

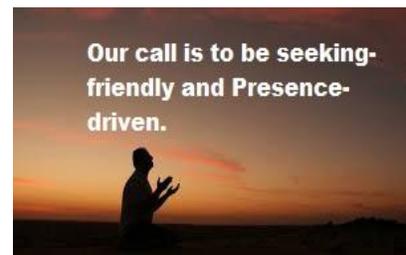
May 7, 2018



Important Traits in Becoming a Seeking-friendly and Presence-driven People

In God's call to participate with Him in influencing the world, leaders are often inclined to evaluate things in terms of what works or what leads to success (often defined by the size of the audience attending services or programs).

Leaders are often drawn to programs or models. What is the model of church that leads to "success"? Is it purpose-driven, program-driven, seeker friendly, simple church, missional church, or something else? Much of the time leaders connect the idea of "success" to buildings, numbers (audiences of satisfied customers), or programs.



There is something else, however, that is the most important thing...Him. It is God Himself who builds His house and takes center stage in all He does.

- ***Psalm 127:1*** Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.
- ***Colossians 1:18*** He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, **so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.**

Jesus didn't come to establish great buildings, meetings, or programs that attract increasing audiences. As a matter of fact, He sometimes thinned audiences with challenging words (John 6:44-71). Many who simply wanted their needs met or were

content to follow Him on their own terms were challenged with His consistent sayings like, "If anyone would come after me, he must take up his cross and follow me."

The most important thing unbelievers, followers of Jesus, and His church need is God Himself. This reality should mark everything we do.

Jesus didn't come to establish audiences of watching stones, but a family of "living stones" engaged in carrying out His mission in the earth. "Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth" with His "image and likeness" through His family. (Genesis 1:26-28).

Do we really think God is impressed with buildings, audiences, or meetings full of consumer-driven spectators. He is building His family of disciples who know and walk with Him as they engage in His mission.

Seeking Friendly and Presence Driven

One of the things about God's people that most impacts others (who don't know Him or who have become estranged from Him) is people who know and walk with Jesus.

I had a revealing experience recently as I sat with a group of people who were faithfully following Jesus, and the question came up, "What or who did God use to bring you to the tipping point of really giving your life to Christ and being transformed by Him?"

When hearing questions like that, Christians normally expect to hear things like: dynamic corporate meetings, great worship teams, a revival service, or altar calls. That wasn't the case at all with this group.

Their responses pointed to **people**. It was usually someone in their life that had a real, ongoing relationship with Jesus. While their character was important, the major impact came from the fact that they followed Jesus in a real relationship.

Most of them had lived in proximity to someone in whom they observed or were aware of a real prayer and worship life. Not just a corporate prayer and worship life but a personal one. They knew these people really walked with and communicated with Jesus on a regular basis. Some lived in the same house or were around them enough to know these people really walked with Jesus.

No one mentioned programs, worship bands, great buildings, or children's ministry which are often the things churches spend their most time and resources on. The

consistent, ongoing reality of people's relationship with Jesus affected them the most. It was the main factor God used to bring these friends to Christ. We can't overemphasize the impact of people who actually walk with Jesus. It works much like the testimony about Peter and John from those who didn't like what they were doing.

Acts 4:13 *Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, **they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.*** "Being with Jesus" is the most powerful testimony of the reality of the Gospel.

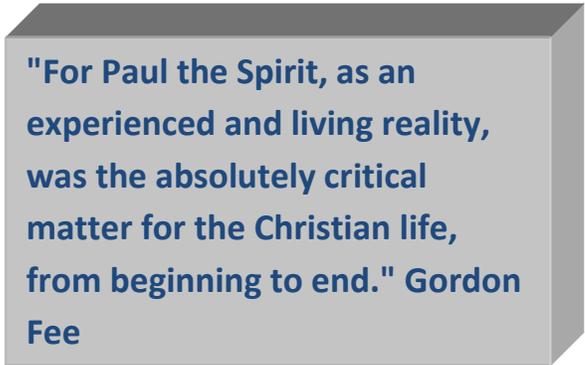
I have ingested many books, articles, and seminars over the past 38 years on subjects centered around how to make a church successful. There are many good tools that I picked up in the material. Ideas that help churches connect with and attract people are important. Jesus loves people and "came to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

The downside of this material is that churches can become more seeker friendly and program driven than seeking friendly and Presence driven. It is important to remember that the Acts 2 and 4 example had something else going on at the same time the church grew numerically. They had an ongoing dynamic relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Evaluate Practices not Programs

When we look at what we are doing as a church to evaluate things for change, instead of asking which programs are "working," (which usually means well attended) how about asking something more accurate. How about asking what **practices** are actually forming us into the calling of knowing Jesus and following Him as a family of disciples on His mission?

We need to think in terms practices rather than programs. We are not simply interested in people attending programs to consume the Christian products we offer. Practices are what we are after. It is about people living with and following Jesus together with others as they engage in His mission.



"For Paul the Spirit, as an experienced and living reality, was the absolutely critical matter for the Christian life, from beginning to end." Gordon Fee

What practices are helping others to know and follow Jesus? Programs are something we attend and support, but practice is something we do. We need to filter our

evaluations through the lens of "practices that form us into God's family of disciples together on God's mission."

Traits of seeking-friendly people who become Presence-driven, not just program-driven. Lets seek things that help others put into practice the following traits.

- **They give attention to prayer (listening and speaking with God) like Jesus did. *Luke 5:16* But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.**
- **They saturate themselves in His word (they listen for and hear what He is saying from the foundation of what He has already said, the Bible).**
- **They express genuine heartfelt praise and worship (God lives among the praises of His people Ps. 22:3). They long to see Jesus exalted among them as they gather. They express praise and joy in God, not just warm fuzzy feelings generated by a great service but heartfelt joy and gratitude no matter what circumstance they are in.**
- **They listen for God, hear from Him, and share it with others who are doing the same (connecting with the "people of His presence" Titus 2:14).**
- **They regularly interact with those who do these first 4 things (Heb 3:12-14, 10:22-25).**
- **They take steps to put in to practice what He is saying. *Mt 4:4* "man doesn't live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."**

While there is nothing wrong with programs, buildings, or being purpose driven, "Presence" must come first. If, out of abiding in God's presence, God says start a program or build a building, then obey and build, empowered and led by God. As for "purpose," the only purpose that is essential is: God Himself. That is, if God says do this, go here, or speak this, we do it. Why? Walking with, and obeying God is the most important thing. Let's be Presence-driven and seeking-friendly people who live their lives in pursuit of God Himself.

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