

“Why are you asking me how many are showing up on Sunday morning? Is that the number that really matters?”

Changing Focus: Measuring The Right Things

Craig T. Owens

Episode 50

Announcer

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

Stuart Kellogg 0:12

Thank you for joining us. You know, since **The Post Covid Church** project is all about helping churches...our mission statement is *Helping the church share more of the good news in the face of hostility, persecution and disinterest....*Well, that can't be done unless we spend a lot of time talking about leadership. Today, you'll hear from a leader who's focusing on helping churches to quit focusing on numbers, and start focusing on what matters.

Craig T. Owens is a pastor of Calvary Assembly of God in Cedar Springs, Michigan, the northern part of that northern state. He's also worked in a variety of leadership positions in the for profit and nonprofit worlds. It's given him a great perspective on how to help **The Post Covid Church** regain its influence to, as we say, here, not just survive, but thrive. Greg is an accomplished blogger, podcaster and author. He's also as I mentioned, a pastor. We'll be talking about what he's learned and shared in his book, Shepherd Leadership, The Metrics That Really Matter. Craig and his wife, Betty have three children. Welcome, Craig to **The Post Covid Church Podcast**.

Craig T. Owens

Thanks, Stuart. It's great to be here with you.

Stuart:

Let's jump right into the tough stuff. You say way, way too many pastors are measuring the wrong things. Please explain.

Craig

Yeah, you know, where this really kind of I guess started for me was when I have some well meaning friends that would ask me, “You know, how are things going in your church?” And almost before I can answer their follow up question that is in their mind, I guess gauging whether I'm actually doing well or not was, ‘How many are you running on Sunday morning?’ And I used to just answer that question. But then after a while, I began to say, “Alright, well, what if I said, 300?” And I get see him get really excited. And then I say, “What if I said, 20.” And they began to look a little confused. And so I said, “Well, let me clarify, what if I said, 300 that only show up on Sunday morning? And that's it? I don't see anything else happening the rest of the week. But what if I said 20, that not only showed up on Sunday morning, but throughout the entire week, I see them engaged, living out their faith actively involved. So you

know, which would you rather have?" And they're like, "Well, the 20." And so I said, "So then why are you asking me? How many is showing up on Sunday morning? That is that the number that really matters? So are we counting the right things that we measuring the right things?" And you know, I just don't really see when we go through the New Testament, I don't see like, you know, Paul saying to us, "Hey, your church will be successful. If you're growing at 7.5% per year in your attendance." That's never been the biblical metric for success.

Stuart

Well, is it because we're in America, and that's the American way, counting grow?

Craig 3:03

I think that's part of it. And I think the other part and again, you know, when I wrote the book, I told my editor, I said, right up front, "Listen, check me on this, I don't want to be on a soapbox sounding like I'm preaching at people, I want to help people." And so I think a lot of this stuff, people were very well intentioned. When we look at churches, and even parachurch nonprofit organizations, for the most part, the boards are made up of people from the corporate world. And so their natural mindset, the way that they think all of the time is in those quantifiable things that you can measure, they look at a bottom line, or they look at how many widgets or they look at, you know, they're things that they can count. And so I think they're well intentioned, when they are then speaking to their pastor or the leader of their nonprofit organization and say, "Hey, show us what is how you're being successful here." And they're almost forcing them to start counting things.

Stuart

Well, to use your example, you're still counting by saying we have 30 who are engaged. It's just that you're counting a different activity.

Craig 4:18

I use the words really, I'm looking for things that are more quality than I am quantity. I mean, quantity's fine, but not by itself. You know, we could use the example of Philip in the book of Acts. He goes to Samaria and he is preaching there, people are getting saved. Demons are being cast out, people get healed. And then God takes him from there, out into the wilderness. And at first, it appears to Philip he doesn't even have a mission. It's just get on this road that goes to Gaza through the desert. If we're in worldly standards, you know, we would say Philip looks like he really took a step backwards. He went from a church if you will a congregation of hundreds to go where? But perhaps it was that maybe Philip's way of talking to that Ethiopian official was the one guy that was going to be able to help him connect.

Here's what I'm reading in the Old Testament scripture and connect that to Jesus. And so we wouldn't say that that was a step backwards. That was where God needed Philip to go. But, you know, I, I think that sometimes we just go, well, it's got to it, things have to keep moving up. The dollars got to go up, the donors have to go up, the attendance has to go up. But toward what end? What are we trying to accomplish with that?

Stuart

As the church re gathers now, should leaders start by rethinking their mission, how to impact the culture and make disciples and from that, the numbers will follow?

Craig

Yes. So I think that, especially for leaders of churches, and this is why I called the book *Shepherd Leadership*, because when you think in terms of a shepherd and a flock, shepherds don't reproduce more sheep. The role of the shepherd is to take the sheep to the place where there's a healthy environment, help the sheep get healthy, so that they can reproduce. And so it's not necessarily again about, "Okay, how many sheep do I have here?" Well, you might have a whole bunch of them, and they're unhealthy. So it's, how healthy are the sheep? If there's, if there's lots of them, great. I'm not, you know, again, I don't mean to be preaching at somebody and saying, "You should never have a large church or a large organization." That's, that's not it. I'm just saying we shouldn't say I'm successful, because it's big. We want it to be really God honoring healthy sheep producing sheep.

Stuart 6:53

My guest, Craig T. Owens pastor, author, leadership, podcaster. And about to be published *Shepherd Leadership, The Metrics That Really Matter.*

George Barna, who has been studying the church for a generation plus, told me one big problem is that senior pastors get their jobs by being really good preachers and teachers, not because they're great leaders. Do you agree? And if so, what should churches do?

Craig

Yeah, I totally agree. I've laughed with people about that before. I'm like, you know, we could spend like hours interviewing a potential pastor for a church. And really it comes down to how does he preach on Sunday? And so you're like, "So you're going to pick the way that he can speak publicly for 30 minutes?" Doesn't necessarily, that's not an indication of the the rest of the the week that he's interacting with people.

You know, you had a previous guest on that was talking about in Ephesians, chapter four, that there are gifts that God gives to the church. And I paraphrase, so this will kind of dated but Dwight Eisenhower when he was President, he said, "If we ever think of the United States as one leader and 158 million followers, it wouldn't be the United States." I think the same thing in the church. If we think of it as just being one pastor, one minister, and then the rest of the congregation, t's not really a healthy church.

I see myself as the shepherd. Yes, I minister to people, but my main goal, according to Ephesians, four, God, Jesus gave these gifts to the church to prepare the people to do the works of service, prepare them to minister. So really, my focus should be on, I want my whole congregation to be ministers. I don't want them to just think of, "well, Craig Owens, is the minister here." No, I'm not the minister. I'm one of the ministers. I might be the pastor the shepherd. But I'm not the only minister.

Stuart

So that means giving up control, delegating and finding talent in the pews.

Craig

Absolutely. Because I, I'll be the first to admit I don't do everything well. There are some things that the people say, you know, just stop doing that. It's not very good. And so then there's other people that God has equipped them and gifted them and say, "Boy, this is right in

your strength zone.” This is how you're going to be a key part of the body of Christ by using your gifts to minister this way.

Stuart:

How can lay leaders or members best take the initiative and help a pastor be a better shepherd leader if the pastor isn't, or isn't open to change?

Craig: 9:40

Well, you know, that's a tough one because I know that there are some pastors that have the mentality that they are the final authority in the church and they're really not open to input from other people. So I have usually said to people, you know, they're like, I think I need to leave my church or I want to help my pastor. Change something. And the bottom line is like for myself, I'm not going to change unless I want to change, if I'm open to wanting to change. And if I don't have that kind of humility, or that posture, the words that other people speak aren't going to do anything to me.

So I think that that has to be the first spot is that a senior pastor, any any senior leader needs to be out among the people all the time and admit your mistakes, and let people know, “Hey, I was no good in this area. That's why I'm reading this book, or why I've gotten a mentor.” Those kind of things will send the signals, “Hey, I'm teachable. I'm open, I'm willing to hear what other people have to say to me.” Or, as you mentioned, when a senior pastor gives up some of their authority when they take their hands off some things that sends a signal. So I'd say if somebody's a leader, a lay leader in a church, and they're not seeing those kind of things, I'd be really cautious about approaching because, you know, you might be stepping on some toes there. But if you hear those kind of statements coming from that pastor, that leader, then they probably are open to having further conversations.

Stuart

What are some success stories you've seen at organizations you've consulted with?

Craig

Well, you know, I'll tell you one of the organizations I just recently worked with, it was really eye opening for me was, I was seeing it was a pregnancy Resource Center. And I saw this huge disconnect between the staff and the board. They were all friendly, they all got along, but you could just see that they weren't on the same page. And as I just kind of sat back during one time, was just kind of observing. I realized that all of the board members, were all business owners.

And so I spoke to him like this. I said, “You know, in your business, if you made a \$10,000 investment in your company to buy a new piece of equipment, or hire somebody or something like that, you would be looking at at the end of your fiscal year, at the bottom line financially, how did that affect us?” And you know, they all kind of agreed with that. So I said, “But now as a board member here, if you go out and raise \$10,000, for this pregnancy Resource Center, they're going to spend all \$10,000 there's not going to be any money leftover at the end. But how many women that were abortion minded? Might they have convinced to keep their child? What value would you put on that life that was saved?” And they just really kind of were all speechless. And so I said, “So that's where I think that the disconnect is, is you guys are raising money. And then you're expecting to see something that you can, like, ‘Oh, hey, look at the bottom line.’ And you might not see that, but you do see a life that was saved? And can you put a value on that? Of course, you can't. It's, it's priceless.”

And, and that organization since that time, what's been amazing, is that when the board went out and started their fundraising efforts, again, they were a now with this total mindset of saying to the staff, "What can we do as we raise this money, so that you can better get the message out to women who are in that crisis place." And so it was just that little shift of thinking on their part. And then I watched Unity as that that staff in that board then got on the same page, and realize what it was that they were actually working for is not just you know, paying off a mortgage, or, you know, having nicer furniture in there, or that sort of thing. But it was creating a place where they could change people's minds who were maybe leaning towards abortion to change the other way. So I think it's never really been big changes. When I've consulted with people, it's just dropping that one seed, how does it look? And then when when people get it, because, as I said earlier, I think those board members, I think a lot of those people, everybody is well intentioned. They just you just got to get maybe you're speaking a slightly different accent. Let's get get everybody on the same page. And that's what I love being able to do.

Stuart

Well, would an analogy in the church be "Christ said the mission is making disciples. So everything we do should be focused on doing that. making disciples."

Craig 14:51

Yeah, I think that, you know, like I joked with one church, they were like, "Hey, do you have any ideas how to grow the church?" And I said, "Well, define grow for me." And they really couldn't. So I said, I offered a very tongue in cheek suggestion I said, "You're right here on the main road and you have a big marquee out front. So why don't you put a sign up that says free \$50 gift certificate for all first time visitors, you should have the church packed on Sunday morning." And they all were like, "No, no." I said, "Oh, that's not what you meant by grow. Okay, so now that we got that out of the way, you know, let's focus: What does grow really mean?"

So even if it's just one person, you know, can you move them to the next step in their leadership development, ultimately, having them become disciple makers themselves and raising up other disciple makers. That, that sounds like a better plan for grow than just, "let's, you know, turn on the lights and do some really cool stuff that makes people come in and go, ooh, you have a lot of people there." But are you moving them towards becoming disciple makers?

Stuart

And a key part of what you're talking about is communication.

Craig

Yes, absolutely. Yep.

Stuart

Craig T. Owens has written [Shepherd Leadership, The Metrics That Really Matter](#). Talk about how confident leaders can balance that confidence with humility.

Craig

I've really noticed that leaders tend to be gravitate toward one pole or the other. The confident leader, you know, knows that God has a call on their life. I use a simple phrase, *God chose me*. So I would say, Okay, well, God's the one who chose me. So I, I'm confident in that. But if that confidence is not balanced by humility, that leader can come across as so hard charging, so focused on the goal that I think that sometimes people have a hard time approaching or getting around them for fear of, "Well, what if I get in the way am I am I going to get run over?" That would be I'd be the first to admit, that's the way that I'm naturally wired. So I have to deliberately find ways to serve the servants, I have to find ways to do things that other people find distasteful. To do whatever that is, you know, certainly serving alongside the church custodians or, you know, you're just you're finding your ways to make sure that you're sending again, that message to everybody else, "Hey, it's not like I've arrived on some level. And these other tasks are beneath me." Now, if Jesus, who in John chapter 13, it says that he knew that God had placed everything under his power. So John 13 opens with with us seeing that Jesus is the most powerful person and he knew it, and his very next action is to stoop down and begin to wash feet.

Did he want to do that? I don't, you know, that's not a very pleasant task. But he delighted in being able to serve those people that were around him. And so I think that if you find yourself being that overly confident leader, you know that you tend towards that poll, you're really going to have to make the extra effort to add humility, to your confidence.

Stuart

You're a blogger, podcaster writer, you're also a pastor. What gives you the greatest joy as a senior pastor?

Craig:

Well, that's an easy one. I love when I can just sit back and just watch, especially like Sunday morning. I've often joked, like when we kind of have a greeting time, or whatever, and people are going around, even like, the start at the beginning, when people are arriving. If I didn't go up front, or send somebody up front and say, "Let's start now", they would just keep going all morning. And I just listen in, you know, here's somebody over here talking about, yeah, I've got this medical concern. I'm not sure what's going on. And a couple people say, well, let's pray. You know, somebody said, I just got foot surgery coming up. Can we help get to the store to get groceries for you?

You know, I just those are the kinds of conversations that I overhear, or when we're out in the community, just watching the way that, you know, totally on their own, I watched our youth group, organize a time where they all got garbage bags, and they just went around the school campus and just started picking up all the trash that was around the school campus. That's the most thrilling thing for me as a pastor to just say, you know, there it is, in a real simple, tangible way. They're exhibiting the love of Jesus. They're saying, "This is our community. We didn't make the mess. We're more than happy to clean it up, clean it up." You know, there's somebody that's in need, we don't need to, you know, "Let's call the church office and organize what we're right here. Let's just take care of it. We'll get meals to that person. We'll pray for him. We'll take them to a doctor's office." You know what, whatever it is I that is the biggest thrill for me.

Stuart 19:58

That sounds kind of biblical.

Craig

Yeah, just sounds like that Acts chapter two, you know, when everybody's together taking care of each other.

Stuart

What a time for that to happen. Thanks for sharing. How can folks find out more about you your ministry and creative work?

Craig:

craigtowens.com is my blog. Just about every day I'm blogging, devotional thoughts or books I'm reading or different things like that. And then there's also a page on there the Shepherd Leadership book. There's a separate page on there that talks about that book.

And then I'm more than happy to I love dialoguing with people. My email is real simple. It's just craig@craigtowens.com

Stuart

The contact information will be in the transcript of this podcast. Just go to the website, www.thepostcovidchurch.com, click on the title, Changing Focus Measuring the Right Things. There it is. Thank you, Craig for joining me today.

Craig

My pleasure.

Stuart

This is the 50th **Post Covid Church** episode. Thank you for taking part and listening. I'd love to hear from you. Ideas feedback, anything: stuart@thepostcovidchurch.org I mentioned the website www.thepostcovidchurch.com You can go there and find all the archive material from the last year. I so appreciate your support. I'm Stuart Kellogg.

Announcer

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