

When Church Stops Working Book Study, Presbytery of Niagara

Summary of Chapter 1

- (preface) There are no quick fixes
- Measuring the present against the past or future (both imagined)
- The idea of making the church great (again) suggests it isn't enough in the present
- There's been tons of analysis on church decline for half a century! All of it more or less asks, "how do we get more people to come to church?"
- In our churches today, the lack of resources and lack of relevance is painful. It causes anxiety and stress.
- Vicious circle of not enough resources to increase relevance, not enough relevance to gain resources
- Solution: the right balance of resource management and effective innovation.
- 1 way is to copy how another (large) church "succeeded", another is more of a general guideline.
- Innovation hasn't worked – decline is a 50 year reality. That's half a century! If those ideas worked, I think we wouldn't be here today.
- Innovation is trying to solve the **WRONG PROBLEM**
- Decline is a symptom, not the problem
- Andy and Blair are "doctors" with the skills to properly diagnose the church's ailment. Dr. google is wrong.
- Their diagnosis is that yes, the church is sick. Decline is the symptom, and the problem is that the secular age has infected the church.
- The complexity of the treatment ramps up when the cause is systemic.
- Secular age in 3 parts:
 - A separation of secular and sacred: Christianity has less/no influence in society because the sacred no longer sets the agenda for all of society
 - A separation of public and private: personal beliefs are increasingly disconnected from a public expression of those beliefs.
 - A separation between the immanent and the transcendent: the enchanted world no longer exists. It is now possible to not believe in God.
- We need to *imagine* a cure that doesn't depend on the secular age
- From within the secular age, we struggle to imagine what a public faith that witnesses to the transcendent looks like.
- The authors ask: "How can we choose whose imagined future is best?" We can't have them all.
- We all have to make choices about what to do with our limited time. One solution is better efficiency. We need to work smarter, multi-task, etc.
- Secular logic tells us that there are two speeds: fast or dead.
- The opposite to acceleration is resonance.

- Resonance is all about connecting with the world, with people in our lives, and finding a meaning that is greater than what we can see and explain.
- The church needs more resonance rather than more influence.
- Jesus told the earliest believers to wait.

Small Group Discussion:

Recount a story of an amazing moment in your life; a moment when you experienced "resonance."

2 Questions:

1. The authors state that church decline is a symptom of the ailment, and not the actual ailment of the Church. In what ways do you see sickness in the Church?
2. A quote from page 13: "We end up trying to win a game playing by rules that are stacked against us when we should instead reimagine the game itself." What are the secular things that we as church are doing (and failing) at? (Like innovations)

Summary of Responses:

- Resonance happened when deeply engaged in a hobby; when singing spiritual music in a choir; when engaging deeply with friends or family around a dinner table or over a board game. The words 'surreal' and 'supernatural' were mentioned
1. Sickness in the church:
 - People lack spirituality; kids aren't taught to pray
 - Children's sports on Sunday mornings
 - Our mission is to direct people to God.
 - People are too busy doing and don't spend time being
 - People lack theological education
 - Talking about your faith is hard
 - People are selfish – they want the church to be around until they're dead
 - Spiritual talk is taboo
 - Pastors don't know their congregation on a spiritual level
 - People don't have a relationship with Jesus/God
 - People are too attached to the church building. The building is not the church, the congregation is.
 - Wealth makes it possible to not depend on God for material well-being
 - We're blinded by the decline. We're too focused on building the numbers of our own church and denomination, rather than the church as a whole.
 - People wonder what this world is going to be like for their [great niece/grandchild/etc.]
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 2. Secular things the church is doing and failing at:

- Trying to compete with secular activities (building a gym onto the church)
- Being busy (taking away from being)
- Many church events have no spiritual component
- We're scared to share the Good News
- We don't know how to articulate the Good News
- It is easier to talk about our faith in small groups like Bible Study
- In a larger church, you seldom get into the topic of your beliefs. You care for and serve each other but the sharing isn't as easy. (private/public break)
- We're trying to run the church like any other business/institution. But, how do we find the way not to?
- We have the living Christ to offer!
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