

Make Time to Rethink Everything

by Reggie Joiner

Statistics indicate that the church is losing ground in today's culture. Despite clear warnings about the decline of church participation, most churches continue to do business as usual. Too many ministries continue to function with their current customer base, even though they are not making significant inroads into the communities around them.

Every spiritual movement in history started because someone was willing to take a chance. They were men and women who dared to "rethink" what they believed and what they were actually responsible for doing in the name of the church.

Two thousand years ago, the apostle Paul rejected the notion that Christians had to preserve the traditions of the Jewish faith in order to establish the church. As a result, congregations sprang up across the Roman Empire and the Gentile world.

A little over 1500 years later, Martin Luther came face-to-face with the concept of being "justified by faith." He nailed a list of complaints to a church door and exposed an entire generation to the idea of a personal relationship with God based on faith, not works.

Even recently, men like Bill Hybels have challenged traditional churches in their approach to make disciples and reach their communities. In the past decade, thousands of churches have been re-engineered or launched around a new agenda. They are consumed with the priority of reaching the majority of the population-people who have become disengaged or disinterested in the church.

An honest evaluation of any leader God uses to impact a generation reveals their common characteristics:

They are usually controversial.

They are not afraid to question what seems to be sacred.

They are uncompromising about their priorities.

And as a result, they tend to embrace a purer and clearer principle, which becomes the foundation of how they do what they do.

In every situation, the church is radically changed.

I guess the real question you need to answer in the light of our culture is simply: Do you think the church needs to change? In other words, is there something in you that believes that the church, especially your church, should not continue to do ministry for the next generation the way you have for the current generation? If the answer to these questions is "yes," then it is only logical that you become intentional in rethinking everything.

This year, we have decided to host a different kind of gathering. These gatherings will challenge leaders to rethink what they believe, and why they do what they do. That's why we're calling them "Rethink Labs." We don't think our leaders have all the answers. But we do have a host of questions that we think the church needs to ask. They are questions that may seem irreverent when it comes to the sacred systems that exist in many churches. Some of them will definitely be controversial. But they are questions that must be asked and considered if we hope to impact the next generation. Too much is at stake for the church to just continue on the course that it has charted.

We really don't think we have all the right answers, but we know it is important to keep asking the right questions. It's the only way to unpack the critical principles that will enable us to reinvent our ministries. Our communities don't need any more churches that are patterned after churches that people are not attending. People are looking for relevance, and they are hungry for answers. Most are walking away from the church convinced that it's the last place they will discover what's important for their lives. Our culture is demanding the church to engage in lengthy debates and take risks. It needs us to be willing to embrace changes that may upset the system and frustrate those who are comfortable.

There are certain principles that need to be reexamined.
What you really believe will change the way you do church.
What you believe about how people change
What you believe about how students learn
What you believe about how individuals actually grow in their personal faith
What you believe about the influence of family
What you believe about why people participate and engage in ministry
Belief always drives behavior. What you believe as a leader impacts how you do church. So what if you are not believing or thinking correctly? There is a lot at stake. Courageous leaders are willing to rethink all of these issues and how they affect what they do.

Don't worry about compromising a principle. Compromise only happens when you refuse to embrace a principle that is unchanging. A principle can never really be compromised, because a principle stays the same. You can compromise your integrity. You can compromise your effectiveness, but you really can't compromise a principle.

A principle is like a diamond-it will hold up under any scrutiny or challenge. A principle does not change with time or pressure. You don't hold on to a principle in order to keep it from changing. You hold on to a principle because nothing can change it. And when you really get a handle on the right principle, it may force you to change. It may demand that you redirect or redesign your church.

What if you had an entire day to gather around a table and just rethink everything? Are you interested in shifting the way you think and starting over with a blank page? Would you be willing to take the risk? We need to initiate a holy riot and challenge the irrelevance of our churches. We can't afford to lose the war against an unseen enemy who is attacking the minds and hearts of the next generation. We are praying for leaders that will sit, dialogue, debate, question, and reinvent how they do church for the sake of eternity. We hope you will join us for a "Rethink Lab" or figure out how to host your own. Just make sure you don't keep thinking the way you've always thought.

Just a few things you should do if you are serious about "rethinking" how you do church:

Schedule time to make "rethinking" a priority.

Surround yourself with younger men and women who will challenge the process.

Hold everything with an open hand, so you are in a position to let go of something.

Strive to create a culture where nothing stays the same for very long.

Give your teams permission to experiment, even if there is risk involved.

NOTE: During our "Rethink Labs" we debate and examine relevant principles relating to 6 areas:

Strategy

Environments

Curriculum

Discipleship

Community

Family

And how they impact the way we do church.

To learn more about the reThink Group and Family Ministries, check for the Regional Conferences at www.reThinkLabs.org

In Closing

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