



Harry Reeder Transcript

“Learn from the past to live in the present to change the future. Back to the basics is how to lead.”

Episode 47

TRANSCRIPT

Announcer 0:04

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

Stuart Kellogg 0:12

Welcome. Today we're focusing on revitalizing the church. What a perfect time to look at what the post COVID Church must do right now to ensure it doesn't just survive but thrives in fulfilling its mission to make disciples.

My guest Dr. Harry, Reeder, senior pastor of Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama since 1999. Dr. Reeder led several churches before that, and his experience in successfully building and leading churches has led to his "Embers to a Flame Ministry" focusing on helping all types of churches revitalize. His doctor of ministry degree is from Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, where he and his wife Cindy are from. Dr. Reeder is a teacher and writer. We'll be talking about his book "From Embers to a flame how God can revitalize your Church". Welcome, Dr. Reeder.

Dr Harry Reeder:

Yes, sir. Thank you.

Stuart

When you wrote "From embers to a Flame", you noted that four to five churches in the US had plateaued or declined. When we're on the other side of this pandemic, do you think things will get better?

Harry 1:18

No sir. I think in fact, if anything its going to accelerate. I think the movement of progressive Christianity is going to be as harmful to the to Biblical Christianity, and a church being on mission and message and ministry as Christian liberalism was in the 19th to 20th century. I think, the 20th to 21st century invasion and penetration of progressive Christianity is going to do the same thing. And in other words, I think progressive Christianity is cut from the same bolt of cloth as liberal Christianity, and both of them ultimately will adulterate the message of Christianity, because it misses the mission of Christianity.

Stuart 2:12

How do you define the two and how do you differentiate liberal from progressive Christianity?

Harry 2:19

Well, I don't think.... there is a slight difference, but I don't think it's much. That's why I recommend J Gresham Machen's book, "Christianity and Liberalism". The key word in the title of the book is the word and in other words, Christian liberalism is really not Christianity. It's an adversarial Christianity.

That doesn't mean that some people in liberal Christian liberal churches or liberal churches aren't Christians, and even some leaders. They're not all wolves in sheep's clothing. Sometimes they can be sheep in wolf's clothing, but the system is opposed to Christianity. It has the wrong mission, and as the wrong motivation, and it ends up with the wrong message because ultimately mission will control your message.

If you believe the mission of the church is social justice, you'll end up with a social gospel. If you believe the mission of the church is success in life, you'll end up with a prosperity gospel. If you think the mission of the church is psychological embrace of self esteem, you'll end up with a therapeutic gospel. Eventually your mission if you think the objective of the church's church growth, then you end up with a pragmatic gospel. As they say, in the business, you got to get meat in the seat if you're going to grow. So what is it what what message will work to get people in, and that becomes a pragmatic gospel and you lose the gospel message; that God in His grace, saves sinners from the power, the penalty increasingly the practice in one day, the presence of sin, through the atoning work of Christ and the power of the Spirit of God using the word of God. That message becomes adulterated and eventually apostasy.

Stuart 4:27

Let's talk about that term social justice. Too often, it conflicts with the biblical view of justice, doesn't it?

Harry 4:34

I believe Christianity produces biblical justice, justice that is defined not by cultural tools of Marxism, but by biblical tools of the gospel and the Word of God, specifically the law of God. How do you love your neighbor? And how do you love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind and therefore, how do you love your neighbor as yourself. There is a difference between the social tools that produce social gospel and the Bible.

You see if I could just say this. The church's mission is narrow: make disciples. Its message is comprehensive, teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. And the result is we turn out Christians that are salt, that Christian's mission is broad. Whether you eat or drink or whatsoever you do do all to the glory of God. You're the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world. What does God require view? Do justice, walk humbly with God, love mercy. Well, they can't do that and the Christian cannot have that broad mission where all of life is governed by a devotion to Christ, unless the church stays on mission to make disciples on message, a gospel based teaching of the whole counsel of God and in ministry of worship, evangelism, discipleship and loving one another.

Stuart 6:10

Your focus is on revitalizing the church. You call it a biblical fitness plan with First Timothy as the model. Can you outline what that fitness plan looks like?

Harry 6:20

Well, I believe that if you go to the Great Commission, what is the imperative? Make disciples! What is the message, a gospel framed teaching of the whole counsel of God teaching to observe all that I've commanded you? What are the ministries? Well, he says, you got to go. That's evangelism. He says, you've got to baptize. So the believer and the household was baptized and add it to the church. That means we love one another, then what do you do teach them? That's discipleship, that equipping. Then what did they do when they saw Jesus, these disciples? They worshiped him. So we call a gospel healthy church that's on mission on message and then ministry, a W.E.L.L. church who **worship** God centered worship with authenticity, that's our ministry to God. **Evangelism**. That's our ministry to the world to bring the gospel to **loving** one another. That's our ministry to one another. **Learning**, that's our ministry to ourselves. So that's a W.E.L.L. church.

Stuart 7:34

So a lot of it is focusing, why do churches have a hard time focusing? And how do you get them to focus starting with the senior pastor?

Harry 7:42

Well, I just tell 'em, look at the churches being plateaued or declining, and losing no conversions, only older people and not reaching younger people, no excitement, no God centered worship. Worship that's either manipulative for entertainment or dull and morbid because of, of just vain repetitions without the sense of what I'm doing, how I'm doing it.

Listen, we know the symptoms of a dying church. So what do we do about it? Well, you don't go into a corner and think it up. I started buying all the church growth books. And I know the hearts of the people were great. But everything was pragmatic. There was nothing biblically developed. It wasn't against the Bible, but it wasn't from the Bible.

Well, I don't believe that. I believe God's word is not only inerrant, it's sufficient to equip us for every good work. So I'm saying to myself, if Jesus says he's going to build this church, churches needed to be strengthened, revitalized, that shouldn't take him by surprise. So is there something that the Bible and lo and behold, I went to Acts 15. And on the second missionary journey, what does Paul tell Barnabas? Let's go back and strengthen the churches. Notice, he didn't say, let's go back and grow the church. He said, let's go back and strengthen the church, the body of Christ. The object is not big, and it's not small. The object is to be healthy, and help the churches grow.

Church growth is a consequence, not the mission. The mission is a healthy church, a W.E.L.L. church, a church well fed and well lit. Then I went the study of three cases of revitalization. In Timothy when Paul said, Timothy to revitalize the church at Ephesus, Titus, where he said Titus to revitalize the churches in Crete. And then Paul said to Barnabas, let's go revitalize the churches we planted the first time. Then I got to Revelation, 50 years after Timothy had revitalized Ephesus, it needed revitalization again. Jesus, not Harry Reeder, Jesus gave the roadmap. He says, remember, repent and recover the first date. So that's our three fold roadmap to help revitalization.

How can you remember, how can you learn from the past without living in the past? And then repent? When you look at the past, you're going to see you've got sin in the camp? How can you with the gospel root sin out of the church, remember, repent, then recover the first things.

And we go back into First and Second Timothy and Titus, and download the eight basics of a healthy church. So we've got the threefold roadmap, remember, repent and recover, then we've got the 10 strategies. How do you remember? How do you remember what you remember what they did when they went through the the Jordan River? And he said, pile up some stones? Bring your children back here and teach them how and what I did for you. How can we pile up stones and learn from the past?

See, the arrogance of modernity dismisses the past and the death of traditionalism just tries to ritualize the past. What we want to do is learn from the past to live in the present, to change the future that leads us to repent. Let's go back and do the deeds you did at first, back to the basics.

I just want to say one illustration. When I was in college, I played baseball, but I switched to golf my last year. And my model for my golf game was a guy I was kind of built like him. And it was a guy named Jack Nicklaus, who I think's the greatest golfer that's ever lived. Do you know how he started every year,? Every year, he took two months off at the end of the year. And then in February, he would go to his coach Jack Grout and he said, Jack, teach me how to play golf. Back to the basics. You see, that's what it means to lead a church back to help them by preaching, prayer fellowship, loving the basics of the gospel ministry.

Stuart 12:36

My guest, Dr. Harry Reeder, senior pastor of Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham and author of "From Embers to a Flame, how God can Revitalize your Church." Part of your focus is making sure that the laity, the talent in the pews is properly used. Is that something too many church leaders ignore?

Harry 12:55

Absolutely. It becomes a top down instead of a bottom up church. And, and so what you got to do is teach everybody, every single one of you have a spiritual gift. Secondly, we were going to create pathways for you to develop and use those gifts in the ministries of the church or the ministries that are coming out of the church. Thirdly, every one of you are important, there are no insignificant parts of the body, the hand can't say to the arm, I don't need you, everybody, everybody has, in some time, the most important gifts. What's the most important gift were the most important gifts in your body? It's not your hair. Your hair can fall out, you'll live but if your liver falls out, you're not going to live. But you don't ever look at your liver. You look at your hair every morning, but you don't ever look at your liver.

It's those things that are least seen that are most of the time most important. And so we want to let everybody know there are no little people and no little gifts in the body of Christ, so that we can develop them as a congregation so that the body as a whole. And arms aren't doing the work of legs, but the legs are showing up. And so that's part of what we love to do. And by the way, we love lay leadership, how can we make use of our elders and deacons and then other people that are in the pipeline of leadership toward formal leadership.

Stuart 14:27

It's kind of hard to let go sometimes though, isn't it?

Harry:

Well, not for me.

Stuart:

Really?

Look, no. Listen, my job is to train them up and then send them out. And so I love to do that. There's no greater joy in my life than just seeing people trying to get ministry done. If they falter, come along, pick them up, dust him off and say, "Okay, what did you learn?" We're not going to go over here and die in a pity party. We're going to find out if you count it all joy when you encounter trials. So you failed, you faltered, you whatever. Okay, let's learn. If you succeeded, let's go give praise to God and then find out how we can build on it. So I'd love to do that.

I, you know, I grew up played baseball, basketball, football and, and stayed with baseball a little bit after school and stayed with it for a while. And then I ended up doing a lot of coaching. I just I love to coach people up as a pastor/ teacher to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. But I never call myself a minister. Although I do know, I'm minister. Yeah, I'm an equipment manager, y'all are the ministers.

Stuart 15:37

Is that one of the biggest problems you see in churches you work with today, not using the talent in the pews?

Harry:

Well, yeah, that is a big problem. It's not the biggest. I in my opinion. It is the loss of biblical heart searching, faithful preaching of God's word. I believe most churches have given up on preaching. I'm going to get myself in trouble, not you just me. I think the prevalence of the plexiglass lectern in place of the of the gravitas pulpit is is not simply a matter of logistics, I think it may be a theological reflection, that preaching is something we get out of the way. And we don't, it's more about the preacher than it is the preaching.

You know that in the reformation, they put a black gown on the preacher to elevate preaching, and block out the preacher. The preacher was blocked out. It was the foolishness of preaching, not preachers, it was the foolishness of preaching that saves us from our sins. And I believe the loss of biblical preaching evangelistically and discipling and equipping, and is that I believe strongly in the primacy of preaching and the priority of intercessory prayer. When they got, when there was a charge against the church in Jerusalem, saying the elders were racist, because they were only giving the mercy gifts to the Hebrew widows, the elders, the apostle said, oh, wow, we're not doing a good job. But it's not because we're racist. We just need some help. So they raised up seven deacons. But you'll notice when they solved the problem, they said this, we to solve this problem. We must not neglect the Ministry of prayer and the word. Those are the two lifelines from heaven, prayer and the word.

Stuart17:41

How can folks get more information on the embers to a flame ministry?

Unknown Speaker 17:46

Well, they can go to our website, “Embers to a Flame”. We’ve actually morphed “Embers to a Flame” into what's now called the third week of January every year at Briarwood, the Lampstand Conference. One of the metaphors for the church is the lampstand. So we teach the eight essentials of a healthy church, then t the first half of the conference. Then the second half of the conference is divided up into three groups of leaders: how to we call it how to plant the church, ignite the flame, how to revitalize the church, fanning the flame, how to take a healthy church to the next level, accelerate the flame. I believe there's basically three kinds of pastorates church planting church revitalization or next level pastor. So I've had the privilege to do all three,

Stuart 18:45

And how great it is for you to be able to share all this information with all these churches to help them be stronger. Thank you, Dr. Reeder for being part of the post COVID church podcast.

Harry 18:55

Thank you Stuart. Thank you for your ministry and your concern and heart for Christ's Church. There is one institution in this world that's headed to the new heavens and the new earth. And that's the Church of Jesus Christ. And we have the privilege to not only be in her, but some of us have the privilege to lead her. Praise the Lord, there's no higher calling.

Stuart 19:17

And thank you for listening to the post COVID church podcast. Our mission helping the church share more of the Good News in the face of persecution, hostility, and disinterest. You can find a transcript of our talk on the website, the post COVID church.com. Just click on the show title. Also on the site, all the archive material from the last year. Thank you so much for listening. I'm Stuart Kellogg.

Announcer 19:44

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, the post COVID church.com

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