

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

October 13, 2020

This week's *Laptop* is partly a repeat of last year's introduction to *Natural Church Development* and partly an update on our NCD process

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My Dad worked in agriculture his whole life. He grew up on a farm in North Carolina plowing behind a mule. After WWII, he managed a network of cotton gins, was an agricultural extension agent, and retired as the Director of the Cotton Classing Division of the USDA.

So long as he was able, Dad also "farmed" in our yard. In Atlanta, where I grew up, he cultivated dogwood trees; and in Memphis, where they spent the last 40+ years of their lives, he cultivated a large rose garden in the back yard. One of the things Dad talked about each year was getting the soil tested so he would know what nutrients needed to be added in order to sustain the best dogwoods or roses. If the proper nutrients were available, plants would grow pretty much on their own.

That's a similar idea to what Jesus said in Mark 4:26-28 – *"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head."* The word being translated "all by itself" is the Greek word *αυτοματη* ("automatay"), from which we get the words "automatic," and "automatically."

To take this in a slightly different direction, what is the primary factor that affects how much water this barrel can hold? It's pretty obvious that the defining variable is the shortest stave, right? Once the water level reaches the lowest opening, the barrel is as full as it's going to get; and the quickest way to increase the capacity of the barrel is to lengthen this short stave.

Following a similar train of thought, German theologian and researcher Christian Schwarz has developed a "soil test" to identify the "shortest stave" or the "minimum factor" in the life of a Christian congregation—that limiting factor that is preventing the "all by itself" growth that God's Spirit intends as the central strategy for retaking this planet from the powers of Darkness.

Schwarz's research has been ongoing for several decades, and has now been normed on more than 70,000 congregations of every sort and size, on every continent except Antarctica. Schwarz's research has demonstrated that eight factors work together to produce "all by itself" congregational growth. These eight factors are:

1. **Empowering Leadership**
2. **Gift-Oriented Ministry**
3. **Passionate Spirituality**
4. **Functional Structures**



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5. **Inspiring Worship Service**
6. **Holistic Small Groups**
7. **Need-Oriented Evangelism**
8. **Loving Relationships**

(Notice that each factor has an operative adjective.)

Over the years, Schwarz's global research has been packaged as "Natural Church Development," or NCD, focusing on these "all by itself" factors. In order for a congregation to benefit from the research, thirty active members complete the NCD survey, which results in an extensive report that identifies the "minimum factors" that are limiting growth. The congregation uses this information to implement improvements for 18 months, after which the cycle repeats, identifying what have now become the "minimum factors."

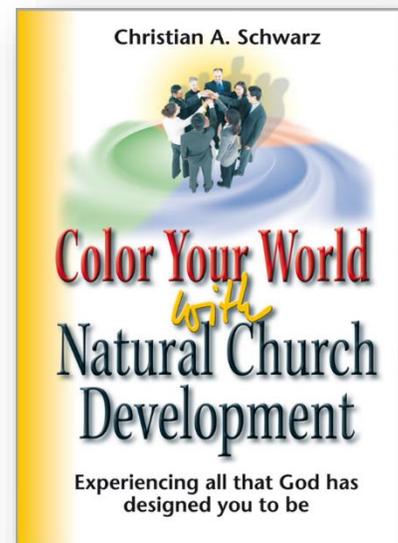
Last year we agreed to use NCD as the mechanism for our strategic planning for at least a year and a half, or one NCD cycle. Thirty of our core leaders took the inventory, and we've been using the results in our planning ever since . . . BUT of course, COVID has thrown a rather large wrench into the implementation of those plans.

If you need a refresher about the NCD process, I encourage you to watch the videos available via this link: <http://www.ncd-international.org/public/Mini-Seminars/English.html> You can watch all six short videos in 30 minutes. If you still want more, you can read the book illustrated here. It's available on Amazon.

The slides that are available below present the results of last year's survey, taken about this time. The Council has seen these several times, but I'm not sure I've sent them to the congregation at large. Please review this information, ponder, and pray.

Let's Roll!

Dave



The links will take a little bit to load, and I think they will allow you to view the files without downloading, if you prefer:

This link will take you to the report as a PDF:

<https://ln2.sync.com/dl/75d5d43b0/gxi9h328-djq88zk6-vt9w2k4y-9ikadwgs>

This link will take you to the report as a *PowerPoint* show:

<https://ln2.sync.com/dl/216f3fd10/mrvxjufv-zzcwecpc-2akecq4y-uvpnh96x>

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