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What does the idea of church growth mean to us?

When Wesley sent Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury to a young nation, the legend says he challenged them with the words “**offer them Christ.**” Another charge came some years later as the Methodist Church began spreading westward, “**nothing to do but save souls.**” Not too many decades ago, one of the mantras of the Methodist Church was “**A Church A Day,**” speaking of how many Methodist churches were being planted across the nation.

I don’t think there were too many Methodist preachers (think circuit riders) who did not have a clear “why” as to growing churches. And so, we became the largest denomination in America influencing the smallest village and the largest city.

What happened?

I believe there are many reasons for the “what happened,” Some reasons were simply logistical and organizational — aging patterns, although there are other reasons far more complex.

But I believe there is another reason. Many churches put the practice of evangelism on the back burner, and what had been the center of the church was either neglected or ignored. It was felt that the church did not need to do that anymore. People were coming just because. Didn’t everyone go to church?

For many, church became an accepted form built around traditions, buildings, processes and structure. In other words, traditions of the church became the center rather the mission. I have long believed the mission is what should define the practice of the church.

The denomination began to operate around its process rather than its mission. The local church was dominated by rotating pastors who were often moved before a significant vision could develop. A vacuum of leadership was created and the why of the church was often lost. Something else filled it, and most often it wasn’t the

mission. Seminaries worked to theologically form pastors but left them ill-equipped to serve a church, must less grow one.

The why was lost and the how of evangelism was often lost with it.

- Does everyone need Jesus?
- Is the Great Commission of making disciples of Jesus Christ central?
- Can the good news of Christ deliver, change, save and restore people's lives?
- **Is offering Christ, saving souls, building a church a day still the mission of the church?**

The DNA of churches who get the why almost always focus on evangelism. A focus that everyone needs Jesus, that the good news can save souls, lives, marriages, families and communities. These churches believe in Jesus Christ. They believe there is a supernatural component of how Christ works in the hearts and lives of people. These churches have a strategy, staffing, worship and groups that reflect this core value. The why moves the church to focus its vision, energy and practice on **reaching people they are not already reaching**. The why informs the how!

I know I made many mistakes leading churches. I had some amazing moments and even more good-grief moments. I learned as much from my failures as from my successes. I sometimes wonder how my last church became the 15th largest attended Methodist church in America. It wasn't my standout talent, the fine way I led or the amazing qualities that I had. It was because I never forgot the "WHY" of the church. The reason I kept working to make it grow was never satisfied and I never lost the WHY of reaching people we were not already reaching.

There are probably few practices more important for a pastor or church leader than finding quiet study time and devotional time to discover and rediscover the "WHY" of our ministry, the passion that follows and the "how" that is developed.

The WHY is everything.