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BALANCE DRAWS MASSES

WE ARE LIVING IN ONE OF THE most phenomenal times in the history of the church. With technology advancing by the minute and forcing change by the hour, the church is experiencing a new day. With the dawning of this new day, opportunities exceed our imaginations. By noon, the tension rises between realism and opportunities. When the sun sets, the problems may eclipse the opportunities.

I believe you want to make a difference with your life. Whatever the ministry is you now serve, you once began with a fresh fire burning in your heart. As ministry opportunities were envisioned and some embraced, it seems that everything was not always as it appeared to be. What happened?

I can tell you what has happened to me throughout the years. My passion has gotten me in trouble more times than I can even know. When you run fast in life, it is easy to outrun the people you are called to serve and lead. I have chased innovation down

many roads, even to the expense of sound judgment and theology. Ideas I thought would reach, touch, and minister to more people have cost me periodically. Why?

Passion that is unrestrained leads to extremes. Extremes may appear as creative innovations. These extremes are not always dangerous, but they can become dangerous. I have never gotten close to falling off of a cliff theologically, ecclesiologically, or pragmatically. However, I have certainly had moments in my ministry where I started toward the cliff. Honestly, you probably have as well.

As I write these words, I ask myself: “Ronnie, are you losing your edge? Are you becoming fearful of taking risks?” I think the answer to both of these questions is NO. Yet my drive to make a difference has been seasoned with learning, experience, and spiritual maturity.

For years, I have been propagating balance with everyone. I believe the limited population in my region has forced me to be a church centrist. I have had to operate with a strong element of balance with an edge in sensible innovation. At the same time, I am a risk taker and will push the envelope continuously.

Our regional population is 365,000 people, and is now growing at an accelerated rate. Yet we are not Los Angeles, Dallas, or Orlando. We never will be.

When you are doing ministry in a city with a million or more people, you can afford to operate in extremes more effectively than I can in our region. Your market reach potential is greater than mine; therefore, the ability even exists to create a niche

market. I have often wondered how some large ministries in the mega-markets of the world would do in Northwest Arkansas. Simultaneously, I have wondered more how large our church might become in these same mega-markets of the world. All of this is just preacher poppycock, and I know it. We each have a unique call on how and where we are to use our giftedness to fulfill the mandate to reach our region, our nation, and our world with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Regardless of the size of your market, I am convinced that balance is essential in the long haul of church life. We do not know what the long-term success will be with so many today that are doing creative ministry successfully as they have obviously dialed into their culture effectively. I pray all of us are successful in fulfilling our unique calls from God to penetrate the world with the gospel.

My goal is not to critique or evaluate others and what they are doing. My goal in this specific chapter is to remind you of something I believe is biblical and right.

Do not mistake my belief as being non-innovative or unwilling to risk or go to the edge. If you believe that, you know little to nothing about who I am and what we do.

Listen, we were singing praise choruses before they were cool. We had screens for image magnification and videos early on in

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the process. We were a church without walls via our missions ministry before anyone talked much about it at all. We built the first animated children's worship building. In fact, I was able to lead to Christ the very man who has now taken what he did with our children's building years ago and expanded and improved it in some of the greatest churches in the world. We became one of the very first churches with an additional site, formalizing our identity as being "One Church in Two Locations." We will not stop here. We believe in reinventing and innovation.

I do not say all of this to boast about who we are or what we have done. We are nothing apart from Jesus and we know it. We also know we should have done, could do, and need to do so much more. I just want you to understand that in all of this and more, I have learned a great lesson I think every minister needs to know. Here is the lesson that will save you some grief and embarrassment and I believe will ensure long-term health and growth in your church regardless of its location.

SINCE THIS IS THE
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MESSAGE. THIS IS THE
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Balance draws masses.

When the proper balance exists in all areas of ministry, you are able to reach more people. When you are seduced into extremes, it will eventually cost you. It may cost you anointing

from God, influence upon Christianity in the world, and even people who may really need the ministry of your church.

WHY BALANCE IS IMPORTANT

Reaching greater numbers of people should not be your only motivation for balance. Yes, for the long haul of church life, I believe it will help you reach more people. However, balance is important for more reasons than this.

Stay Centered on the Cross and Resurrection in the Message

Balance is portrayed and marketed with a message that stays centered on the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even though this may be the intent of your heart, balance calls you to stay centered on the most essential of all essentials. Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world. Jesus was raised bodily from the dead miraculously.

The only way for anyone to ever meet God is for them to personally embrace what Jesus did for them, trusting in His death and resurrection for the forgiveness of their sins. When this occurs, their sins are forgiven, Jesus comes to live within them through the person of the Holy Spirit, and they experience eternal life in heaven when they die.

Since this is the message for the entire world, stay centered on the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ in your message. This is the only power of God that is for salvation.

All of the theological clutter in the world, as well as the temptation to out-create your last brilliant moment of creativity, may cause you to shift from the centrality of this message. Staying centered on the cross and resurrection of Jesus in your message will help you be balanced.

Stay Focused on the Great Commission

I am convinced that staying focused on the task of sharing this wonderful message of good news about Jesus around the world will help you be balanced in your life and ministry. This wonderful message of salvation was mandated by Jesus for us to share internationally and continuously. This is why we call it the Great Commission.

Sharing this message is our task. It is our commission. It is great. We cannot stop sharing it until we finish the task. We are called to make disciples around the world. This demonstrates a commitment to balance. Out of all the things you will be called upon to do in 21st century church life, ensure you do this. If not, you will chase extremes.

Keep your focus on this commission that is so great. Stay focused on it in your region. Stay focused on how to fulfill it in America. Stay focused on finishing the task globally. Stay focused.

Stay Simple by Building a Jesus Church

In the model-craze of church today, do it God's way. In this highly technological moment we are in, keep it simple. How? Be concerned in your life and ministry to build a Jesus church.

A Jesus church is not a new denomination I am creating. A Jesus church is a New Testament church. It's the kind of church you read about in the Book of Acts and the successive books of the New Testament.

A Jesus church is centered on the cross and resurrection of Jesus and is very focused on taking the message of salvation

globally. A Jesus church is balanced due to its commitment to all of Scripture and is empowered by the Holy Spirit of God who is able to do the supernatural.

You may or may not be identified with a denomination. You may be identified with a certain kind of model in church life. Regardless of your status on either thing, above all, build a Jesus church. If you do not have your church so simple that you understand it is all about Jesus, you are too complicated. Balance prevails and draws masses when you become a Jesus church.

WHAT BATTLES BALANCE

Balance is always battled by an ideology or an individual who tips the scales. I like mavericks because I have learned to work with them. I like innovation because I have learned how to restrain it reasonably. However, each minister needs to know which things battle balance in church culture.

Poor Theology

When biblical illiteracy is raging from the seats of the church due to the lack of biblical teaching and preaching from the pulpits of the church, the result will be poor theology. Additionally, truth is determined in our culture by what people see, hear, feel, or experience. When you blend poor theology with the pseudo-spirituality of our day, the end result will be an impotent church. While crowds may gather to experience the most recent phenomenon, we must never equate genuine spirituality with the response of that audience.

This kind of “shake-n-bake spirituality” that is being served weekly through “church potpourri” is an indictment on the church and our commitment to

biblical theology. We need to repent. We need to return to teaching and preaching the Bible and the whole counsel of God in a convictional, authoritative, and personal way that will engage the audience to the point that the entire church experiences the power of God. If we do not do this, poor theology will battle balance, tipping the scales toward error.

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Niche Elitism

Marketing the church toward reaching a specific audience has assisted us in being somewhat successful in the short term of life. Many churches pride themselves on the kind of people they are reaching due to this strategy. They declare their niche and go after it. If they are successful by their own gauge, they can develop a spirit of elitism.

Is this New Testament? Can you find this marketing strategy in the New Testament? Perhaps you can and if so, I am glad. Niche elitism as a church, or within any ministry of a church, will cause imbalance over time. This imbalance will prove to be unhealthy.

Worship Extremes

Both poor theology and niche elitism have contributed to worship extremes. These worship extremes may occur as we

try to find something for everyone or may exist because we are chasing the winds of a certain style of music. This simple point could dominate the pages of an entire book.

Whether the substance is weak in worship music or the styles are highly defined, both will limit the masses from engaging in genuine worship. Genuine worship is an encounter with Christ that results in lifestyle change.

Balance in worship is critical. When it does not exist, you had better pray you are attempting to do church in one of the great mega-cities of the world. Yet even if you have a huge population base to reach, nothing will limit the percentage of the possible pie for ministry reach in your region any quicker than extremes in worship.

HOW TO MAINTAIN BALANCE

I do believe that balance draws masses. I also believe that when fountains of explosive growth occur, the test for success will be over time. If God is in it, it will last. If it is not of God, it will not. I pray it all lasts if it is Bible-based, Jesus-centered, and Holy Spirit-controlled. It is incumbent on ministers to think about balance and how to maintain it in churches across the world.

Based on the Bible

If your church is not based on the Bible, balance will not occur. If you do not read it, teach it, preach it, and live it, balance will not occur.

The only equalizing source of authority in this world is the Bible, the precious Word of God. It has stood the test of time.

It is God's truth for today. It is the way you and your church can stay balanced.

Heart for all people

I believe the church should cross generational, racial, and socio-economic lines. The only way to have a heart for all people is to minister to and reach people from all walks of life. When a church does not do this, they will forget many of the people in their community in the name of "our niche" and "our style." Over the course of time, this will be very unhealthy. Having a heart for all people will result in balance in your ministry and church.

Listen to wise, godly counsel

When a minister is headstrong about "his way of doing church" and it becomes "the only way," he develops arrogance. Arrogance puts the entire church in jeopardy. This is why each minister needs to learn to be a listener.

Listen to wise and godly counsel. This may come from other ministers on the team, from across the country, or from some lay person in the church. If they are wise and godly, learn to listen to them when you hear them singing the same song, calling for you to have greater balance in your ministry and church. God may be saying something to you through them.

A FRESH CALL

I am compelled by the Lord to issue you a fresh call. This fresh call to ministers and churches is something I have done for the past several years. It is what the American church needs to hear and do and the unchurched culture needs to see. Here

is the fresh call to each of you and the need of the day: *Practice orthodoxy packaged in innovation.*

I believe strongly that real truth and doctrine can be packaged in innovation. I believe orthodoxy is not threatened by innovation because it is truth. Truth always lasts. I believe innovative methodology needs genuine substance. Jesus packaged His truth in a way that people in His day understood, using innovation to do it. The New Testament church echoed this uniqueness.

In 21st century church life, we have some ministers and churches entrenched with the purity of their truth, ignoring the power of innovation. On the other hand, we have ministers and churches that are as cutting edge as Las Vegas or Hollywood technology, but doctrinally are as shallow as an inch. Each of the groups has “stand offs,” exercising their spiritual gift of criticism toward each other. Neither is right and neither honors God. Both mislead people about true Christianity.

I believe the unchurched and the church will run toward a minister and a church that will practice orthodoxy packaged in innovation. At the least, the world will give you more credibility. More importantly, I believe you will represent the heart of Jesus’ truth, life, and ministry when you practice orthodoxy packaged in innovation.

When this occurs in the right way with the right spirit, this kind of balance will draw masses of people.

Remember: “As for Me, if I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to Myself” (John 12:32).

