

Holistic Ministry—Holistic Church

By Bob Young

I recently wrote about the two-fold mission and work of the church—to save the lost, to keep the saved saved. These are two essential dynamics of ministry in the local church. Ministry in its simplest form focuses on only two goals. To simplify even more, the number one and only goal in the local church is the salvation of souls--the church that knows the goal and focuses everything toward the goal will be blessed by God to accomplish God's purpose.

Last year, in an article entitled "If I Could Start Over in Ministry," I wrote about other important aspects of ministry. I explained the importance of evangelism, building strong relationships, discipleship, meaningful worship, fellowship, and having every member involved in ministry and mission.

In this article I suggest ways to integrate the two articles.

First, the church must keep in sight the goal of sharing the gospel. In saying that the church must keep the goal in sight, I do not refer only to the leaders, preacher, elders. I am writing about the DNA, mindset, and world view of the church, every member. Constantly in view in the life of the church must be the ministry of the gospel and the mission of the gospel. Keep the goal at the forefront—every member knows the task. Every member can explain the task, because the task has been accepted as the work of every Christian in the local church. The challenge is to get people in contact with the gospel. That contact is made through evangelism efforts; strong relationships both within and without the body; thoughtful, meaningful, challenging worship; shared fellowship; and members involved in service and mission.

Second, the church strengthens and stabilizes its members. Members belong to one another—we never let go of those who belong to us, we never let go because we belong to one another. Discipleship requires relationships. Jesus said making disciples involves two things—teaching the gospel so that people are baptized and continuing to teach after baptism. Discipleship is intentional. Discipleship is training in Christ, the image of Jesus, the heart of Jesus, the priorities of Jesus.

The church that is serious about discipleship will develop ways to evaluate disciple-making efforts. Obviously, we look at how many people are responding to the gospel because Jesus said that discipling the nations will lead to baptisms. But the number of baptisms does not tell the whole story. What happens after baptism?

How do we evaluate growth in Christ? How do we evaluate growth in discipleship? We sometimes measure attendance. Just getting together—whether in worship assembly, classes, or groups—does not guarantee that people love and obey Jesus. The activities that many churches share in their groups do not produce disciples who make disciples.

Here are some suggestions.

Do you see the church members obeying Jesus in their daily lives?

If not, either people are not spending personal time in the Word or they are not identifying the actions and action steps that should come out of their time in the Word.

The church serious about discipleship will help members identify their action steps. What will you do in coming days, weeks, months to obey and to follow Jesus more closely?

Principle: The Word must be central—in worship, classes, groups, and personally!

Do you see the members of the church contacting others and sharing their faith? Do you see disciples making disciples?

If not, either people are not focusing on unreached people, evangelism opportunities, and mission opportunities in their prayer lives, or they do not have a specific plan for outreach.

The church serious about discipleship will help people develop specific plans for starting spiritual conversations and reaching out to the unreached, the wandering, and the weak. Shared outreach activities are a good starting point to help people overcome their hesitancy and reluctance.

Principle: Evangelism must be a priority!

Do you see the members openly and continually sharing their lives with others?

If not, either people are not aware of the importance of community, or they are reluctant to let others see them so intimately.

The church that is serious about discipleship will help members develop activities that build relationships and fellowship—both planned and spontaneous. Leaders must model transparency and openness.

Principle: Fellowship and relationships are essential to discipleship.

Do you see and hear church members experiencing God's presence in their lives, in their relationships, and in their meetings with God?

If not, it is time to rethink how we can be more aware of God's presence, or to change some of the aspects of our shared praise time. Is it that people are not aware, or is it that our God-meetings are often outward and lack a sense of God's presence and spiritual realities?

The church that is serious about discipleship will help members develop the "God presence" in every aspect of their daily lives.

Principle: Disciples worship—continually!

Do you see all the members involved in ministry and service?

If not, is it because they do not want to serve, or is it because they do not know how or have not been asked or included?

The church that is serious about discipleship will make it easy for members to use their spiritual gifts and be involved ministry that moves the church toward its goal of salvation for all. Every member involved in evangelism, discipleship, and mission.

Principle: The goal is every member actively involved in Ministry!

In summary, the goal is holistic ministry, focused on what matters to God. The priority is salvation—saving people and keeping them saved. A holistic church will change the lives of its members. It will also change the life of its community.