

Big or Small, Churches are for Serving

Churches always seem to be in need of more people to fill the jobs necessary to operate the local assembly of believers. Calvary Bible Church is in many ways is a typical church in terms of attendance, range of ministry, and income. Recent statistics show that the 'average' church in this country is composed of 75-100 people. This is the number of people that are either members of, or attend regularly the church of their choice. The so-called "mega-churches" (2,000 or more in attendance) comprise barely 2% of the roughly 300,000 congregations in the United States. Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas is an example of a mega-church gone "monster church" as they claim to be the largest congregation in the country with over 40,000 in attendance each week. According to Mark Chaves, Director of the National Congregations Study, most churches tend to be small, but the largest number of attendees are concentrated in the fewer 'large' churches. Professor Chaves goes on to say that according to his research, 90% of all churches have 350 or fewer people.

So the lion's share of churches are very much like the ones in our community. Is there an advantage in attending a smaller church? One "very small church" pastor, as he put it, remarked: "Without trying to feel sorry for myself... I am convinced that most people attend large churches to hide. Not many people "see" you and large churches offer a lot of programs for specific ages, etc. But some of my most precious and special memories of my early days as a new believer were not in the larger venues I was supposed to attend, but my spiritual family ties came from the smallest." One characteristic of large churches is it is often harder to serve in key positions because there are more people involved, and bigger budgets bring more paid staff to do the work. And sometimes people can get lost in the organization. One large church pastor surveyed in 2009 admitted he did not (even) know the names of everyone on his staff! (Chaves' blog, "Congregational Size").

Regardless of how many people attend CBC or any other church, God uses people to do His work in whatever venue they are in. The kinds of people He uses are described in detail in the Bible. 1 Corinthians 1:26 reads: "For consider your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble" are called. Dwight Moody, Jim Cymbala, and Bill Hybels are three examples of men used mightily by God, but were told they were not educated, did not 'fit' into the neighborhood, and were too young to pastor a church. In the Bible, we see Gideon asking the Lord, "How can I save Israel? I come from a nobody family; in fact I am the lowest nobody in my family." After God enlisted the nobody Gideon, He got a nobody army, and won the battle with a bunch of nobodies! (Judges 6). Of the five women in Christ's genealogy, Tamar played the harlot, Ruth had the wrong ethnicity, Bathsheba was an adulteress, and Rahab was a street walker. Why does God use these kinds of people for His work? Paul goes on in 1 Corinthians giving us the answer – "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise... the weak things to shame things which are mighty... the base things and things despised..." (v.27). The Bible communicates, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Cor 1:31). If we operate in our own strength, and not God's, we risk taking the credit for ourselves.

David Jeremiah shares a story as told by the late Adrian Rogers, the well-known Southern Baptist pastor and author. Rogers told a story about a woodpecker pecking on a tree. In the middle of his wood-working, a bolt of lightning hit the tree, splitting it down the middle. The woodpecker backed off, surveyed the situation, and flew away. Later that day he returned with 6 other woodpecker friends and proudly told them, "There it is gentlemen, right there. That's what I did."

Let's never take the credit for what God does. Our Father is looking for men and women who have hearts that would say, "Lord, use me in Your church in any capacity needed... I am a nobody without You." When God hears this, He promotes us in His kingdom from a nobody to the level of nobility.

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