

## AN EPHESIANS 4 CHURCH

Illustration of the two types of churches. One is the Clergy Centered Church and the other is an Ephesians 4 Model assembly. Both have similar pastors, similar buildings, and work in similar locations. The big difference, though, is in the model of ministry.

A Clergy Centered Church is a church where the pastor or pastors basically do it all. They run the show. There is very little participation on the part of the laity. They come, they watch, they leave. They are not changed; their community is not changed. While they are lights in a dark place, they are very dim lights at best.

The Ephesians 4 model on the other hand comes from – you guessed it – Ephesians 4 in the Bible. Let me read to you the passage in question. Ephesians 4:11-13 states: **“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”**

I know that pastors get caught up in a million other things. I read some time back of a pastor who remarked rather sorrowfully, **“The prophet Isaiah wrote, 'In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord,'** If he were a modern minister he would write, 'In the year that Uzziah died I made a thousand pastoral calls, dictated two thousand letters, and held five thousand telephone conversations. I reviewed a book a week, pronounced 63 invocations at public functions, put my name on 25 committee letterheads, served as chairman of the Community Chest, and didn't have time to say my prayers.'”

Wow, it doesn't feel like that at times. However, to put it simply, in addition to prayer, study, and the daily operations of the church, the pastor is a facilitator of gifts. I am to do what Ephesians 4:11-13 tells me to do. In fact, I believe that one of the things that the Lord will judge me on, when I stand before Him at the Judgment Seat of Christ, will be just how I went about fulfilling the Ephesians 4:11-13 job description. To boil it all down to it's barest essence I am to prepare God's people for works of service. I am to prepare priests for the priesthood of believers. I am to prepare ministers for the work of ministry.

When that doesn't happen, then we have what we saw in the Clergy Centered Church.

I need your help here for a moment. As you can see, I have drawn a line between two ends. One end is marked Clergy Centered Church while the other end is marked, Ephesians 4 Church. In a moment, I am going to have you identify to yourself where this church would stand on that line. However, before I have you do that, I want you to note the characteristics that mark the two extremes.

### Clergy Centered Church

Spectators  
Sluggish  
Stagnant  
Motiveless  
Weak  
Unschooling  
Unprepared  
Not using giftings  
A few  
Paid  
Independent  
I

### Ephesians 4 Church

Participants  
Energetic  
Growing  
Motivated  
Healthy  
Trained  
Equipped  
Using giftings  
Many  
Servants  
Team  
We

Now that you have heard the definitions, where would you put this church? If you are a visitor, where would you put your church? Without hearing your answers, I can pretty well tell where you would have placed your mark. The more heavily involved you are in the church, the more your mark will be weighted toward the Ephesians 4 model, the less involved, the more your mark will be weighted in the other direction.

Pastor Bill Hybels, pastor of the 18,000 member Willow Creek Community Church outside of Chicago, teaches that 95% of the churches in America follow the Clergy Centered model.

Hear me, please. Of the approximate 350,000 churches that exist in America, "four out of five are either plateaued or declining." Then too, of those that are growing, only 14 percent are growing as the result of conversion rather than transfer growth. Is there a connection between the fact that 95% of our churches in the US are Clergy Centered and the fact that 80% of our churches are on the downside of the growth cycle? I think the connection is plain and clear.

**NOW FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL MINUTES, I WANT TO GIVE YOU A NUMBER OF CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EPHESIANS 4 CHURCH. I WILL MAKE SOME PERSONAL APPLICATIONS WITH EACH POINT.**

**1. EPHESIANS 4 CHURCHES PREPARE PEOPLE FOR WORKS OF SERVICE.** Given what Ephesians 4 says, this is a given.

This past week I had a one-on-one with the Interim Chief of Police here in Janesville David Moore. What a pleasant and nice fellow. I am very impressed with him as a human being. Anyway, the gentleman couldn't say enough good things about the Day of Compassion event. As we were ending the conversation, I said one of the things that most upsets me today is this silly barrier that has been erected between church and state. I noted that regardless of one's faith, generally speaking, religious bodies teach their people to be good and to do good. I said most of us pay our taxes, love our neighbor, help when help is needed, don't use drugs, commit crime, or cause problems in the community. I said that most of the people in the churches of America are nice people. The churches of America, I continued, have a tremendous amount of potential for good if only our governments could see it and would avail themselves of it."

I am not exaggerating when I say that I believe that the saints from our churches literally have the power to change our world if only they would see it and commit themselves to the task. The 800 of so volunteers for Day of Compassion certainly helped change Janesville.

In the book *The Volunteer Revolution* Bill Hybels writes, "Over the years I've heard a lot of great servants of God describe themselves as "just a volunteer." Before I write one more page, I want to make something very clear. The term "just a volunteer" should have no place in our vocabulary.

The church I pastor would not exist without the thousands of hours given each month by fired-up volunteers. There's not enough money in the world to pay for all the good deeds desperately needing to be done in the name of God in my church and yours, in my community and yours, in my country and yours.

Without the work hours of volunteers, countless wounds will not be tended, mouths will not be fed, grieving people will not be comforted, broken marriages will not be mended, lonely people will not be embraced, children will not be nurtured. Countless cups of cold water will never be offered in Jesus' name, and countless spiritual seekers will never be befriended and coached toward Christ.

What do you have to offer? More than you probably think. You have the gifts and talents you were born with. The passions that inspire you. The blessings of education. The skills you've honed as you've worked at home or in the marketplace. The life experiences that have matured you. The pain that has deepened you. The love of neighbor that spills from God's heart into yours.

These are powerful tools for good that God has lavished on all his children. Why? So that we can lavish goodness on others. One of my favorite definitions of the church is a "community of

blessing"-a community blessed by God so that it can bless the world.”

Steve Sjogren General Editor of *Group* magazine wrote:

We love, serve, and care for others because that is normal behavior for people who are filled with God's Spirit. We are Christians. Christ was the ultimate servant. We can't help but serve because the Spirit of the Servant has filled our hearts. When we serve, we are just being who we naturally are.

Hybels points out, by the way, that the average church has three levels of volunteers:

- High capacity volunteers
- Medium level volunteers
- Low level volunteers

Capacity is marked by one's education, experience, and/or energy. As a rule, people will work up to the level of their capacity.

## 2. THE SECOND CHARACTERISTIC OF AN EPHESIANS 4 CHURCH IS SEEN IN IT'S ABILITY TO RECOGNIZE PEOPLE'S TALENTS

Peter wrote, **“As each of you has received a gift (a particular spiritual talent, a gracious divine endowment), employ it for one another...”** 1 Peter 4:10 (*The Amplified Bible*). Likewise, Paul told us that each of us have different gifts. **“If a man's gift is ...serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage....”** (Romans 12:6-8).

Jesus was a master at recognizing other people's gifts. Look how He used people in their uniqueness. Peter wasn't a John or a Paul; he was just Peter the fisherman. John was perfect for his calling--- young, enthusiastic and loving. Paul had been prepared to stand before Caesar. He was the right one to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

I am reminded of a man that I pastored a number of years ago. His name was Mel Miller. Mel was a short, squat fellow. He owned his own shoe repair shop. He was quiet and unassuming. Upon starting to First Assembly he asked me to put him to work. He told me that he had worked with the Boy Scouts and that he loved being around kids. The church had a struggling Royal Rangers group at the time. It had maybe 4-5 boys in it. Mel immediately pitched in. In short order, he had the group up over 100. He was uniquely gifted, just to be honest. He was certainly the right man at the right time.

Hear me, please. Mel was a 100 boy Royal Ranger leader in a 4 boy group. In time, though, he brought the group up to the level of his giftings.

My first pastorate, the Assembly of God in Rutherford, Tennessee, averaged 26 people in attendance. Evening attendance struggled to get to 10. I had two very rebellious teenage girls in the so-called youth group. Three deacons, one of whom quit on me, made up the board. On a good week, the church may have taken in \$100 counting everything.

If you know me very well, you know that I am a avid reader, a lover of books. I literally have thousands of books today between my two offices. Back then, my library all fit on three planks of wood stuck between a stack of bricks.

I would generally ran out of voice before I ran out of material.

I had my first funeral, first water baptismal service, first convert as a pastor – Andrew Climber – all in Rutherford.

What is the point, you ask? God sometimes puts us in small places to prepare us for bigger places. I learned many of the disciplines of ministry and pastoring in that little congregation. In fact, our all-wise sovereign God could have started me out right here at New Life Assembly, had He of wanted to. But, again, He was wise not to do that. He knew that I needed the lessons and disciplines of Rutherford before I could tackle the bigger challenges later on.

To be honest with you, before I was ever a pastor, I spent four years doing anything and everything that I could do for Jesus. I preached in jails, missions, rest homes, and on street corners. I witnessed. I prayed at times nearly all night. I was involved. My pastors saw this and one after another confirmed that God had placed His hand on my life. My efforts helped those men discover my gifts and calling. My efforts also helped me clarify my pastoral gift in my own spirit.

I know that there has to be some people in this room this morning who don't have a clue as to what their spiritual gifts, talents, abilities are. Right? If you find yourself clueless in Janesville this morning, maybe this quick little quiz will help.

What do you not like? What is it that you just can't stand?

- Poorly prepared lessons for a Sunday school class? Then the Lord may be calling you to be a teacher.
- Disorganization? Missed deadlines? Your gift might just be administration.
- Neglected children? Poverty? Your gift might be mercy.

Do you get the point? Many times when we do not like something, it is because the Lord is gifting us to fix it. Just a thought.

The Ephesians 4 Church specializes in finding people's giftings.

### 3. THE THIRD CHARACTERISTIC IS A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

I have up on the screen a picture of a diseased bush and a healthy bush. What makes the difference? Mainly the environment of the plant. The climate, the soil, pests, etc. In like fashion, the environment of a church is critical to developing a healthy Ephesians 4 church.

Let me give you some hints on developing a perfect environment for nurturing gifts, talents and people.

**PRAY FOR THE SERVICES.** I know that we have a lot of things going on prior to our services. But wouldn't it be something if several of you came in for a few minutes prior to each service and prayed? You could remain at your seats or you could move to the altars. I recognize the fact that a few of you are doing that already. Thank you. Then too, we have a group that prays in the Prayer Room during the Sunday school hour. We need and want more people to do this.

Then too, I am asking that the Spirit of God raise up additional individuals (intercessors) who have a heart to stand on the front-line of spiritual warfare and pray for protection and power for this church and for its leadership. We need people who will commit themselves to engage and defeat the strongholds of Satan. We are in need of a group of intercessors who can and will listen to the voice of God and remain intimately linked with the leadership of the church in relationship, purpose, and vision.

Believe me when I say, we need protection from the scorching winds of a satanic attack.

**BE FRIENDLY.** Smiles remind me of the warm rays of the sun. Each week we provide time to greet those who are seated around us. Believe me, I consider every moment of a service as being very, very important. I wouldn't give up the time for greeting if I didn't see some value in it.

I want to encourage you to use the greeting time wisely. For guests, this could be a highlight of the morning, or it could be a very discouraging moment. If a guest is not welcomed when everyone was specifically asked to welcome those around them, then the greeting time quickly becomes a negative to that person. (I find it funny, some of our guests actually count the number of people that greet them when they visit a church.)

Such greetings can take on many forms: an encouraging word, a compliment, a listening ear, a hug, a

spontaneous prayer, a warm handshake, etc. Let us get in the habit of assuming that God desires to provide each one of us an opportunity to bless and minister to someone else.

Let me push you to graciously by-pass those that you know or that you greet every week to welcome the newcomer. It is O.K. for you to leave your seat or aisle to do so.

Invite a newcomer to sit with you, to come to your cell group on Wednesday night, to join you for lunch after church. You don't have to be pushy. A simple invitation will suffice. At the very least, they will feel welcomed and know that you desire to know them more.

It would be great if a first time visitor left with two or three invitations to a cell group or a meal. This is the context in which they will move from being a stranger, to being a friend, from a friend to a viable member of the fellowship, and from being a viable member to being a saint who is prepared for works of service.

I know that it is a stretch of the comfort zone to meet and speak to people with whom you don't know, but I promise it is far more of a stretch for the person who is here for the first time. They are risking much to join us for they know nothing about us. They risk the awkwardness of not knowing who we are, how we speak, anything about our rituals, our customs, or our traditions. They have stepped out, prompted by God, to be in this place. As they come, let us assume that God brought them here specifically to be blessed and received by us.

I have found that churches experiencing high quality growth have members who love one another, care for one another, and enjoy being together. It is in such an environment that gifts grow and flourish.

#### **4. THE FORTH CHARACTERISTIC IS SEEN IN THAT THE PEOPLE GIVE**

God has always used his people to provide for his work. There is no special check-book from the "Bank of Heaven" nor are there any government subsidies that help support the work of the Kingdom.

God has always required that his people be so intimately linked to his purposes that they invest of themselves into the work of the Kingdom. He calls His children to tithe, not only a sign of our heart condition, but as a test of our faith and love for him. Our ability to carry out the work of the vision of this church is, in large part, dependent on our ability to be wise and good stewards of the things that God has given us.

Friends, God is not building a chicken coup here, He is building His church. He is touching an entire area with our efforts. Such efforts cost money. A lack of funds will shut us down and still our voice. I would hate to be responsible for that happening. Wouldn't you?

I am looking for people who are wanting to take some hills, not laze around on them. This is a call to sacrifice and challenge, not ease and comfort. Jesus called us to cross-bearing, self-denial, and death. Surely, giving to your church falls somewhere in there.

#### **5. MY FINAL CHARACTERISTIC IS REPENTANCE**

I believe that one of the hallmarks of an Ephesians 4 church is holiness. In other words, the people walk the talk.

- Their language is holy.
- Their minds are holy.
- Their habits are holy.
- Their checkbooks are holy.
- Their lockers at school or work are holy.
- They are a holy people.

You see, sin stunts spiritual growth as well as spiritual gifts.

I have no idea how many people have told me down through the years that they can't receive communion, they can't teach a Sunday school class, they can't operate in their gift because of some area of spiritual weakness in their lives. Sin is keeping them from being all that God wants them to be.

It is with this in mind that I am calling New Life Assembly of God to a night of Corporate Repentance. The evening of September 19 is being set aside for the church to spend some extended time on it's face before God. The whole service will be dedicated to this holy purpose. While we will spend some time in singing, the songs will be songs of repentance. The homily that night will focus on this theme as well. Then we are going to fall on our faces before a holy God and repent.

We are aware, as a church, that no major move of God comes without God's people humbling themselves and repenting for those things in which they have sinned and have become disobedient. The testimony of Scripture is that a loving and gracious God always responds positively to sincere repentance. It is a cleansing and a releasing of internal strongholds that would prevent us from accomplishing the great purposes God has planned for us. I find this exciting. I am already looking forward to the service. Believe, it is going to be both unique and special.

Can I be so bold as to say, I honestly believe that this night of Corporate Repentance is a divine requirement before we move on to possess higher ground in Christ.

Then a portion of the night will be given to corporate repentance over the sins of our nation. This night of prayer will precede this year's national elections by only 6 weeks. Let us remember the words of 2 Chronicles 7:14 which says, **"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."** The responsibility to repent begins with the church.

**N CLOSING**, God is calling us to be more than we are or more than we have been. He is seeking to raise up an Ephesians 4 type church. Let's work to be such a church here.