

Articles and Sermons :: seeker-friendly**seeker-friendly, on: 2007/7/25 2:09**<http://eaglestar.org/feature/wftw/2007/3007.htm>) Seeker Friendly

by Rick Joyner

July 23, 2007

As I travel, I continually hear about a basic conflict between "seeker-friendly" churches and those who feel they are leading Christians to a deeper or more substantial discipleship. I am personally thankful for both types. I believe both certainly have merit and are even necessary. However, I do not think that it is best for them to be separate, and certainly they should not be in conflict with each other. In fact, they need each other.

Seekers or new believers will usually feel uncomfortable in a mature church, especially those churches which are committed to deeper life or deeper discipleship. Likewise, maturing believers who may have met the Lord in a seeker-friendly church will usually start to yearn for more than they can receive there and will start to cause trouble if their spiritual needs and desires are not met. It is good to have a church devoted to this so it can be a kind of a relief valve, or there will likely be constant strife in the seeker-friendly churches which will make it uncomfortable for everyone, including the seekers.

Of course, there are many seeker-friendly churches that have made provision for believers to go on to maturity without having to leave their congregation. These can be the healthiest of all churches. There is an exhilaration that comes to any congregation when there are new believers coming in, which is necessary for the health of a congregation. If the light we have been given is not helping others to come out of darkness, then we need to recognize that there is either something wrong with our light, or it is being wrongly hidden. Staying in touch with those who are in darkness or just emerging from it is critical for the health of a church.

When Jesus walked the earth, He basically ministered on three levels. He ministered to the multitude, then the twelve, and then the three that He took everywhere and showed everything to. The healthiest churches will likewise have ministry on these three basic levels. This was in fact the model given to us for the church, God's dwelling place, which is seen in the tabernacles and temples of the Old Testament. They had the Outer Court which was open to anyone, then the Holy Place that only qualified priests could minister in, and then the Holy of Holies, which only the high priest could enter.

The purpose of seeing believers in this way is not to grade people on their level of maturity or sanctification, but to evaluate them so that they can be properly taken care of and directed to a path of increasing maturity. The healthiest of all churches will have people across the spectrum of spiritual maturity, all getting along, all loving and helping one another.

We must keep in mind that a fundamental difference in the New Covenant is that anyone can enter boldly into the very presence of the Lord by the blood of Jesus. We do not get perfected so we can enter His presence, but we get perfected by entering His presence. The newest, most immature believer can come before the Lord as easily as the most mature and powerful apostle. The immature believer who does this and continues to do it may be more pleasing to the Lord and ultimately changed in the right way (by His glory), than the most seemingly mature, knowledgeable, and powerful apostle. As we are told in I Corinthians 13, the one who has love is greater than the martyr, the one with the greatest knowledge, or even one who can move mountains with their faith. Loving God is the most important love that we have. An immature believer can have a love that touches Him and pleases Him more than any apostolic works.

If we forget these fundamentals, we will depart from the path of life. We may need to evaluate people's maturity and needs to help them along the path, but not to in any way hinder them from the presence of the Lord or judge their value. Our value and righteousness is not based on our maturity, but on the price that Jesus paid for us. Our ability to please the Lord has much more to do with our love than our works, knowledge, or power. However, the best would be to do the works and to seek the knowledge and the power out of love.

As much as there seems to be an outcry against the seeker-friendly churches in some circles, there is a rising outcry about those building on the groups of twelve in other circles. Like many of the seeker-friendly churches, those who are built

ding on the groups of twelve are thriving and healthy, even though some may have gone to extremes. Every movement will have elements which will carry things to extremes and usually bring disrepute to the whole movement, but we should not judge them by their most extreme elements, rather by their fruit. There is good fruit from many of these churches that are building on the groups of twelve principle, just as many have come to the Lord through the seeker-friendly churches. We should rejoice in all that are bearing fruit.

We all need to mature to the place where we understand that just because something is not what we need or is not our vision; it does not mean it is not of the Lord. We need the diversity. Israel was composed of twelve tribes, which all had different callings and visions, but were also a part of the common nation of Israel. We need many different movements in the body of Christ, each with different callings and purposes, but which also keep their identity and relationship with the whole body.

Just as the high priest carried the breastplate with all of the tribes of Israel represented on it, if we are going to abide in our High Priest, walking in the high calling, we must keep all of God's people on our hearts.

The truly mature are never intimidated when they meet or hear of those who are different from them, but they will be excited and open to learn from them. The leadership who seeks to keep their people isolated from the rest of the body is too immature or insecure to be leaders in the church. One of the basic requirements for leadership in the church was that they be given to hospitality to the aliens or strangers as we see in the Book of Titus. We might say by this that a leader must be open to those who are not like him. This is basic evidence of maturity and a right foundation for leadership in the church.

What would happen if seeker-friendly churches were open to learn from those who build on the groups of twelve, and those who build on the groups of twelve were open to learn from the seeker-friendly churches? Both would become much healthier. A church which only ministers to seekers and new believers may become large, but will rarely have much depth. A church that only ministers to those who are going on to maturity, without staying in touch with the multitudes may get deeper, but they will almost all ultimately succumb to pride and/or a control spirit. We will cover the reasons for this later.

The healthiest of all ministries will be like the Lord's, with something for the multitudes, a smaller group that is more closely trained (twelve is an excellent size for this), and a more intimate group of two or three that they share everything with. If we only focus on the multitude, we will become imbalanced. If we only focus on the more mature and zealous for the Lord, we will become imbalanced. Again, there is a ditch on either side of the path of life and staying out of them requires balance.

When we minister to a large group (the multitude), we need to discern their level of maturity so we can meet them where they are, with what they need at that time, but also so we can call them to greater maturity. Out of the large group, we should always find some who want to go deeper and who may be ready to be part of a group of twelve. Out of these groups of twelve, we should always be sensitive to those who need more. All of those who become a part of our most intimate group should, in due time, have their own ministries on all three levels.

The churches building on the groups of twelve often find many troubles when they try to get everyone into a group of twelve. I personally think it is a good vision to have everyone becoming a part of a group of twelve, but if you force people to do this prematurely there can be many unnecessary and potentially devastating problems. Likewise, if you do not have more intimate groups who are being taught more and are more highly trained, which people from the larger group can go to, you will have many unnecessary and potentially devastating problems. We should be wary of anyone who projects one formula for everyone.

Again, it is the basic nature of the Lord to love diversity, and the one formula method, regardless of what it is, is against His basic nature. This is why every church in the New Testament had some distinctive basics from the other churches. Even the seven churches the Lord spoke to in the Book of Revelation, which all existed at the same time and in the same general area, were all at very different places, with different needs, problems, and solutions. Beware of "cookie-cutter Christianity." Those who promote such confined answers for everyone will depart from the path of life and will become a sect at best, and some may even become cults.

It is apparent that some cultures are more receptive and even need certain expressions of the church more than others. For example, the group of twelve has had great success in Central and South America, but modest success at best in North America. Many want to blame "the independent spirit" of North Americans for this, which may be true to a degree. H

However, this "independent spirit" has also enabled many North American Christians to touch the creative nature of God in a seemingly greater way, which has touched and blessed the church around the world in many ways.

You may think I'm just an extreme optimist, and this may be true, but as it is explained in I Corinthians 13, love hopes and has faith first, not doubt—love sees the best in others first, not the worst. Seen as a whole, the body of Christ is the most diverse, creative, interesting, dynamic, and alive entity on the planet. I really, really love the church, and the more I have matured, the more I have learned to love every part of it. However, when we look at any one part of it alone, we will see things to love and things not to love.

I may have problems with some movements and denominations, their doctrines and/or their practices, but I still love them. Those of you who have been reading this Word for the Week for long know I won't hesitate to address what I see as problems or wrong teachings, but I will do it out of love because I really do love the whole church. I know I am not perfect either, and have often learned the most from those I disagreed with the most at one time.

I have seen some of the most destructive mistakes made by some I had the most hope in and have seen some I had little regard for be used to do great things. Overall, it is hard to imagine anything more interesting or wonderful than life in the church, and at times I have hoped that I would not be penalized in heaven for having it so good here!

Re: seeker-friendly, on: 2007/7/25 2:25

I enjoyed this article. Thoughts or anything to add please do.