

Session Three

Lessons for the Church and Hope for the Future

INTRODUCTION

The sole resource for this report that will provide the background for our discussion on April 27, 2025 is the book, *The Great Dechurching – Who's Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?* By Jim Davis and Michael Graham with Ryan P. Burge. The parenthetical numbers refers to the page numbers of the book.

SPRITUIAL FORMATIN AND THE DECHURCHED

The world has certainly changed in the last three decades as so many have Dechurched for many different reasons. It is important to know that we cannot approach the Dechurched as we would a new believer; the Dechurched were once a part of the church and we can assume that they have some understanding of God, the church and their spirituality. The challenge that the authors want us to understand is the complexity of influencers and the information diet we partake of each and every day.

Our society of instantaneous and overwhelming information cannot help but affect ourO spiritual lives. We must ask questions that will help us discern what influencers we allow into our lives and how those influences affect our spiritual lives. (Questions form page 187)

How much of your information diet is consumed with any meta-awareness of *why* the content is being shown you?

How much of your information diet is consumed with any meta-awareness of *what* that content is *doing* to you soul?

How much of your information diet is consumed with any meta-awareness of *how much credibility* you give that content?

Once we ask these questions, then it is our responsibility to check ourselves in providing reliable and trustworthy information to those we are trying to reach with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Pastor Timothy Keller speaks of the fullness of the gospel as being a four-chapter gospel (190-191):

1. CREATION: God made everything, and it was good.
2. FALL: Man sinned, and everything became cursed.
3. REDEMPTION: Jesus saves sinners and inaugurated his kingdom.

4. CONSUMMATION: Jesus consummates his kingdom, and all of creation is recreated.

The challenge is that the church often shares information in our outreach that is only two chapters: The Fall and Redemption. This concern is couched in the need for the church to consider Content, Context and Habit; it's and issue of discipleship.

THE CONFESSIONAL AND MISSIONAL CHURCH

Utilizing the analogy of NFL Teams that are capped at a salary offering of \$224.8 Million (The amount allowed in 2023): It would be unwise to spend \$210 Million on offense and only \$14.8 Million on defense. (199) While no church perfectly engages both confession and mission, many churches embrace one at the expense of the other. Confession is defined as sharing what a church believes, its core values and emphasizes how we can align our lives with the Christian faith and our Creator God. Mission is defined as going out into the world, interacting with others and seeking to understand the culture and meeting people where they are in the lives they are living.

A "Confession Only" church would be concerned with right theology and the desire to express clearly what is necessary for people to be reconciled with God and be a part of that church. A "Mission Only" church would focus on the culture and rather than seek to be an influencer, presenting the gospel the church would accommodate the culture into its own behavior.

While the church obviously cannot exist fully at the extremes of these, both ideologies are important to the ministry of a church that wishes to reach out to others, especially the Dechurched.

The important question for the church to answer is "How do we combine these two functions of the church?"

EMBRACING AND LIVING IN EXILE

The premise of this chapter is that the church, from its earliest days has done best when it is in exile. The thought process is that people and organizations operate best (strategically, precisely, frugally) when “their backs are against the wall.”

Acts 11:19-30 illustrates well how the dispersion of the early church in response to the killing of the first Christian martyr, Stephen, created communities of faith all over the known world. Exile, as counterintuitive as it may sound offers several benefits to the church (217):

1. Exile Promotes the Advance of the Gospel
2. Exile Confronts Our Idols of Power
3. Exile Is Where We Depend on the Lord
4. Exile Shows Us Our New and Better Identity
5. Exile Requires Discipleship
6. Exile Makes Us Generous

FIVE EXHORTATIONS TO CHURCH LEADERS

While we feel the urgency to reach out to people, specifically the Dechurched, in whatever way we do to move toward that purpose and goal, we do want the church to exist. As we take the information from these three sessions and create a plan for outreach, we must remain true to the integrity of the gospel message and our identity based on that gospel message. There are four Exhortations to Church Leaders of which we must be aware:

Exhortation 1: Don't Be Surprised When People Fall Away

Exhortation 2: Extreme Responses Hurt People

Exhortation 3: Be Patient

Exhortation 4: Shepherd the Flock

Exhortation 5: Equip the Saints

CONCLUSION

We have work to do! I (Pastor Jack) would love to see a Team emerge from these conversations that will focus on outreach, supporting the efforts of our Staff and Leadership. This will be important work as we seek to grow the Kingdom of God at Central UMC – not increase our membership. If we create a healthy understanding of what it means to be “in the world and of the world” sharing the redemptive message of Jesus the Christ, then certainly we will be blessed. Remember that God is with us! As Luke wrote in the Book of Acts, “The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord.” (Acts 11:21)