



TC's Thoughts for Discussion

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Is it the purpose of the church to get people "saved" and then to get them Involved? Or, might it be our mission to get people involved and then to get them "saved?" Which do you think?

On second thought, neither my opinion nor yours may be appropriate, here. Perhaps we should consult God's written word for the answer. Is it the mission of the church to get people "saved" or did Jesus prescribe a very different mission for us?

> "Therefore go and **MAKE DISCIPLES** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you..." —Jesus, at Matthew 28:19,20 (NIV)

"Believers" and "Disciples:" Are there differences? To learn the answer focus, first, on what Jesus did NOT tell us to do:

> "Go, therefore, and get people 'saved'."

> "Go, therefore, and get people 'saved' and then get them involved in church attendance and active Christian fellowship, activities and programs."

> "Go, therefore, and get people involved in church attendance and active Christian fellowship, activities and programs and then get them 'saved'."

> "Go, therefore, and persuade people to believe in me so they can be 'saved'."

What he did tell us to do was to (a) Preach/Share the good news, (b) MAKE DISCIPLES of those who believe, (c) Baptize them and (d) Teach them...to obey His teachings. That's the *only* assigned mission of The Church. Take it to the bank:

> "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that OBEY him." —Paul, at Hebrews 5:9

The visible church has done a respectable job of making BELIEVERS. Can't argue that. But, Believers are passive. They are non-productive, in the Matthew 28:19,20 sense. But the visible church values Believers highly: Many of them give offerings. Some of them tithe. But are they Disciples? Are they even "saved?"

> "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things..." —Paul, at 1 Timothy 6:10,11 (Not a warning to rank-and-file Believers, but to members of the Professional Clergy!)

Disciples are active. They're fruitful. They make other Disciples. They obey the commandments of our Lord. They, alone, are The Church. Believers are...well, SPECTATORS; they warm the bleachers while professional Christians keep them entertained.

> "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." —Jesus, at Luke 14:33

Those are Jesus' words; not mine. Fact: It is not the mission of The Church to get people "saved." Sorry. That's the job of the Holy Spirit: ^

^ "...And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." —Acts 2:47

When the visible church beckons Believers and Participants, it promises them programs and activities and a perpetual series of fully choreographed dog-n-pony shows. The opening acts are often professional musicians and singers. The headliners are often motivational speakers. Today, with the newest crop of mega-churches, there is the promise of a better life via Positive Thinking and Prosperity. When Jesus beckoned his disciples, he promised them NOTHING. (Wanna chew on that for awhile?)

George Barna's research appears to yield a strong and clear snapshot of today's thinking Christians: They're leaving! ^ They're finding entertainment and meaningful social interaction elsewhere. Thank God, some of them are discovering grassroots networks of Disciples who're working to revive The Church...one that at least *resembles* the church that Jesus described at Matthew 28:19,20. Must all Christian thinkers eventually follow suit?

^ See the book, Revolution, and multiple other publications by George Barna and the Barna Group.

Today's church leaders, with their programs and activities, are, themselves, responsible for the current bumper crop of pew potatoes. But are those programs and activities, alone, the culprits? The preaching and teaching of the visible church are also remarkably programmed for yielding Arrested Christian Development:

I was a successful Bible teacher for a LOT of years—big sanctuary classes.

I knew what my denomination believed and that's what I taught.

Yes, I should've checked it out to make sure it was true.

So why didn't I do that? Well, maybe I didn't do that for the same reason that you haven't really checked out what your denomination teaches.

"In religion and politics, people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second hand, and without examination." —Mark Twain



No matter how strong their pulpit skills, preachers CANNOT make Disciples from the pulpit. That may be at least one of the reasons why so many Sunday morning sermons are characterized as "salvation" messages: Pew potatoes love to say (or think) "Amen!" when messages are directed to others. (The "Amen!" response, today, means "You tell'em, Brother!")

Those clergymen who try to "teach" Discipleship via pulpit sermons presume an impossible task: Discipleship cannot be "taught;" it must be "coached." Only personal coaches can do that, one-on-one. Doubt it? Stand behind a podium and try "teaching" a group of young children how to ride bikes...

So, what is the value of pulpit sermons? Pew potatoes love motivational speeches that are creative and skillfully and sometimes humorously delivered. If a preacher can consistently keep'em awake, they'll tell their friends, "You've just got to come and hear our wonderful preacher just once, at least!" and the church will grow. Include a pomposity of fully choreographed musical entertainment and FREE tickets to Heaven that can't be revoked, lost, given away or trashed to build a mega church... and collect lots of followers' dollars.

Are size and growth legitimate measures of success for an institution whose assigned mission is to make Disciples? What eternal value might there be in a church building packed full of blissful Pew Potatoes, even if most of them were of the *sweet potato* variety? For some fascinating additional insight, visit us at: www.DYPK.org/we-believe.

- > "We started out in the right direction during those first few centuries: loving, serving, healing, restoring, forgiving, sharing, praying – every one either learning to be a disciple, being a disciple or training others to be disciples. But somewhere along the way, we turned into serious slackers, slugs even. We benched ourselves and appointed a 'chosen few' to do what Jesus and the Father called us all to do, and we sat down to watch. We opted for disobedience and convenience. Why did we do that? We, as the people of God, chose inertia over 'doing the stuff.' We ignored God's command to 'take dominion over the earth and subdue it'...for the pleasures of more mundane, less challenging 'kingdoms' and a permanent pew cushion. Folks, we've messed this job up big time..." —a 2014 "Reflections" post by an unknown author, at <http://wordpress.com/2007/08/10/disciple-or-pew-potato>

Where scriptural challenges of a "what 'we' believe" franchise are discouraged, there can be no healthy forum for making Disciples. Such a church is programmed only to manufacture and maintain a congregation of naïve Believers, a.k.a. pew potatoes. Consciously or subconsciously, that's what the collective leadership of the visible church wants and that's what it gets. Will God be mocked?

Meaningful DIALOG is critical to the making of Disciples. Lecturing has been shown to be of very little value for real learning of *any* sort. An effective Disciple-making forum is characterized by on-going, reciprocal correction, instruction and reproof:

- > "All scripture...is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." —2 Timothy 3:16,17
Note: The phrase, "man of God," here, includes *non*-clergy Disciples. Perhaps you've heard something different...
- > "...reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine..." —2 Timothy 4:2-4

So why is lecturing the "teaching" tool of choice? It is because, "That's how we do church, here!" Preferring to "teach" and "preach," today's church leaders continue to turn deaf ears to proven learning-based methods.

- > "If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail." —Abraham Maslow

Among the just under 11,000 Baby Boomers who'll reach retirement age every day for the next 18 years or so are a respectable number of capable and experienced thinkers. Thinking Boomers have sat quietly in the church pews for decades, *wondering* whether their preachers have really done their homework. That notorious 60s-styled skepticism and curiosity continues to gnaw at them—especially when they're in church. When they retire, many of them will *make* the time to do their own scriptural homework. It won't take them long to discover that their silent doubting has been fully justified. (Note: Their kids, the Millennials, are not only abandoning the visible "church," they're abandoning religion, too...in favor of secularism.)

They'll soon discover that all seminaries teach "what 'we' believe," that seminary graduates teach "what 'we' believe" and that the Believers who warm their pews believe "what 'we' believe." Those Boomers have not been naïve, but patient. As soon as their retirement tsunami gains critical mass, they're likely to spring some major surprises on the visible church. Clergymen beware: "Make full proof of thy ministry." —2 Timothy 4:5

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Spoken or unspoken, the primary objective of the visible church is to build and maintain congregations of BELIEVERS. To attract those Believers, they use various methods for making Christianity appear ATTRACTIVE. How attractive can that be to God? How attractive is it to you? How does it compare to the method Jesus used?

Essentially, though, this article is for laymen. If you're a Christian layman, please examine your priorities: Will you be a perpetual spectator who keeps the bleacher seats warm or will you be an active participant on-the-playing-field, pursuing the mission JESUS prescribed for The Church?

Google^(®) "pew potato" and you'll find some really interesting stuff. As an example there's a fascinating Foxworthy-styled "You might be a pew potato IF..." piece. And there's a tongue-in-cheek "pew potato" hymn—"Sitting On The Premises," to the tune of "Standing On The Promises."

Most of what you'll find, though, is quite serious. It's written by clergymen. Each of them is either promoting a method for transforming pew potatoes into "sweet potatoes" [my term] or searching for ways to do that. Best I can figure, their treasured sweet potatoes are pew potatoes, still, but involved in church programs and activities. Hmmm...

Therein lies those clergymen's implied "pew potato" definition: "A believer who may or may not attend church regularly, who avoids involvement in church programs and activities." You may soon agree that definition falls far short of its potential.

In 2013, a Bill and Blanche Fry of San Antonio, Texas wrote, "Couch potatoes may be the kings and queens of the sofa, but some...reign as sovereigns of the pew! Couch potatoes may expend more energy with TV remote controls than pew potatoes do with Bibles or hymnals. The pew potato is a Christian who has become inactive or has retired because of what she perceives to be sufficient years of service." —<http://www.churchofchristusa.com/Archives/old%20bulletin%20articles/Pew%20Potatoes.htm>

Perhaps you now perceive a more apt definition for the term, "pew potato." Consider this one:

> "'Pew Potato,' noun: 'a sincere, but passive Christian BELIEVER who is not and will probably never become a mature and fruitful Christian DISCIPLE!'"

—T. C. Newsome 

PS: Post a comment or question or just read what others are saying: www.DYPK.org/apps/blog.

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