

12. Healthy Churches Measure Effectiveness by How Many They Send Out

Today, many churches measure their success by the number of people who come to their church or by the size of their buildings or offerings. These happen to be worldly measures of success instead of Biblical measures of effectiveness. Christ focused on effectiveness rather than success. In the first part of John chapter six, Christ fed five thousand. Many people who saw that crowd would have said that Christ was very successful. Later in the chapter, when the crowds came to Him again, Christ told the crowds what it meant to be His disciples. We see the result by the response of many of the people who called themselves His disciples.

John 6:60 says, “Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’” Christ told them that some of them did not truly believe. We see the response of the crowd, in John 6:66. “From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.”

Christ then spoke to those who remained, and said, in John 6:67-70, “‘Do you also want to go away?’ But Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also, we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?’” Even with the twelve, Christ knew that Judas was not a true follower. In the space of one chapter, Christ went from a crowd of more than five thousand to a group of eleven true disciples. Christ was not concerned about worldly success, but He was very concerned about being effective, by doing the Father’s will.

Christ made two key statements near the conclusion of His earthly ministry – one the night before He was crucified, and the other the night He rose from the dead. Those two statements summarize why Christ knew He had been obedient, to the Father, in His ministry on this earth. Christ made the first statement as He prayed to the Father, in John 17:4, where He said: “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.” Then, Christ said to the disciples, in John 20:21, on the night of His resurrection, “... ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’” Christ had finished the work of equipping the disciples to carry on His work before He returned to heaven. He had glorified the Father by making disciples, and He had equipped them to Make Disciples. Now, Christ was sending the disciples out to do the same work.

That is the same work Christ has called each Christian to do in our lives here on earth. Matthew 28:18-20 says, “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.” This means that we cannot measure our success by the number of people we get to attend a church.

Instead, Christ said we will only be effective if we Make Disciples. We will Make Disciples and be effective if we:

1. **reach** people for Christ by going to people where they live, work, and spend their free time,

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- sharing the Gospel with them, and then helping them identify with the body of Christ, the church.
2. **teach** those we reach, so they know the Word of God, understand the Word of God, and apply the Word of God to their lives.
 3. **train** people how to glorify God by showing them how to grow in godly character and how to be effective in ministry to others.
 4. **send** them out to glorify God by reproducing themselves as they Make Disciples.

We bring glory to God by finishing the work Christ has commissioned us to do. That work is to **reach, teach, train, and send** as we become reproducing Christians and reproducing churches. The last thing Christ said before He returned to heaven was to tell the disciples where to do that work. Acts 1:8-9 says, “‘But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” That means that the true measure of effectiveness is the number of disciples we send out to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, to be witnesses of Christ and Make Disciples of all nations.

The word translated “nations” in Matthew 28:19 is “ethnos” from which we get our word “ethnic”. We glorify God by reaching people of all ethnic groups for Christ, showing them how to grow in godly character, teaching them the Word of God, showing them how to share the Word of God with others, and equipping them to Make Disciples among each of the ethnic groups in our community. This means that the true measure of our obedience, as churches and Christians, is whether our goal is to bring glory to God by making disciples.

In the process of making disciples, we are to show those we reach and equip, by our own example, how to cross four barriers:

- Jerusalem – the barrier of fear of sharing the Gospel and making disciples among their own relatives, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and other acquaintances
- Judea – the barrier of making contacts with strangers
- Samaria – the barrier of sharing the Gospel with people of another culture, religion, or ethnic group
- the ends of the earth – the barrier of language

Through the years, I have asked many people which of these barriers is the hardest barrier to cross. Nearly every person has answered that the hardest barrier to cross is the barrier of their own fear. Even Paul said this was the hardest barrier for him to cross. That is why he asked for prayer, in Ephesians 6:19-20, when he asked the Ephesians to pray: “For me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” If Paul had to ask for prayer for boldness to share the Gospel, then every Christian needs to ask and pray for boldness to share the Gospel. We bring glory to God by helping every Christian learn to pray for boldness to share the Gospel, instead of trying to share the Gospel in his or her own strength. Learning to yield our lives to Christ, and asking for His boldness, is the first and most important lesson every Christian must learn in order to become effective and bring glory to God.

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However, Christ also shared some other lessons about how to become effective reproducing Christians, and churches, that bring glory to God. In Mark 1:16-17, we read, “And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’” The next three verses show that He gave the same invitation to James and John. Then, verses 21-37 tells them that Christ showed them that very same day, by His example, how to share the Gospel with their relatives, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and other acquaintances.

Christ did not show the disciples what to share just one or two times. Mark 1:38-39 says, “But He said to them, ‘Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth.’ And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons.” Here, we see that Christ showed His disciples what to share, and how to share it, many different times and in many different places. He showed them how to answer the questions people asked in those various places. He showed them how to develop attitudes of compassion and love.

During the years these men spent with Christ, their lives were being transformed. They learned to deal with sinful attitudes in their lives that needed changing, because they saw the attitudes of Christ. They learned to have compassion for people, because they saw the compassion of Christ. Most of all they learned that Christ loved them. That is why they could understand what Christ meant when He gave them the new commandment, in John 13:34-35. Those verses say, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” They had seen His love for them. Now, He told them to love one another with that same love. That command could never have been given unless they had spent much time with Christ.

In the same way, people will only learn to love others, as Christ loves them, if they see our love as they watch our example. That is why Paul said to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” Just like Christ, Paul spent time with people so they could see his love and learn to follow his example, not just hear his words. In fact, Paul, Silas, and Timothy told the Christians in Thessalonica how they had helped them in their spiritual growth. 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9 says that they had provided both the time, and the loving care of a nursing mother, to help them grow in their spiritual lives. Then, 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12 says that they provided the example of a godly father as they helped them grow. The lives of people will be transformed, and equipped to help others have their lives transformed, as we share our time, show our love, and give them an example to follow as we follow Christ.

Are we looking for worldly success, or are we seeking to glorify God by developing a transformed life that will give others an example to follow? Are we telling others what to do, or are we showing them how to live? Are we spending time with them and serving them by taking them with us as we minister? We need to ask these questions both as individuals and as a team of church leaders. Churches that seek worldly success measure their success by the number of people who attend their churches, whether or not their lives are being transformed. Churches that seek to glorify God

will be able to measure their effectiveness by the number of people they reach for Christ, teach to grow in Christlikeness by their example, show how to grow in godly character and effective ministry, and then, send out to make disciples to the ends of the world. Is that the goal of your church as well as your personal goal? May the Lord bless you as you seek to glorify Him!