



Barna/Rainer Leadership

Announcer:

Welcome to the post COVID church podcast with your host, Stuart Kellogg.

Stuart Kellogg

Thank you for being part of the post COVID church podcast.

Great having you here with us today. Today we're going to look specifically at church leadership. It is critical because we're seeing the church doors open, but with fewer members. Also a lot more challenges when it comes to leadership. We've got two nationally known experts who are going to share how your church can start now to be more effective because what we're seeing now is the church tree gathers is that nothing is the same. Dr. George Barna is the best known Christian researcher in the nation. Dr. Tom Rayner is one of the foremost experts in church leadership. They're here with some specific advice to help strengthen your church.

First with us today, Dr. George Barna who spent decades researching Americans about their faith, and he's currently the Director of Research at the cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University. Dr. Barna has been called the most quoted person in the Christian church today. He starts by explaining how critical it is for the right leader to be in place.

George Barna

Leaders must encourage talented people in the pews. What a great leader does is empower other people to identify God's vision and calling for their life. And then to give them the resources and the opportunities that they need to pursue that vision that God has uniquely for that person. If we had a church in America, where God's called leaders were allowed to empower people in that manner, and to get them motivated and enthusiastic about it, and to celebrate the victories that those people are having in their pursuit of God's calling and purpose for their life, the church in America would be absolutely unstoppable, it would be the thing that everybody would want to be part of.

Because those people who are being empowered to pursue God's calling, inevitably, in my research, what I find is that those people experience joy. The difference in America is that most people are trying to find happiness, happiness comes and goes. Joy is the cornerstone of the Christian life, because you have Christ and the Holy Spirit, operating within you moving through you accomplishing things you couldn't do on your own. While you're busy trying to make yourself happy. You're convinced that most churches are measuring the wrong things to determine success. We think adults are what matter because we think they think more clearly more deeply, more reflectively more thoughtfully, more analytically. And so therefore, let's focus on that. And that's where we're going to make the impact. Secondly, we have a model issue. When we look at the model of the local church that we've developed, and we developed it, it's not in the scriptures. But when we look at that, what we've done is essentially, we've said, if you want to be the big person in the ministry, you want to be the senior pastor, the lead pastor,

head, Pastor, whatever you want to call it. Well, the only way you can do that is also by being the primary teacher.

And so what's happened in our nation is that most of the people who filled the role of senior pastor are by their own admission, not called and gifted by God as leaders, but they're called and gifted by God as teachers. There's nothing wrong with that we need great teachers of God's Word. But there's a massive difference between being a teacher and being a leader, in terms of calling and gifting. And of course, in terms of your behavior as a result.

So we've got churches that are being led by teachers, they're focusing on adults, because those are the ones who will take notes when they speak. And we are essentially ignoring the children. And the third element is that when we talk with these senior pastors about whether or not they believe their churches are effective ministries, vast majority of more than four out of five, so what we have we're very effective. It's like, Okay, well, how do you know that? What do you measure to figure that out? And we find that typically, a church will measure five particular things. This is common across 10s and 10s of 1000s of churches across the country. They'll measure attendance giving, number of staff people hired, number of programs offered, and the square footage that's been built out. And the saying goes that

If your numbers on those indicators are bigger this weekend than they were 52 weeks ago, you're a quote unquote, healthy and growing church, ie you're successful, you're effective, whatever. And the reality is Jesus didn't die for any of those things. He didn't die to put butts in seats. He didn't die to give the church the biggest real estate portfolio in the community. I mean, he died to see lives transformed. And so our measures of effectiveness and ministry really need to go back to transformation. And Jesus Himself defined discipleship in John, you know, in John eight, John 13, John 15, He told his disciples, they'll know you're my disciples, when you obey my teaching when you love one another. And when you produce spiritual fruit, those are the things we need to be measuring.

Stuart 15:23

What are the most important changes the post COVID Church must make?

George

Well, let me let me give you a list of things that I've been, you know, grappling with in my head that I think are important for us. In the coming days, months, years, as we tried to be the church, not just go to church, but we have a spiritual revolution based on us recognizing where to be Christ like, we are there for it to be the church wherever we happen to be 24 seven. And in order for that to happen, I'd say number one, we've got to prioritize ministry to children, because if they don't get it, right, the chances of them ever transitioning when they're an adult, away from a secular worldview, whichever one it is, whether it's, you know, secular humanism, Marxism, modern mysticism, they're about 24 of them, you know, whatever it may be, to a biblical worldview doesn't happen very often, it can't happen, because the Holy Spirit can do that with anybody in any time. But I'm a sociologist, and I'll tell you, on average, it doesn't happen.

So prioritizing children's Secondly, the local church being used to equip parents, to be raising their children to be spiritual champions, not just to stay out of jail, not just to get into Harvard, but to understand that the most significant commitment on earth for any parent is raising their child to be a follower of Jesus Christ. That is success in life. Not not all the other stuff.

Thirdly, for churches, local churches to be considering if they don't already offering a Christian school, or support for a homeschool parents within their congregation. Because as I look at

what's influencing people to embrace the worldviews they do, being in a public school, is one of the things that does that, because we've intentionally unconsciously removed God from that setting, and and his word.

Fourthly, I'd say, looking at the discipleship research I've done over the years, we have to recognize that the discipleship models that we've been using don't work. There, you know, I could spend hours giving you statistics on that. But as I as I studied, how do people's lives get transformed, one of the things that really struck me is that the people who are growing spiritually are the ones who have a an individual, who is a spiritual mentor, or coach has nothing to do with how many notes they take of sermons, how many programs they get involved in. It's a one on one relationship with somebody who's more spiritually mature, is sharing with them living life, but with them, holding them accountable to spiritual principles, biblical principles.

Fifthly, as identified before, it's going to be important that we redefine how we measure what an effective ministry is. Because you get what you measure, you measure the wrong stuff, you're gonna get the wrong stuff. What we measure now leads us toward having big churches, big churches are not necessarily bad, but they're not necessarily the answer. So we got to change the metrics.

Sixthly, I'd say it, it probably has to do with making sure that we are teaching the Bible, not teaching emotionally pleasing lessons, because we are an emotionally driven society. People want to feel secure, they want to feel comfortable. But the message of the gospel isn't always comfortable. The Bible doesn't always tell us the things that we want to hear. And so we need to make be sure that we are teaching biblical truth, and that we have an intentional and strategic approach to enabling people to connect all those dots into a biblical worldview, not just collecting information.

I'd say we have to recognize next that small groups are a an abysmal approach to trying to teach people they are terrific for building community. So let's use them for what they're good at. Let's build the body of believers, through small groups. Let's connect people absolutely. But let's not fool ourselves into thinking that's going to be an efficient mechanism for teaching them biblical truth. as I alluded to before, another thing I'd say is important is that we have to have leaders who are given the opportunity and the situations in which to lead. Right now, it's not attractive to lead in the church, we make it virtually impossible for a leader to have those kinds of positions and opportunities. We've got to rethink that. Another element has to do with also addressing something that I found in a survey I think it was last year, we did big national study, we asked people across the country, what are the benefits that your community has received from having Christian churches located in your community? Most Americans could not name a single benefit. We've got to change that.

Stuart

The church went away, nobody would notice is what you're saying?

George:

Not that they wouldn't notice. Many people would actually be happy because they'd say, well, we get more tax revenue, because now we can put that on the tax rolls. But yeah, I mean, the issue here is one of service. Can we stop focusing on ourselves? And do that that element that Jesus talked about disciples, which is loving other people? Can we be so focused on taking care of others, that people say, Man, if we didn't have the church, we don't know what we do. So those are some of the things I think that are going to have to happen.

Stuart:

Stepping back. taking a hard look at any organization and making changes is never easy. But George Barna says the post COVID Church has no choice if it's to fulfill its mission and regain its relevance.

Dr. Tom Rainer is the founder and CEO of church answers. He's a nationally renowned expert in church leadership. He's pastored churches, spent 12 years as dean at Southern seminary, and now runs an organization whose focus is helping the church fulfill its mission.

Thom Rainer 11:59

Step one, making sure every leader forgets about returning to any kind of normal, encouraged church leaders pastors in particular, not to think of new or old normal, but to think about a new reality. But I would make this analogous to Egypt wilderness in the promised land. Prior 2019 and prior was Egypt. Right now we're in the COVID wilderness. The opportunity is the promised land.

Why do I suggest that 2019 before was Egypt, that's because the church was getting unhealthier and unhealthier before COVID. Their trajectory, whether it is mainline denominational evangelical or evangelical Nondenominational, all of the trends were pointing toward a decline. We don't want to go back where we're still making bricks with straw. We don't want to go back to Asia, we don't want to say why did you put us in this wilderness? Send us back to Egypt? So there are a number of church leaders who have a strategy right now, to get back to normal. They're waiting and Christian, some Christian organization say, once everything gets back to normal, we'll be fine. Well, if you wait on that, you're going to be in a lot of trouble.

So the first thing I say is get out of that mindset. Do away with, with the Egypt mentality, we know that we're in the wilderness now but start asking the question, what does that promise land look like? We can say beyond a shadow of a doubt, we don't know. We do not know exactly what is on the other side of COVID. But we do know something. We do know that churches that are becoming more and more faithful to reach in their community that are doing direct work in evangelism, that are looking beyond themselves instead of returning internally, whatever that may mean, those of the churches that are beginning to see actual increases.

I was interviewing a pastor just yesterday, an outlier for his church. But that church is currently at 105%, pre COVID, in person attendance. And I asked this question, what are you doing? He said, Well, COVID gave us a blank slate. And I knew that one thing that we weren't doing sufficiently in 2019. Before, was reaching out community and sharing the gospel on a more consistent basis. We started doing that. Now to use a well worn phrase that Ain't Rocket Science. It's just basic obedience.

But it's something that we were not doing prior to this. One of the pieces of data we have those absolutely alarming is over 90% of churches in America that we have contact with, which is a lot of churches, over 90% of churches in America, are using less than 5% of their resource of ours in reaching their community, our evangelism, that was 2019 and before, if that's our Egypt, if that's 2019 and before, we want a new world, so one of the things is very simple, if you're using 5% of your resources of time, and you might put money in there as well.

To reach the community, why not look at putting 30% or 40%. And we have some churches are even saying we're gonna go to 50%, I think that is going to reset, and that's going to give us a blank slate. We don't know the specific methodologies of how that will take place. But just the

intention and desire and obedience of doing so will begin to cause those paradigmatic shifts that will take place and we'll know more about the how if we move forward.

Stuart:

You think church leaders have to move more quickly?

Thom 15:35

Well, I used to advocate the incremental change that one of my earlier books that I wrote, I believe is 1994. So I spent a long time ago was called eating the elephant. Basically, I was urging church leaders to eat or to move incrementally How do you eat an elephant one bite at a time. Because if they lead faster than the church could not take the pace of change, I think I was close to being on target, then I'm never perfectly right. But I can say now, eating the elephant is totally irrelevant.

If we move at an incremental pace, first of all, we're moving slower than culture are our church members, no change faster than than incremental these days. And they may want it to be a little bit slower than the world they're in. But if we slow down too much, we're going to fall behind.

So I say one of the first things that we do is to have a bold vision. Now, that's a generic statement that can have a lot of can have have a lot of good assets attached to it, or can have a lot of baggage attached to it. But a bold vision just simply means that the congregation knows that we're going somewhere, and they're willing to go forward with that most cherished most church pastors do not have a clear and compelling vision.

I know that in our church, we really believe that some of the future is going to be based on reaching certain neighborhoods or communities where there's a significant church presence, we're not going to go the traditional multi church route, we're going to go the micro route, where gatherings of 30 or 40, are going to become churches and of themselves, and they're going to have their own pastor, we were doing that for a number of reasons. One, the resources that are needed are less in terms of physical resources and money. And secondly, we also know according to the research, we done that both the younger millennials and Gen Z, those two groups want to be in smaller, more intimate gatherings. And that is the trend. So we're, we're not adapting to culture, we're adjusting to culture. And so the you asked, the question is, you know, one of the one of the things is happening.

My pastor has a clear and compelling vision. He admits he didn't know all the details on how it's going to work out. But we're eagerly following because we know that they're, they're going somewhere.

Another characteristic of healthy pastors is that they have a disposition of hope. If If you as a leader, specially as a biblical leader, one who believes in the word cannot communicate hope, then you don't, you don't have a place in leadership and Christian Leadership. And so pastors need to be certainly they don't need to be unrealistic and have their ostrich like heads in the sand. But they certainly need to have an attitude of hope to to for their congregants to move forward.

And then a third very generic characteristic is they are spending their time leading their congregation with an outward focus. These are not mutually exclusive. They obviously overlap. But many pastors don't even mention how we might reach people beyond our walls or beyond our own congregation. And they're consistently doing that you see those three ingredients in a

church leader, and you're likely to see a church that has a great new reality where it might be hit. But I'm a firm believer that yes, there is a leadership that is caught up in a leadership that is taught. And if we, if we had, we, the church had some mechanisms where we could train a bit more on the practical on the leadership side. It wouldn't make every pastor a great leader, but at least it would make them a more capable leader.

Stuart:

Can you share a simple but effective exercise any leader can do to focus the church's efforts?

Thom 19:29:

I sometimes talk about the vision intersection profile, and it's basically a Venn diagram where you put three circles and then you see where they intersect. At one point, a pastor would just visualize, Okay, one of those circles is the gifts and desires of the congregation of the member. Okay. Another one of those is the the needs of the community. And then the third one is the resources of the church and see where those intersect.

Essentially, what you're saying is, if we get people doing what excites them, if we equip them with the resources that we have, and it meets a community need, that Venn diagram is a perfect intersection.

Everybody wants to be a part of something that makes a difference. Everybody wants to be a part of somewhere, they can make a difference. And so it becomes a bit easier at that point.

Stuart:

We've talked a lot about steps, leaders must take what is most missing in the church today?

Thom:

I think Grace is missing everywhere. I don't even want to get on Facebook, because it's mean. It's just it's a mean place to be. And sometimes I have to check for professional reasons. But otherwise, I can't say avoid social media, but I'm minimizing a lot more than I used to.

One of the greatest witnesses that the church can have is to be a demonstrator of grace. Because if we become a demonstrator of grace, the world begins to notice and it becomes one of our most potent evangelistic approaches. When they see us acting in unity. We will know this by the way, they love one another when they begin to see us acting with grace instead of judgment, when they begin to see that we're different than the rest of the world. That is when our evangelism and our witness becomes more effective.

Stuart:

I hope these ideas from Dr. Tom Rainer and Dr. George Barna help. It's why the post COVID church project is here. I'd like to know what you think is easy to send a comment: "stuart@the postcovidchurch.org."

Thank you for being part of the post COVID Church Podcast.

Announcer:

Thank you for listening to the post COVID Church Podcast. You can find much more at the post COVID church group on Facebook or on the website, www.thepostcovidchurch.com

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