believers. It is the work of leaders among God’s people to make these things happen.

**Challenges of Leadership****Max Dawson**Introduction:

1. Almost everywhere I go, I talk to preachers and elders who are experiencing the same thing: People who attend church are attending less often! The “online church” is part of the reason for that.
  - a. People who used to attend three times a week now attend once or twice. Those showing up every week, now attend three times a month. People who came twice a month often now show up once. Attenders who used to come once a month are showing up half a dozen times a year.
  - b. Research shows this is true of almost all kinds and sizes of churches. It appears to be less common only in very small churches (because of commitment level, needed support, etc.).
  - c. Leaders can get mad, even rant and rave, but it is unlikely to help. If all people get is condemnation or “you should be doing better” when they do show up, why would they keep coming? Like it or not, people do not respond to guilt in the way they used to. If you are trying to guilt people into coming to church, ironically, you will probably have fewer in attendance, not more.
2. The fact is, there are fewer and fewer Americans every year who (1) feel guilty when they miss a Sunday, (2) have a natural instinct to head to a gathering of Christians on the first day of the week, (3) miss church only when they can’t get there, (4) or are part of a local church of any kind. We cannot count on the future somehow turning out better. Large numbers of people attending churches—like it used to be—is in the past. America is changing. We must know how to meet the change. The seven things in this lesson are valuable in addressing almost all the cultural change taking place—not just the digital revolution.
3. The question to leaders: How do we respond to these changes? Here are seven things we can do.

The Lesson:**I. Create A Powerful Online Presence.**

- A. Online is where folks go to learn about your church. It is critical that you have a website.
  1. Some brethren see that as pointless because they never go online. They may not even have a computer, tablet or smartphone. They say, “We never had a website in the 1990’s.” And they are right—but we have been out of the 90’s for 18 years! We live now. With the conditions that now brings. We address things as they are, [Acts 20:20](#).
  2. You have to have a website just to keep from losing ground. Everyone else has one.
- B. But, it is more than a website. While a webpage is critical, there are other necessary things.
  1. You can also stay connected with your people (and make connections with others) through Facebook, Twitter, email, podcasts, apps, and blogs.
  2. Additionally, there is a powerful online church program called Congregate. It affords you all sorts of ways to contact and track your members and guests.
  3. Someone says, “This sounds like a lot of work.” Nobody said being a leader would be easy.

C. Instead of complaining about online options, we need to leverage those to our advantage.

## II. Elevate Personal Relationships.

A. In the early church, personal relationships were critical to their well-being saints, Acts 2:44-46. These saints spent time quality together outside the assembly.

1. This was an expression of the loving relationships they enjoyed, Romans 12:9-18
2. We must have more than just showing up, getting our ticket punched, and going home.

B. Producing powerful personal relationships is easier and more effective in person! This is one of the ways you will overcome and address the cultural changes that are taking place: I am talking about fewer people who attend worship, as well as gravitation toward online worship.

1. Churches that place a high value on personal relationships will tend to attract people who value *personal connection*. Who values personal connections? Who doesn't? In an age of so much connection (or maybe "disconnection") via technology, most people are still craving for genuine personal connections. It is a fundamental human need. It always will be.
2. One way that leaders can facilitate personal connections (in addition to just eating together from time to time) is to have an effective small groups program. This is where everyone in the church is potentially connected to others through small groups. There are plenty of resources for setting up and maintaining small groups.

C. Leaders who elevate personal relationships can overcome some of the cultural change.

## III. Love People—Both In and Out of the Church.

A. If we are called upon to do anything as Christians, we are called upon to love people. That's what our Father did, John 3:16. It's what Jesus did. It's what we must do.

1. Leaders need to work to create a culture of love in a local church. We love one another. We love the prodigal who needs to come home. We love the alien who has never been here.
2. Love has to be expressed in action, Luke 10:29-37. Words are not enough, 1 John 3:18.

B. Can you really love people without being with them? That's hard to do.

1. Human relationships go to their deepest levels in person—not online. Loving people is another way to fight the decline in attendance and the "online church" situation.
2. Did you know that 40% of marrying couples today now first meet online? But those couples don't stay online. Do you know what they do? They somehow manage to meet in person and get married! We can meet people through a powerful online presence—then love them.

C. Love can be expressed online, but fulfillment happens through personal contact! Effective leaders who understand the culture, know that. And they leverage that. Value personal contact!

## IV. Create a Wonderful Worship Service.

A. There is something that happens when you are in the room and in the moment that can't happen when you are watching a livestream on your computer.

1. People need to get something in the assembly that they can't get online!
2. Would you like to watch a Colts game (or Indy 500) on a screen in your house (or on your smartphone)? Or, would you rather be there at the event in person? Would you rather be at a live

Keith Urban or Carrie Underwood (or pick your own singer) concert, or watch them on a YouTube video? To ask those questions is to answer them!

- B. Do you realize that church is more than the sum of all its parts?
1. The preaching, singing, Lord's Supper, and the human interaction, even the conversations before and after services all combine to produce something that cannot be found online!
  2. But what that means is that the preaching, singing, the Lord's Supper and all our interaction needs to be done at the very highest level—where “good enough” is not good enough.
  3. We must absolutely, positively strive for excellence in everything we do. A church where “anything goes” doesn't go! Every man does not need a turn at singing. Everyone doesn't get a crack at preaching—unless you are determined to have your own little group that never reaches anyone outside the group. Worship must be led by competent men who are well-trained and well-prepared to do what they do. See the book “Do Things Well.”
  4. Poorly led and poorly executed worship does not cut it in our time. Our God deserves better, Psalm 8:1-9; 150:2. We serve the excellent God. He deserves our best. The saints of God deserve our best. A lost and dying world deserves better than we often give.
- C. Effective leaders understand the value of a wonderful worship service. If you are consistently conducting worship services that are boring, lifeless and careless—and not striving for excellence—you have already lost the battle and don't know it! That is a brutally unpleasant truth!

#### V. Create a Culture of Serving.

- A. Online church doesn't provide much in the way of serving opportunities. We have a powerful advantage over the streaming websites—if we will exploit it.
1. Serving others and serving God makes us feel the reality of being part of something bigger than ourselves. It gives us a sense of purpose, a sense of teamwork, and a sense of worth.
  2. Leaders look for ways to grow servants, equipping people to serve, Ephesians 4:11-16.
  3. Here are two things every church must do—a dual culture they must create: *Evangelism* and *Service*! Those two things must be constantly before the congregation—so it becomes part of your DNA. It defines who and what you are and what you do. Leaders know that!
- B. Let me address briefly some areas of service that can be identified when you come together.
1. I recognize there are many areas of service found outside your gatherings. Teaching a home study, visiting the sick, taking meals to shut-ins, inviting folks to attend, etc.
  2. But let's think about our gatherings: Do you see that value of serving as a Bible class teacher? ...getting up early on Sunday morning to review your lesson; prepping your classroom; being there ahead of your students? Instead of something like that being a drudgery, let it be promoted as a valuable area of service that helps kingdom citizens grow.
  3. The same should be said of the song leader and his preparation, or of those who prep and serve communion, who clean the building, who help produce the livestream, who greet guests with a smile. It can be said of the sister who prepares her home for a small group meeting.
- C. Leaders make serving others a prime directive in and out of the assembly. Serve. Do it well.

## **VI. Prioritize Young People.**

- A. Do that with young kids and with teens. Churches fail because leaders do not do this!
  - 1. Kids miss out when their parents miss services. Make their Bible classes something special and they will want to be there. They want to be with their friends. They will drag their parents!
  - 2. And it is not only Bible classes. Devos for young people are a powerful tool to keep kids. One of the reasons churches decline is that they lose more than 50% of their kids! The devo at someone's house after Sunday evening services can put a fourth voice before the kids. You have the parents, the preacher and the Bible class teacher who, with one voice encourage and teach the kids to serve God. But the devo often has just a regular Christian serving as a fourth voice to help the kids. He (or she, or they) knows the kids' names, has learned about their hopes and dreams, and says the same thing to them that a loving parent would say. That kind of interaction cannot be produced in the online world.
- B. When parents miss church, the kids are the biggest losers. The more leaders prioritize families—and particularly the kids in families--the more families will prioritize worship services.

## **VII. Create a Culture of Peace.**

- A. I am expressing this point in a positive way. I am doing that because the other side of that coin is ugly, negative and destructive. There are fundamentally four reasons why churches decline:
  - 1. They do little or no evangelism. We talk evangelism, but it's mostly just talk.
  - 2. We lose most of our young people to the world. We may blame each other for that, but the fact remains that not much is being done to save our kids from that fate.
  - 3. We fail to recognize the cultural changes taking place all around us. Because of that we don't know how to respond—and often don't even know there is a need to respond.
  - 4. Finally, brethren fight and argue and tear each other to pieces and destroy unity. The cause of truth suffers mightily because brethren can't (or won't) get along. Infighting has never caused a church to prosper, won a lost soul, or helped a teenager be grounded in the faith. But, it has put many churches in a state of decline and cost the souls of thousands.
- B. Leaders learn the value of James 3:13-18. Leaders create a culture of peace. Not an artificial peace where we overlook sin or error. But a genuine peace based on truth, on the love of Jesus and love of one another. We must believe in peace and unity based on truth, John 17:20-21.
  - 1. So much of the infighting among brethren has nothing to do with truth, but with matters of judgment and personal taste. It often has to do with getting your own way!
  - 2. Stop the infighting. Are we blind to the fact that we will give account for the division and discord we create? A great day of judgment is coming. Souls will be lost because of this.
  - 3. Stop the backbiting. Stop the gossip. Stop the questioning of motives. Stop with the judgmental spirit, James 4:11-12. This is a frightening text. Let us heed the warning.
- C. Leaders promote a culture of peace. They know when to compromise, and when not!

Conclusion:

1. This study is attempt at answering the cultural issues that are impacting local churches today.
2. So much of what we face is due to the digital revolution. In some quarters, and in the minds of many people, churches have been replaced by online religious teaching. Thus, the emphasis in this lesson.
3. But with—or without—the digital revolution, which of the seven things in this lesson are not needed? Which of them have no value. They all do.
4. As a final word: *Six of these seven things would be true even if there was no online world!*

**Introduction:**

1. It has been my privilege for the past several years to work with churches in short meetings like this (2-3 days, or even one day). I have particularly worked with churches that want to do better in evangelism. It is really a positive sign when brethren look for ways to do God's work more effectively.
2. I have never yet seen a church that did not want to improve their service to God. Yet, in our changing times, it can be a challenge just to survive. We live in a time of rapid change. And, sometimes we feel like we are left behind. Today's studies are designed to move us forward.
3. Our lessons today: "Surviving and Thriving in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This first part is what you can do as an *individual Christian* to help this congregation survive and thrive. These are things you individually need to do and be.

**The Lesson:**

**I. Each Christian Must See This Local Church As Jesus Sees It.**

- A. Note the seven churches in Revelation. They provide a model for examining churches today. Whether growing or dying, those churches were made up of God's people—Christians. Jesus saw them as they were—better than they saw themselves, Revelation 3:17. Jesus wanted them to see things the way they really were—and the *changes that needed to take place!*
  1. Like you, people in those churches had strengths and weaknesses. Jesus expected them to overcome their weaknesses. Jesus wanted each disciple to see the potential for change!
  2. Every Christian in these churches, no matter how good or how bad—could improve. "To him who overcomes" (found 7 times) told each Christian that they could do better. They could make the church survive and thrive! With some of these churches, their very existence was on the line. Jesus expected these saints to do something about their weakness and problems. And it was something they could do. It was within the realm of possibility.
- B. This church is made up of God's people. You will help this church survive and thrive by taking an honest look at this church and what you can do to make it better. See the potential to improve.

**II. Each Christian Must Be Part Of The Solution, Not The Problem.**

- A. This is not something to just be left up to the preacher, or to the men of the congregation.
  1. It is not something where anyone can just sit idly by and hope things get better. This is one of those times when you will either be part of the solution or be part of the problem.
  2. Returning to the churches of Revelation, should anyone in those churches say, "Not me"? Dare anyone exempt himself from responsibility when Jesus says, "to him who overcomes"?



- B. If this church is to survive and thrive, it will be because you became part of the solution. Church is not a spectator sport. It is about participation, Ephesians 4:16. You are a member of the body, 1 Corinthians 12:14-22. You have talents and skills that can be put to work to make this church thrive. “What do I have?” You have a voice! Use it as a team player; speak optimism and victory. Sometimes we believe we have no choice but to fail; but with God’s help, we can succeed!

**III. Each Christian Must Put Himself Last For The Sake Of The Gospel.**

- A. God never intended that church be like a country club where you pay your dues and get your perks and privileges. It is a gospel outpost where you put yourself last.
1. Some Christians insist that the songs and sermons, times and temperature please them!
  2. We do not have the right to demand our way. It is not “all about me.” Philippians 2:3-4.
- B. Be willing to let your will die for the sake of the gospel, Acts 21:13. Paul would literally die!

**IV. Each Christian Must Be Convicted Of This Church’s Purpose.**

- A. That begs the question: What is the purpose of this church?
1. Is it merely to keep the doors open as long as possible—and the last person turns out the lights when he leaves? “If one more family leaves, we might as well close the doors.”
  2. Or, is it to survive and thrive, doing God’s will, converting souls, and building them up to be like Jesus? See Ephesians 4:11-16; Romans 8:29.
- B. What do you think is God’s purpose for this church? Is it not about the goal of heaven? You have a powerful part to play in this church’s purpose. This church must be a gospel outpost in the midst of a desert of error and sin. It must be an oasis of truth—saving and edifying souls.

**V. Each Christian Must Encourage and Support The Leadership.**

- A. Whether you have elders or not, and have a preacher or not, you do have leadership. Encourage and support those who lead among the brethren (see Acts 15:22). This is de facto leadership.
1. Does anyone have vision to reach people beyond these walls? Do others have that vision?
  2. Not everyone can be out front as a leader. But everyone can support those who are.
- B. Hold up the hands of those with leadership skills—those who want to see the church make a difference—now and forever. Stand together as one man for the gospel’s sake, Philippians 1:27.

**VI. Each Christian Must Be A Giver In Supporting This Church.**

- A. One of the key marks of support for a church is giving—of time, energy and finances.
1. The devil doesn’t care how much you say you believe in this church’s future—as long as you don’t believe you should give generously to support it, 2 Corinthians 8:1-4.
  2. And why be a generous giver? To reach out to the surrounding community! Not just to paint walls or get a new carpet for the auditorium. The focus must be outward, not inward.
- B. God needs to open our eyes to the lost all around us! Then we need to open our pocketbooks.

Conclusion:

1. You are the first step in the future of this church. What you do, how you see this church, your unqualified support of this church—it is up to you. Allow me to note 1 Corinthians 10:31. You exist for the glory of God; this church exists for the glory of God, Ephesians 3:20-21. The bottom line, and the reason for each Christian doing these things is for the glory of our God and His Son, Jesus Christ.
2. The local church is God's collectivity for spreading the gospel. This local church is God's group for doing evangelism in this community. It is God's "Plan A" for accomplishing His mission. There is no "Plan B." That's why this church must survive and thrive. That's why you must give your all to that!

*Introduction:*

1. In the past several years I have visited a number of local churches. I have been asked by churches to help them with leadership and evangelism. I have worked with three kinds of churches.
  - a. Those that are holding their own. They were stable, but not growing. They were aging and recognized that if they did not do something, over the next 20 years, they would be in decline. There is help for a church like that. That church can do more than hold its own. It can thrive.
  - b. Those that looked like they were dying. When I see a church that looks like it is dying, I look for a way for that church to survive. But not merely to survive—but to thrive! I have learned that it is possible to rescue and regrow a church that is not doing well. There is help.
  - c. Those that are doing incredibly well. They are growing and prospering. Those churches that are excelling want to do even better. Just as important, how do they keep themselves from slipping and becoming “a used to be”? There are some things that can help them with that.
2. It is apparent that successful churches are doing some things that others may not be doing. Yet, surprisingly, the actions that all three churches need to take are essentially the same.
  - a. There are certain things that churches must do that will cause them not only to survive but to thrive. To “thrive” is to grow, prosper, flourish and to be successful. It is to be successful in doing God’s work; to have a group of flourishing, growing disciples who serve God.
  - b. I will present six critical elements that make a church survive and thrive. The church as a *body of believers* must embrace these. Note that my title specifies “in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” It is important that we recognize that we are talking about today, not 1950. Our culture has changed. There are some things that demand more attention today. In 1950, open the church doors and folks will show up. That has changed today. One thing that never changes, however, is the gospel.

The Lesson:

**I. This Church Must Stand For Gospel Truth With No Compromise.**

- A. The church is the pillar and support of truth, 1 Timothy 3:15.
  - 1. Churches must not depart from the truth of the gospel, Galatians 1:6-8.
  - 2. Not every church stands for truth. If we don't get this right, nothing else matters.
  - 3. Teaching on salvation, authority of the Scriptures, the church, etc., must be crystal clear.
- B. Churches survive and thrive by tackling tough issues, addressing them with truth. Satan hates that stand and the growth that follows—but God loves both the stand and the growth!

**II. This Church Must Promote An Aggressive Evangelistic Culture.**

- A. Evangelism is God's great work! It is a work given to us, Matthew 28:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:8.
  - 1. We are on a mission from God! We answer the call, Matthew 9:37-38. We need less talking about the Great Commission and more doing. Evangelism has to be in this church's DNA.
  - 2. Does God want more evangelism or less? What does the devil want? What do you want?
- B. Four simple things all can do: Shine, Speak, Invite, and Welcome. This makes churches thrive.

**III. This Church Must Reject All Cultural And Ethnic Barriers.**

- A. Sunday remains the most segregated day of the week. In some towns there are black churches and white churches. Is that God's will? God's will is found in 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Galatians 3:27-28. God's church is the answer to racial issues in our culture.
- B. Thriving churches are made up of people of every cultural background, people with a common bond—not the color of their skin, but faith and love toward Christ Jesus.

**IV. This Church Must Promote A Spirit Of Excellence For God's Glory.**

- A. Our God is an awesome and excellent God! He deserves our best, Malachi 1:6-8, 14.
  - 1. Though you may currently be smaller in number, you must give God the very best effort on everything. In *everything*...our best; we dare not insult our great God—our God!
  - 2. In no place in Scripture do you find that God is pleased with mediocrity!
- B. Thriving churches are made up of people who believe "good enough is not good enough."

**V. This Church Must Promote An Optimistic Spirit Of Unity.**

- A. That means strong teaching followed by a sense of determination within the congregation. Here are five things that make up that spirit of unity. They have to do with dispositions.
1. "Together, with God's help, we can solve every issue and accomplish God's will."
  2. "Together, we can be optimistic about our future, because we are doing God's will."
  3. "Together, we can rejoice over the good things God has already done for us (and will do)."
  4. "Together, we can work with our God, cooperating in the grandest enterprise of all time."
  5. "Together, with God's help, we can accomplish what we could never achieve on our own."
- B. Unity isn't just about everybody getting along. It is about working together, 2 Corinthians 6:1.
1. We must work together with a spirit of optimism and wonderful anticipation about our future. Thriving churches are made up of people who speak unity, cooperation and optimism.
  2. We can do! Churches have the potential to achieve so much more. Remember Matthew 19:26b. This isn't about the miraculous (like Luke 1:37), but about men doing God's will.

**VI. This Church Must Seize The Moment—Because The Time Is Now.**

- A. God's time for this church to act and implement these things is now, 2 Corinthians 6:1-3.
1. The devil doesn't care how much we believe these other things—as long as we don't believe now is the time to act. Jesus does not want His disciples to delay their work, John 4:35.
  2. Looking at this list, many of these things have to do with disposition and attitude. Attitudes lead to action. Today is a great day to begin to build a new spirit and new attitudes.
- B. Thriving churches are made up of people who see possibilities and are ready to act now!

Conclusion:

1. These are six things from the word of God. And these things are observable in churches that are going beyond survival. These are things that thriving churches are doing!
2. I will add one more that may be the sum of the six. It is faith, trust in God that His ways are best and right; it is belief in the success of God's kingdom; belief that it will all work! Do you believe?

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