

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

February 4, 2020

As many of us begin our Lenten small-group journey, here are a few similar thoughts to ponder. Unless otherwise noted, these quotes come from the book *Comeback Churches*,¹ and page numbers refer to that book . . .

“As Robert Lewis so pointedly asks in his book *The Church of Irresistible Influence*,² if your church closed its doors today, would anyone but its own members notice?” (p. 5).

“Patterns and traditions that once seemed special eventually lose their meaning. Churches that were once outwardly focused eventually become worried about the wrong things” (p. 17).

Three Faith Factors:

1. A renewed belief in Jesus Christ and the mission of the church;
2. A renewed attitude for servanthood; and
3. A more strategic prayer effort (p. 55).

“William Temple, the former Archbishop of Canterbury once said, ‘The Church is the only organization organized primarily for the benefit of its non-members’” (p. 64).

“Comeback churches have decided that the ‘sin of preferences’ leads to the ‘sin of a dying church.’ This is particularly true when the culture around a church changes quickly. Most American churches today are well suited for ministry in a different era. All churches are culturally relevant; the question is whether they are relevant to a culture that currently exists in their community or to one that disappeared generations ago” (p. 65).

“The vast majority of American churches are not contemporary; the majority [of comeback churches are], and that should make us take notice. . . . As you start the journey toward evangelistic effectiveness, be willing for God to stretch you in new ways, and be open to whatever music style God would use” (p. 84).

“If your church is stagnant or in decline and you visit one that is growing rapidly, we promise that their worship will not look or feel the same as yours” (p. 85).

What are these churches doing, and why is it working? What is our church doing, and why is it not working? What can we learn? What can we try? (p. 88).

“The main reason a church does not grow—are you ready for this?—is that it doesn’t *want* to grow” (p. 106).

“In many churches, as soon as the service ends, the regulars flock together and basically ignore guests” (p. 114).

“Many comeback churches—53 percent—raised the requirements of church membership, challenging people to live out the privileges and responsibilities of the covenant community described in Scripture” (p. 124).

“Churches with high membership requirements and expectations grow faster and are more evangelistically effective than those without high expectations” (p. 126).

“Before people can be motivated, their hearts have to be changed” (p. 133).



¹ Ed Stetzer & Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around & Yours Can Too* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2007).

² Robert Lewis, *The Church of Irresistible Influence: Bridge-Building Stories to Help Reach Your Community* (Zondervan, 2002).

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“Over and over, comeback leaders stated that increasing expectations is a key to creating an atmosphere for mobilization of the laity” (p. 137).

“George Gallup found that 70 percent of Americans have said that the church is not meeting their needs. When asked what these needs were, there were six common responses:

1. To believe life is meaningful and has a purpose. (A LIFE THAT MATTERS)
2. To have a sense of community and deeper relationships. (RELATIONSHIPS THAT LAST)
3. To be appreciated and respected.
4. To be listened to and heard.
5. To grow in faith.
6. To receive practical help in developing a mature faith (p. 150).

Small groups [such as our Lenten groups] provide an environment in which to:

1. Learn more about God and what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ;
2. Love others and experience God’s love;
3. Minister to people in need, within the group as well as in the community;
4. Decide to grow deeper in faith;
5. Share the joys and stresses of life together (p. 154).

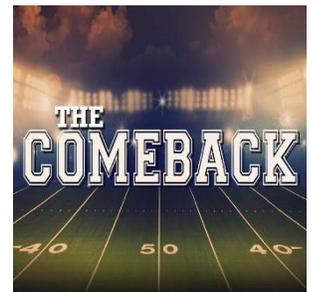
“The reason the bonsai stays as small as it does is because the pot dictates the size of the tree” [facilities] p. 161.

“The vision to reach new people or a segment of the community led to new or remodeled facilities, which helped cause the growth. . . . Let your vision determine your facilities. Never allow facilities to dictate your vision” (p. 165).

“Why not do it with a high degree of excellence?” (p. 166).

Seven Principles for “Timing”:

1. Prayerfully determine what God wants you to change.
2. Clearly define the change that needs to be made.
3. Look at the change objectively and clearly define the positive and negative forces that are presently holding the situation in stasis.
4. Consider other issues of timing (support; influence; influencers, etc.)
5. Since the situation needing change is “frozen” in place, unfreeze it by creating healthy discontent; determine who will play needed roles to help the change, as well as determine your own role.
6. Plan your approach and prepare for resistance to the change.
7. Refreeze the situation so that the change stays in place (p. 186).



“All things that resist change are changed by that resistance in ways undesired and undesirable” (p. 190).

“Once the comebacks started taking place, comeback churches saw the need to make changes in regard to children’s and youth ministry” (p. 193).

Children’s Ministry: use a team approach; focus on safety; make it fun, interactive, and high energy; provide funding; use special events (p. 194).

“Making a comeback will probably require churches to take a long and hard look at how they do worship, and then make some changes” (p. 197).

“As we have stated many times, making a turnaround requires making changes. That’s just the way it is” (p. 198).

We need to constantly remember who our true enemy is and who we are fighting against. Spiritual conflict will often manifest itself indirectly (p. 203).

Churches may declare that they are interested in and concerned about their community, but objective observers evaluating how the churches invest their effort, time, and money, frequently

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have to conclude that churches are far more interested in keeping their current attenders happy than in fulfilling the Great Commission of our Lord (p. 210).

Remember that Jesus commissioned you for this purpose. Stick with it (p. 214).

How many unchurched people are we reaching? When was the last time I witnessed to someone? Is what we're doing achieving the Great Commission, or is something else really our goal? (p. 214).

"Comeback churches changed plans and took risks" (p. 216).

"We need bridges that balance public proclamation with congregational incarnation. Bridges that are suspended by the steel cables of the Great Commandment as well as the Great Commission. In the twenty-first century, the church must understand, as never before, that faith—without works—is dead. So, too, will be our influence. . . . For the watching world, drowning in postmodernism, this is foundational: not simply the Word of truth, but the Word made flesh. A living proof—an irrefutable incarnation."³

"Without practically attractive, spiritually compelling, proof-positive lifestyles, what good are our claims and pronouncements about a life-changing God? If we can't outlive the world at every point—in our marriages, with our children, at work, with money, in our relationships, in the use of our time—why dare to speak of salvation and the abundant life?"⁴

"More changes now occur in one decade than occurred in entire centuries in the past. You can count on this: what works today won't work tomorrow" (pp. 210-211).

Since creativity is by definition un-usual, how willing is your church to tolerate people who are creatively unusual? Churches are generally more tolerant of reactionary, backward-looking, obstinate and ill-tempered people than they are of people who are actually trying something new (p. 216).

"Our churches are fixated on problems that belong to worlds that *are* no more, while the problems of the coming world are largely unknown and unaddressed" (p. 230).

"In times of change, it is the learners who will inherit the earth, while the learned will find themselves beautifully equipped for a world that no longer exists" (p. 233; Cynthia Ann Broad, Michigan Teacher of the Year, 1990).

"Much of what leaders in the church are trying to do has so long passed its use-by date that it's a wonder there's anybody left. . . . Some Christians have minds that haven't changed in fifty years. Not even rocks stay that still" (p. 234).

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Wayne Gretzky: "You miss 100 percent of the shots you never take."

"I don't skate to where the puck is.

I skate to where the puck is going to be."

We don't steer church toward where the church used to be.
We don't plan for where we are now. We plan for where we're going to be.

How would what we do have to change in order to actually meet the real needs of the people in our community? What would we have to learn in order to reach these people?

Ponder and Pray, my friends. Ponder & Pray.

Dave

³ Lewis, pp. 40-41.

⁴ Lewis, pp. 60-61.