

The Church in the 21st Century

10 GREATEST CHALLENGES FACING MINISTERS TODAY

by Dr. Mohler

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- I. Addressing post-modern Americans with the AUTHENTIC gospel
 - A. Our culture is watering down the gospel
 - B. People think they know what they need...
 - C. We are not to “negotiate” a “palatable” gospel
 - D. We have to tell people they don’t know what they need...
 - E. We have to give medicine to people who don’t they their sick...
 - F. We are to share the authentic, objective, biblical Truth!

- II. Cultivating a people of truth within a context of relativism
 - A. The greatest missing element in evangelical life is the Church
 - B. Christians must find a way to hold their faith firm while living with influence in the world around them...
 - C. Reflex Posture = our “comfort zone” on different issues (our “social space”)
 1. Being relative in evangelism requires us to know what the “reflex posture” is with our audiences
 2. Know that most Americans have a “moral relativist” position
 3. Moral relativism is inconsistent by definition
 4. Be aware that the moral relativism of today is soft and seductive... not harsh and “narrow-minded”
 5. Recognize that as a Minister of the Lord, when you come along with the Bible’s absolutes of right and wrong... expect resistance!
 - D. Moral relativism is the reflex posture of most Americans
 - E. We cannot avoid these people just because it will be difficult!

- III. Preaching the unchanging Word in a time of constant flux
 - A. Everything we know comes from a book that covers information from two to six thousand years ago...
 - B. Most people don’t want a “user’s guide for life” that is that old
 - C. If your doctor had a two hundred year old “book of medicine” that he used to make his decisions... you would look for another doctor... that is how lost people tend to look at us when we come to them with the truth.
 - D. The demise of Expository Preaching reflects the challenge herein... when we try to mold the truth to culture, we tend to water down, if not walk away from God’s Word!
 - E. One need only look to the liberal denominations, churches, and people to see what happens when the Word is changed to meet culture
 - F. We must preach truth until people find what they need, or Jesus comes...

- IV. Recovering biblical worship against an entertainment culture
 - A. We tend to strive to create an appetite amongst the people
 - B. We need to get back to sharing truth - “share the steak vs sell the sizzle...”
 - C. Our culture has developed expectations in our people... even attention spans have been affected (ever shrinking)
 - D. We have to teach people that worship is not about us... it is not entertainment for us, it is an expression of love toward God... People don’t want to hear that...
 - E. We have one book to share in a culture that likes it internet and remote control...
 - F. The flood of entertainment is deluging individuals today... to the point of overwhelming their senses.
 - G. The “reflex posture” is entertainment.

- V. Contending for the faith in a day of reflexive accommodation
 - A. The greatest danger to the gospel in this generation is a lack of firm teaching by church leaders on the exclusivity of the gospel.
 - B. The Bible is black and white on the need for Jesus alone!
 - C. Too many churches stress the gray areas of the Bible because the people like it...
 - D. Active Accommodation = when people say: “this is what the Bible says.... BUT, I can explain it in a gentler, more accepting way...”
 - 1. This used to be the hallmark of Christian liberalism... but today it is popping up in more and more places
 - 2. These people try to explain away the hard parts (forcing changes in our lives) of Scripture
 - E. Passive Accommodation = when people simply avoid biblical passages
 - 1. These people are very sly...
 - 2. They pick and choose which parts of the Bible they accept and embrace
 - 3. At best, they won’t argue against truth, they just want preach it...
 - F. Moral cowardice is a real problem!

- VI. Being the children of light in the midst of the children of darkness
 - A. Note, the first phrase beckons us to begin as the “children of light”
 - B. We have to contextualize our walk to be influential where we are...
 - C. What kind of people do we have to be to be effective in a world that is as messed up as it is...
 - D. We have to be the people who are humbly shaped by the Scriptures before we go into a dying world...
 - E. Sometimes *we* need to go through as much *refining change* as the people we talk to... even though their changes tend to be more broad sweeping...
 - F. Example: we need to address marriage (roles in, divorce, living-together, etc.) in our churches if we want to go out in the community and denounce same-sex marriage...

- VII. Challenging a new generation to Christian leadership and ministry
- A. We are not replacing our leaders at a rate equal to our rate of need
 - B. We are not calling out young men to positions of leadership in our churches
 - C. We are not intentionally mentoring future leaders (young and old alike)
 - D. We are raising up a generation of followers... who may not follow
 - * “You can only be a good follower if you know what a good leader is to do.”
- VIII. Salvaging the family from cultural destruction
- A. Family is the one cultural institution that nurtures responsibility
 - B. Most people today willingly sacrifice their family via medications, institutions, baby-sitting... vs. take up their responsibilities
 - C. Assaults on parental authority is running wild today...
 - D. Many are embracing the ideology of “it takes a village...” which ultimately embraces the idea of taking the children of society out of the hands of their parents... literally and influentially
 - E. Our views of the family needs to be theologically based
 - F. A theological view of the family rejects the world’s value system for the family
 - G. The world vies us as radically dangerous, in that we put biblical precepts of right and wrong above the social likes and dislikes of a child or any adult...
 - H. We say the family is far more important than the world says.... But at the same time, it is not the ultimate family...
- IX. We have to live the Christian disciplines in an era of do-it-yourself spirituality
- A. Most Christian books of do-it-yourself spirituality is really little more than instructions for how-to-love-yourself, in a biblical context
 - B. **“Reading the Bible is not about ‘what you get out of it’ – it is about what it gets out of you.” – Al Mohler**
 - C. We have to tell people to: 1). read the Bible, 2). study the Bible, and 3). pray! It is the same message that Paul gave the people of his day...
- X. Building a missiological worldview centered in the glory of God
- A. We must get beyond the act of missions, to the heart of the missions!
 - B. Missions is not the ends, it is the means, to the glory of God in all creation
 - C. Our love of God should fuel a passion for missions, as a means to glorify God
 - D. Note that God made us “vessels” for the Great Commission
- *** We have “reaching churches” that are not “teaching churches,” and we have “teaching churches” that are not “reaching churches” – we must commit ourselves to leading “Teaching AND Reaching churches”

WHAT REALLY MATTERS IN CHURCH GROWTH

Ten Years of Research & Five Conclusions

by Dr. Rainer

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Surprises From Healthy Evangelistic Churches

- I. Doctrine Really Matters
 - A. 91% of “new” Christians were attracted to a church because of its doctrine
 - B. Doctrinal absolutes were critical
 - C. Certitude was certain... conviction of the messenger was key
 - D. Dean Kelly was right in his book: Why Conservative Churches Are Growing... people want correct doctrine shared with love and conviction

- II. Expository Preaching Really Matters
 - A. Preaching was cited as the number one “correlative” factor in evangelistic churches - *** Over 90% of the time
 - B. Expository Preaching was the dominant preaching style of 75% of these pastors
 - C. Preach the WHOLE counsel of God!!!
 - D. People need to hear what God says – not what we think they need to hear!

- III. Prayer Really Matters
 - A. **Acts 2: 42-47** shows us that prayer is a core “purpose” of the Church
 - B. If prayer is not seen as an independent, foundational, pillar of church purposes, it tends to get minimized and lost through splintered delegation in the activities of the church body
 - C. Prayer ministries were the second highest correlative factors *** (68%)
 - D. Prayer for lost persons by name were common in these churches
 - E. Our people need to develop a heart for the people of their community and the world. Then they need to develop a passion to become the person God wants them to be. Then... they need to intentionally, fervently, and consistently pray for both themselves in their pursuit of continued sanctification and lost people. When that happens, God seems to bless more times than not...

- IV. Bible Study Really Matters
 - A. Sunday School and similar Bible study groups were the 3rd highest correlative factor *** (64%)
 - B. Strong biblical teaching
 - C. Intentional evangelistic outreach

- V. Personal Evangelism Really Matters
- A. Pastors of effective evangelistic churches spend an average of 5 hours a week in personal evangelism
 - B. By comparison, most pastors spend ZERO hours per week in personal evangelism
 - C. We tend to forget about intentionally making opportunities to share our faith with lost people...
 - D. We can “know” the truth, but if we are not intentionally sharing the truth of the gospel, one can rightly question whether or not we truly believe the truth we claim to embrace

*** Good churches become GREAT churches by doing that which really matters!

*** Truly effective churches may or may not embrace some cutting edge methodologies... but they NEVER abandon the biblical fundamentals!

*** Sadly, most churches are not attending to these seemingly obvious issues

DISCUSSION TIME

- “The will is the heart, choosing.” - Jonathan Edwards (per Dr. Mohler)
- “Churches grow... that *want* to grow.” – Dr. Mohler
- 2 Timothy 2 shares a model of leaders training future leaders that we must embrace... the demographic shifts in our society will require more and more bi-vocational, non-seminary trained ministry leaders...
- What is the church?
 - A. Preaching - the gospel
 - B. Power and authority models from Matt. 16
 - C. Functions – see the Pastoral Epistles and Acts

*** We have to decide what the non-negotiables are, and then become as flexible as possible to effectively “teach and reach” in ways that are glorifying to God.

*** Look to Paul... we need to share his level of commitment to uncompromised proclamation of the truth, as well as his willingness to become “all things to all people” in his God-honoring methodologies.