

*Baptists Today* is running a series of articles in which they ask the same seven questions to various pastors and then publish those interviews. They recently interviewed George Mason, pastor of the Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, and I want to quote George's answer to the question, "Can you identify a couple of the biggest challenges in pastoral ministry today and share how you and your congregation are facing them?"

George's answer was really more about identifying the challenge than about solving it, but here was his reply: "Participation and stewardship are two significant challenges. The self-definition of an active member has shifted from attending about three times per month to about once per month. It's difficult to have continuity, to preach sermon series, to staff Sunday school, and to count on common knowledge when people are AWOL so often. The subtle shift from a sense of being part of a covenant community to being an attended when convenient is a huge challenge."

George's comments reminded me of these words from Mark Buchanan's book, *Your Church is Too Safe: Why Following Christ Turns the World Upside-Down*:

"Historian Daniel Boorstin documents a momentous shift that occurred in North America in the nineteenth century: we stopped calling people who went on trips travelers and started calling them tourists.



"*Traveler* literally means 'one who travails.' He labors, suffers, endures. A traveler—a travailer—get impregnated with a new and strange reality, grows huge and awkward trying to carry it, and finally, in agony, births something new and beautiful. To get there, he immerses himself in a culture, learns the language and customs, lives with the locals, imitates the dress, eats what's set before him. He takes risks, some enormous, and makes sacrifices, some extravagant. He has tight scrapes and narrow escapes. He is gone a long time. If he ever returns, he returns forever altered. . . .

"A tourist, not so. *Tourist* means, literally, 'one who goes in circles.' He's just taking an exotic detour home. He's only passing through, sampling wares, acquiring souvenirs. He tastes more than eats what's put before him. He retreats each night to what's safe and familiar. He picks up a word here, a phrase there, but the language, and the world it's embedded in, remains opaque and cryptic, and vaguely menacing. He spectates and consumes. He returns to where he's come from with an album of photos, a few mementos, a cheap hat. He's happy to be back.. He declares there's no place like home.

"We've made a similar shift in the church. At some point we stopped calling Christians disciples and started calling them believers. A disciple is one who follows and imitates Jesus. She loses her life in order to find it. She steps in the language



and culture of Christ until his Word and his world reshape hers, redefine her, change inside out how she sees and things and dreams and, finally, lives. . . .



“A believer, not so. She holds certain beliefs, but how deep down these go depends on the weather or her mood. She can get defensive, sometimes bristlingly so, about her beliefs, but in her honest moments she wonders why they’ve made such scant difference . . . .

“You can’t be a disciple without being a believer. But—here’s the rub—you can be a believer and not a disciple. You can say all the right things, thing all the right things, believe all the right things, do all the right things, **and still not follow and imitate Jesus.**

“The kingdom of God is made up of travelers, but our churches are largely populated with tourists. The kingdom is full of disciples, but our churches are filled with believers.”

I suspect that most of us are proud that the Baltimore Ravens are this year’s Super Bowl champions. And I suspect that you realize that the Ravens didn’t achieve this distinction by simply wanting to be on the winning team. No, victorious teams are composed of players who show up for every practice, on time, dressed out, warmed up, and willing to endure the pain of practice and scrimmage and battle. **No excuses. No whining. No schedule conflicts. No weather woes. No outcome but victory.** That’s what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, too.



Rick Warren has famously said that “**A Great Commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission will grow a Great Church.**”<sup>1</sup> We’ve taken the Great Commandment and the Great Commission and distilled them into what we call “**The Five Things Disciples Do Every Week.**”

I’ve attached a handout with this email that shows how these Five Things are related to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. You’ve seen these five things many times before, and they simply make tangible and specific what we’re talking about when we make our way “around the baseball diamond” of **WORSHIP, CONNECT, GROW, SERVE, and GO!**

Dr. George Bullard has written that “Your congregation is more likely to exist ten years from now if at least 50 percent of the adults present on a typical weekend for worship [are practicing The Five Things] in their lives. If only 25 to 50 percent [are practicing The Five Things], then your congregation’s future existence is marginal to uncertain. When less than 25 percent [are practicing The Five Things], your congregation’s long-term existence is very much in doubt.

“Congregations,” he wrote, “where at least 50 percent of the adults present on a typical weekend for worship [are practicing The Five Things] continually create the leadership base necessary for the congregation to grow qualitatively and quantitatively. If people attend corporate worship frequently, are engaged in a disciplinemaking process, have a close support group of friends, and have a place of service, then they will also grow deeper as followers of Christ.

“Congregations where only 25 to 50 percent of people [are practicing The Five Things] are probably struggling to have enough leadership and financial resources to be vital and vibrant.

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<sup>1</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 102.

Often they burn out their faithful leadership and strangle their ability to fund essential work and balanced ministry.

“Congregations where less than 25 percent [are practicing The Five Things] are deteriorating in their ability to provide quality leadership and adequate resources for the work and ministry of the congregation. People leave these congregations to go to other congregations where the programs, ministries, and activities they need are provided.”

One of my Dad’s maxims about which I often think goes like this: “**What kind of church would this church be if all of its members were just like me?**” While its grammar could be improved, that statement is an excellent summary of what I’m trying to convey.

If you want your life to count for eternal things, if you intend to be a spiritual **travailer** rather than a spiritual **tourist**, if you intend to be a **disciple** rather than just “a **believer**,” then **your life going to have to look a lot like WORSHIP, CONNECT, GROW, SERVE, and GO.**

You can’t say, “yes” to everything. You have to say “no” to some things. You often have to say “no” to good things in order to have time for the best things. If you’re serious about fulfilling God’s purposes in your life, then you have to make space for God in your life. And if you’re going to make space for God in your life, you’re going to have to cut some stuff out. Some good stuff—not sinful stuff—good stuff. If we’re going to be all that God intends for us to be, we have to stay focused, to keep the Main Thing the Main Thing.

I close with Theodore Roosevelt’s famous words from his “Citizenship in a Republic” speech, given in Paris at the Sorbonne on April 23, 1910:

“It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat.”

Are you going to travail on the field, my friend, or are you just going to watch from the sidelines? The Master calls . . . let’s Go!

Dave

**Children’s Ministry Confab**  
**July 21, 7 p.m.**

