

## Where Do We Go From Here?

### Introduction

- We're going to do something a bit different this morning. Having finished James and before we start a new book series, probably from the Old Testament, I want to take some time to fill you in on where we are headed as a church. It's been almost eight months since **LifeGroups** were unveiled. Some of you weren't around for that unveiling. You're here and you have no idea what we're about. Others of you are still trying to figure out what this transition to **LifeGroups** means. So this morning I want to try to share with you, as best I can foresee, where we are headed, how we are going to get there and what that means for you.
- I want to begin with a story. It's the story of the Church. Once upon a time, and for almost two thousand years, the Church enjoyed a prominent and important place in society—it was culturally significant. [Slide #2] In fact, in those days the Church stood at the epicenter of culture. It had tremendous authority and influence. Like [E.F. Hutton](#), when the Church spoke, people listened. Universities listened. The Media listened. Business listened. They were guided by the Church. People looked to the Church for direction. And it was the happiest of happy days for this thing called the Church.
- But in the United States, as it had already happened in Europe, something happened. A shift. Something changed. In 1963, in Greenville, South Carolina, the Fox Theater defied the state's time-honored blue laws and opened for business on Sunday evening. In the words of [Stanley Hauerwas](#) and [William Willimon](#), "That evening has come to represent a watershed in the history of Christendom...On that night, Greenville, South Carolina—the last pocket of resistance to secularity in the Western world—served notice it would no longer be a prop for the church. There would be no more free passes for the church, no more free rides. The Fox Theater went head to head with the church over who would provide the world view for the young. That night in 1963, the Fox Theater won the opening skirmish."<sup>1</sup>
- [Slide #3] Ever since then the cultural landscape has changed dramatically. It now looks more like this. The Church no longer sits at the center of society. It's been dethroned. It's off to the side now. It's been marginalized. Its influence diminished. It's now just one of any number of different places that people go to find Truth and meaning. The Church has become culturally insignificant.
- As part of this new landscape the Church was forced to reexamine itself. How should it reach a surrounding culture that continually pays less and less attention to it? And the answer to that question has come in two forms, two options. The first alternative is attractional. Out compete the other spheres vying for people's attention. If the Church can get people to come through the front doors of a building it can win people over with good coffee and programs, things for kids, and health clubs and you name

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, p. 15-16.

it. Or as [Alan Hirsch](#) puts it the church becomes nothing more than a “vendor of religious goods and services.”<sup>2</sup>

- If all of us tried we could probably think of a hundred different harebrained schemes churches have used to get people in the doors. Sometimes it works. Some stay and come to Christ. Many don’t. When churches are able to pull the attractional model off they grow big. Real big. Most can’t. 99% of churches can’t. Most don’t have the people resources or the financial resource to compete with the other spheres. That’s why most churches in this country are in decline. Urban, suburban, rural, you name it. Most churches are in decline because they have adopted a method of ministry and a faulty mindset. It’s the Field of Dreams mindset. “If you build it they will come.”
- By and large this has been the approach of the American church for the last twenty-five years and it hasn’t worked. We’ve built it, and they haven’t come. All the attractional model has really done is make Christians better consumers—of churches with the biggest and best programs, of an experience of God, of the best sermons, of churches with the nicest buildings. And instead of reaching people all we’ve really ended up doing the last twenty-five years is shift sheep from one church to the next. Meanwhile the darkness continues to creep and spread.
- However, there is another alternative. Another way. A better way. A forgotten way. Instead of the attractional model which tries to draw people in, in this second alternative the church sends itself. [Slide #4] It goes to the people. It decentralizes. I want to suggest to you that unless we adopt this second way of doing church, we will continue to grow increasingly irrelevant to the culture around us.
- I want you to turn to John 20:19. The events of John 20 immediately follow the Resurrection. Listen to what the risen Christ says to his followers. *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. 21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*
- That’s us. [Slide #5] In the attractional model, that’s us. The Church locked up isolated from society. Fearful and afraid. Trying. Marketing. Spending. Building. But having little or no impact. Jesus says to the disciples *as the Father has sent me, I am sending you*. There’s the command. Our job is to send ourselves in response to the command. [Slide #6] We have to take Church to the people. The church must send itself.
- I’m not talking about being missionaries to foreign countries. I’m talking here in Richland Center. We must decentralize and send ourselves here because the world without Christ isn’t going to come. We have to go. *As the Father has sent me*, Jesus says, *I am sending you*. Or as [M. Scott Boren](#) says, “We can fight to reestablish the

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, p. 110.

church as a physical place where certain things happen. We can work harder to compete with society, to out-entertain and lure people in with as much pomp and circumstance as a church can afford. Or, we can become a church on a mission.”<sup>3</sup>

- For us as a church, **LifeGroups** are the way we are going to send ourselves. The **LifeGroup** model is not some gimmick. **LifeGroups** are not about building a good small group program. **LifeGroups** are about becoming a church comprised of small micro churches. This way of living out our faith is an intentional response to the changes that have taken place in our culture. Through this decentralization we hope to become more missional—meaning focused on our mission—so that we might reach our culture with the good news of Jesus Christ.
- **C.S. Lewis** once said, “There exists in every church something that sooner or later works against the very purpose for which it came into existence. So we must strive very hard, by the grace of God to keep the church focused on the mission that Christ originally gave to it.”<sup>4</sup>

### Transition

What is that mission? What are we to be about? At this point, I don’t want to take more time to explain to you what happens within a **LifeGroup**. For that you can read the **LifeGroup** brochure on the **LifeGroup** table in the foyer. You can read what the web site says about **LifeGroups**. And if you already know you’re ready for **LifeGroups** there’s a sign-up sheet on the **LifeGroup** table in the foyer for future **LifeGroups**. By the way, a new **LifeGroup** will launch in Spring Green sometime after the New Year led by Todd and Meg Deibert. If you’re interested in being a part of that launch I will help you make contact with Todd and Meg. Right now, I want to focus on what our mission is. What we are about is described in two passages—the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

- Let’s look at the Great Commission first. Turn to Mathew 28:18. Please don’t let the familiarity of these words keep you from hearing what Jesus says. We must hear Jesus’ words as if they are for us personally and not just generally for the Church. What Jesus says here to his followers he says to you.
- Mathew 28:18. *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* Jesus’ followers are commissioned for two things. Mission and discipleship. Mission is encapsulated by the words *make disciples of all nations*. And discipleship is encapsulated by the words *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded*. We are told to bring people to Christ—make new followers. Mission. And then we are told to teach those who come to Christ to obey Jesus’ commands. Discipleship. Mission and discipleship.

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<sup>3</sup> M. Scott Boren, *Making Cell Groups Work*, p. 77-8.

<sup>4</sup> C.S. Lewis, quoted in W. Vaus, *Mere Theology, A Guide to the Thought of C. S. Lewis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), p.167.

- The third thing we are called to comes from the Great Commandment. Turn to Luke 10:25. *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" 27 He answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" 28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."* Jesus tells the expert in the law that what God really wants from us is a life of worship through our expression of love for Him and for others.

### Transition

So, together, the Great Commission and the Great Commandment describe for us a three orbed Christian life. Worship. Mission. Discipleship. It looks something like this [Slide #7]. Let me say a bit about how all these circles relate.

- First of all the center is Jesus. He is the bond that holds everything together. You can organize all kinds of groups in the name of all kinds of stuff but unless that group organizes itself around the person of Jesus then it's not the Church.
- Second, if this gathered group is to be a true expression of the Church it must covenant, agree not only to organize around the person of Jesus, but organize for the purpose of mission, worship, discipleship—the three core things Jesus called his followers to live out. Mission and worship without discipleship is an incomplete expression of the Church. Worship and discipleship without mission is an incomplete expression of the Church. Discipleship and mission without worship is an incomplete expression of the Church. They all have to be present for the Church to be faithful to its calling in Christ Jesus.
- What this means is that if the Church is not actively discipling its people, or if it's not actively engaged in mission, or if its not actively worshiping then it has painted an incomplete picture of the Christian life; people might actually be missing out on a third or two-thirds of the Christian life. And because all three orbs are interconnected if the Church is missing, for instance, the mission orb then the Church's worship and discipleship are impoverished. Or if the discipleship orb is missing, the Church's worship and mission are impoverished. Or put it like this. If we fail at the task of making disciples, we won't be fruitful in mission. If we fail in the area of mission, our worship will be fruitless.
- Let me also say this diagram is not a picture of Sunday morning. This is not Sunday morning. In churches that really have it together you can accomplish at best two of those three orbs on Sunday. But the mission part, that just can't be done on Sunday. But you can do all three in a **LifeGroup**. That means that the more full expression of what it means to be the Church happens in **LifeGroups** because all three orbs are operational. **LifeGroups** are not some add on to this, they are the Church—they are the primary experience of Church rather than a program of the Church.<sup>5</sup>
- As we continue with this transition, this mental shift is the single biggest shift that needs to take place in your thinking. This, Sunday morning, is the Church gathered

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<sup>5</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, p. 46.

for corporate celebration. Sunday morning looks like this [Slide #8]. It's the weekly gathering of the witnessing communities to celebrate the character of God and praise His name. But the real nitty-gritty of what it means to be the Church happens the other six days of the week as these witnessing communities seek to spread the fragrant aroma of Jesus to a lost and dying world. Sunday morning you gather the Church together. In **LifeGroups** you do Church.

### Transition

I hope you are beginning to see how different this really is. I realize all of this raises some questions. Let me see if I can briefly answer some of those questions for you.

- [Slide #9] First, is Sunday morning needed? The answer, absolutely yes. Sunday morning is vitally important. Following the Resurrection, Scripture says the disciples gathered on the first day of the week, Sunday, the day our Lord and Savior was raised from the dead. Remember the John 20 passage we already looked at? John 20:19 *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together.* You see this developed even more in the book of Acts. Luke describes writes in Acts 20:7 *On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.* We don't want to stop that pattern.
- The goal on Sunday morning is to celebrate who God is, what he's done, and what he is doing. Hear how God is working. Dig into the Word. Be equipped to live life as part of a **LifeGroup**. As **LifeGroups** develop Sunday morning becomes increasingly important to supporting and buttressing what happens the other six days of the week.
- [Slide #10] Second, what about programs? Chances are Grace Community Church won't have the programs you may be used to at other churches. For example, we won't have a men's ministry or a women's ministry or a senior adult ministry. But we will have ministry to men and ministry to women and ministry to seniors within the **LifeGroups**. If you come to me with an idea for a ministry that God has put on your heart. I'll say to you "go for it." And I'll be your biggest cheerleader. I'll do everything I can to equip you to serve in that capacity. But I will ask you to develop that ministry in the context of a LifeGroup.
- [Slide #11] Third, how does evangelism happen? Evangelism happens in one of two ways. As we gather to celebrate the character of God on Sunday people see the vibrancy and passion and certainty with which we worship and they say "I want that." And they begin the journey toward Christ. Or, it happens as a group of you, called a **LifeGroup**, covenant together to love people into the Kingdom.
- [Slide #12] Fourth, if you're not a part of a **LifeGroup**, are you welcome here? Absolutely yes. Would I like to see every single one of you to be in a **LifeGroup**? Yes. But I realize, for any number of reasons, being part of a LifeGroup might not be feasible. You're still welcome and will continue to be welcome here.
- I want to encourage you if you have questions about what I've said here this morning, don't stuff your question. Talk to me later during lunch. Write me an email. Call me this week. If you're struggling to try to understand what all this means please talk to me. Talk to one of the **LifeGroup** leaders.

## Conclusion

- Do you know what geocaching is? Although I've never done it, thanks to Ben and Marnie Pooley I have a better idea. Geocaching is an outdoor treasure-hunting game in which the participants use a GPS receiver or other navigational techniques to hide and seek containers, called geocaches, placed all over the world. A typical cache is a small waterproof container containing a logbook and "treasure," usually toys or trinkets. There are over 800,000 geocaches registered on various websites that you can try to find.
- This **LifeGroup** journey we are on right now kind of feels like we're geocaching as a church. Like we're in search of something illusive. What I've described for you today is, I believe, the most worthwhile pursuit there is in life. Matthew 13:44 *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. Join me in search of this cache. Let's pray.*