

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CORNERSTONE

I came to Christ in the mid 70's and got into a SBC church right off the bat. It had problems, such as the fact that the church was massively infected with worldliness, no church discipline, no expository exhortation, did not practice separation, and focused on man-made rules. However, it had one redeeming quality it - kept inviting guest speakers who were great exhorters.

Because I was converted, I kept going witnessing and to any Bible study or Bible course I could find. The church soon recognized that I was called to preach and sent me to a liberal SCB college. I was confused, shocked, discouraged, and I dropped out after a semester. I then started to do a lot of self-study, randomly taking courses, studying with the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Hindu gurus, just trying to understand God and the Bible.

Soon after, a pastor I met encouraged me to connect with one local church and I started to grow. I started to think of how to finish my Bible education, and finished college at William Jennings Bryan College in Tennessee. The president of the college saw that I was called into the ministry and made arrangements for me to go on to Dallas Theological Seminary. I was then introduced to MacArthur's book, "The Gospel According to Jesus." I finished Magna Cum Laude in the late 80's and went on to pastor a small church. I saw many things in American churches which did not match Scripture. Most of the traditional churches I saw were saturated in legalism, apathy, man-made rules, no expositional preaching, no Lordship Salvation, no fervent evangelism or disciple-making and plenty of market-driven seeker-sensitive church philosophy.

To plant or not to plant

I had a growing burden on my heart to either drop-out of the organized church altogether, since it was nothing but a sewer, or to plant a church and do it right as I understood the Bible to teach. That started me and my wife on a 5-year quest to understand the biblical teaching of the local church and how to plant one. I enrolled in doctoral courses majoring in church growth. I read dozens of books on church planting and church marketing and so forth. I soon came to realize that there were three basic approaches to church.

1. The traditional model of the past 50-100 years
2. The market-driven model of Hybels and Warren (later this evolved into the Emergent Movement)
3. The Bible-driven model

The model of Warren and Hybels focused on finding out what the unchurched person wants and giving it to them. This is the market-driven model. The other was to find out what the Bible teaches and give it to them. This is the Bible-driven model. There is a wealth of literature on both models.

The step of faith

Laurie and I moved to Orlando in 1992 with the clear call of God to plant a Bible-driven church. I told the Lord, "Lord, if church can still be done according to the Bible in this wicked and adulterous generation then I will do my best whether no one comes." When we came to plant the church we came as a "pioneer plant." This means that we had no core group, and no mother church to seed our church with ministry families. No help. We came totally alone. We did not even have a ministry team to encourage and help us as Paul did. I took the life of Jesus (Gospels) and the apostles (the Book of Acts) as my handbook. Therefore, I went out witnessing door-to-door, in the marketplace daily (sometimes 8-10 hours a day). We began meeting in my home at first and soon had a handful of professors of religion.

Infil – traitors

Soon other "evangelicals" heard about us and came to "help us out". They only wanted to remake the church into another market-driven, Charismatic church. They originally came saying that they wanted to get on-board and they said that they liked what I was doing, but when push came to shove they reverted either to their traditional dead model or to the market-driven model. Neither the traditionalists nor the market-driven people were teachable. They sowed discord, called us a cult and saw it as their God-appointed duty to rescue our new converts from "our cult". We were **not traditional enough** for the traditionalists, who demanded that we wear suits, use the KJV only, sing only hymns and preach in vague generalities, and were shocked that we preached Lordship Salvation. We were **not innovative enough** for the market-driven group, who were outraged that we not tolerate Charismatics, would not allow women to keep coming dressed sensually, would not use hard rock music, would not use video clips, preached against night clubs, refused to use drama skits each week, and were outraged that we preached Lordship Salvation.

Over the years, wolves have infiltrated us numerous times as Jude said that they would. I am convinced that there is nothing that you can do to absolutely keep all wolves out at all times (Acts 20-28-31). However, what Satan meant for evil and the destruction of our baby church has actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.

Growth by attack

The attacks have caused us to examine what we do strongly from the Bible alone. This has made us like Nehemiah at the wall. The areas which I was a bit soft on have been shored-up and are non-negotiable. For example, because the vast majority of churches have abandoned person-to-person soul winning we were called a cult because we “do what the Jehovah’s Witnesses do”. The fact is that Christians have been doing person-to-person evangelism centuries before the Watchtower cult was ever dreamed of. This has made us immovable on the issue of evangelism. No one will ever be a leader at Cornerstone who does not fervently practice person-to-person evangelism. That decision has cost us many members.

For another example, one wealthy, self-made businessman came to our church for about a year. At the end of the year, he called for an appointment. He told me that God had revealed to him why our church is not growing faster. He said it was because I preach too hard and that I preach about Hell. “It scares people off,” he said. He pointed to many other well-known preachers who tell lots of jokes, keep their sermon to 20 minutes, and never say anything offensive. “Look at how fast Warren’s church grew! 0 members to 5,000 in 5 years! Paul Yongi Cho has a church of 1 million in Soul Korea! God is obviously blessing him. You could have that kind of growth Pastor Dave! The fact that your church is not busting at the seams is proof that you are not doing things the way God wants them done. After all, aren’t we supposed to ‘preach the truth in love?’ ”

I asked him for time to reexamine the Bible to see if I was missing something in my preaching. I had taken preaching in college and made straight A+’s in every preaching course. I had taken many preaching courses in my four years at seminary and was selected to receive the J. Ellwood Evans Award for the best work in the whole seminary. I had made straight A+’s in every preaching course in seminary. I also had taken preaching courses in my doctoral studies and made straight A+’s there also. Had I missed something?

What does a biblical preacher preach like?

I started at Genesis and worked through the entire Bible. I looked at every preacher in the Bible to see their topics, audience, tone, motives, results and so forth. I came to realize that I had been holding back and had not been preaching hard enough! I explained to that “big giver” that he was not welcome at our church any longer. Of course he left and did all he could to take others with him.

The same is true of every area of attack. First, the enemy would attack what seemed so clear to me. I would then be forced to go back to the Bible to see if I had missed something. After extensive study, I came to the point where that area of attack became 50 feet of steel reinforced concrete. When I was a young preacher 25 years ago, I assumed that anyone who had a few years on me and had been in the churches for a significant numbers of years had to be a wonderful, mature Christian with only my best interests at heart. Boy was I mistaken. But in God’s fatherly discipline, he used their vicious attacks to force my forehead to become like flint.

Church growth

Church growth is utterly meaningless and deceptive. *I care nothing about church growth.* It is not a biblical command or a biblical value. It is a deceptive concept used by the church marketers to force pastors to soften the message in order to fill the pews. The Bible speaks about church growth only incidentally. All I care about is faithfully serving my Lord. If he chooses to allow us to grow I always ask him to limit the speed of the growth so that we are not overrun by infiltrators. I have repeatedly pled with the Lord that he would just allow me a handful of genuine converts to love and serve him. I would rather have 12 genuine disciples than 12,000 weeds. You can change the world with 12 genuine disciples. What biblical examples can we turn to?

- Was Jeremiah a disobedient failure? God told him he was sent to a people who would not listen to him!
- Noah preached 120 years and got a boatload of converts – 8!
- Elijah felt like he alone was left
- Jesus preached perfectly and worked miracles for 3 years and had only 120 converts before Pentecost