

Bill M. Sullivan on Breaking the 200 Barrier

In this second session we will consider the ways in which a church must prepare spiritually for the task of breaking the 200 Barrier.

"No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4b).

Christians and churches must face the fact that apart from Christ they are powerless to accomplish God's work. This does not mean that God does the work.

Every gardener knows that it is the branches, not the vine, that bear the fruit. Vines do not bear fruit. Branches, that are connected to the vine, bear the fruit.

John 15:1-8 uses agricultural imagery to describe the divine and human involvement in accomplishing the work of God in the world. Without God the Christian can do nothing. But a Christian who remains in Christ will certainly bear fruit—even in abundance!

Devout Christians tend to overstate divine involvement in the work of the Kingdom. This is understandable. No true followers of Christ want to detract from the glory and power of God—not that we could even if we tried.

But the plain biblical fact is that Christ's followers are His servants—"slaves," if you want the more literal translation of the Greek. When a Christian speaks of the work he is doing, he is not neglecting to give God the glory, he is only recounting the duties his Master has assigned him to perform. Indeed, Jesus declared, "You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last"

(John 15:16).

Christians and churches have difficulty synthesizing human effort and divine power. Jesus says it's as simple as, "You go, and I'll go with you!" When Christians work for God and His kingdom, He makes their efforts productive.

What really matters is the relationship between the Christian and Christ. Abiding in Christ is the relationship that the Master desires from His followers.

When a church decides to attempt breaking the 200 Barrier, the members need to examine the extent to which they are abiding in Christ. They must recall the words of their Lord, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5b).

The most important spiritual preparation that a church can make for breaking the 200 Barrier is to return to abiding in Christ. Usually, this means a renewed commitment to prayer, both individually and collectively.

The pastor will need to pray for special anointing. His leadership will be tested in significant ways. At times he will be exhausted, physically and emotionally. He will have to grow personally and professionally. He'll be tempted to succumb to discouragement. Any trace of poor self-image will arise and accuse him of inadequacy and incompetence. And just in case his poor self-image doesn't accuse him, the devil will make sure that someone else thinks about his incompetence and raises the subject for consideration!

The laity will also need to pray for divine help. In all probability their experience won't be a textbook case. There will be variations from what they had anticipated. They will begin to think that

something has gone wrong and that, perhaps, once again they have been inspired to do, not so much the impossible, as the ridiculous. They will want to quit. They will hope that the whole experience will just go away.

But prayer will be needed for more than the problems. The entire project needs to be undergirded with prayer. Everyone will want to pray that God will make the effort accomplish all that He wants to see happen in the life of the church and in the community.

One of the realities of prayer is that it must be disciplined. People who wait to pray until they are moved to pray, seldom pray. The pastor and key lay leaders must call the church to specific times of collective prayer.

A regular weekly prayer time at the church may be best in many churches. Particular boards and committees may want to give an important portion of their monthly meetings to praying for power to do the work God wants them to do. Prayer in the regular services should petition God for divine power to accomplish the task.

Prayer should be for more than breaking the 200 Barrier. The goal is always to reach the unsaved with the good news of the gospel. To grow without reaching the lost for Christ and without meeting human need is of no merit in the kingdom of God.

Of course, the prayer must be sincere. It is not an experiment to see if it works.

Faith is both simple and complex.

1. Faith in the existence of God is easy for most people. Of course, doubts come at times but most people have faith in the existence of God with little hesitation.

2. Faith for salvation is not usually difficult for most people. Some may feel that they are unworthy or too sinful but most can readily believe in the abounding grace of God.
3. Faith in the providence of God comes almost naturally for people. There is a general confidence that God provides for our daily needs and protects us from lurking evil. Some persons who have experienced calamity struggle to maintain faith in the direct involvement of God in everyday affairs. But many of those who have experienced misfortune are able to believe that even in tragedy God works for their ultimate good.
4. The kind of faith many people question is belief that God will answer prayers for specific help. Requests for physical healing, for financial aid, for rescuing a business, for accomplishing some unusual feat, etc., taxes the confidence of many people. Much of this reluctance to believe stems from actual observation. People have watched others pray for specific help and have not been convinced that it was received.
- There is a similar skepticism among some Christians in regard to the claims of clergymen. Some lay leaders in small churches have been disillusioned. A pastor challenged them to "have faith" in a big program or expensive project which didn't succeed. They were embarrassed, or at least disappointed, and not infrequently left "holding the bag" financially.
- Now, these lay persons are hearing about a kind of faith that is called a spiritual gift. It is the gift of "Mountain Moving Faith." It is characteristic of strong leaders and "Super Church" pastors. But it sounds like the old line with a little more spiritual "glitz."

Have these Christians "lost faith" too easily? Were they mistaken in coming to an unwarranted conclusion? Is there a renewal of faith that Christians can experience which will help prepare them and their church to do great exploits for God?

Elmer Towns, in his book Stepping Out on Faith, discusses the "Gift of Faith" and describes three uses of this gift. The *Instrumental* use employs the gift to do God's work, such as preaching. The *Insight* use enables seeing what God wants done in the church. The third use is *interventional*, which moves God to act on behalf of some specific ministry.

What may be open to question is not the reality of the "Gift of Faith" but the credibility of the person who claims to possess the gift. Spiritual Gifts teaching insists that gifting be confirmed by the church. If the church doesn't believe that a person has the gift of faith, then the person may be mistaken in claiming to have the gift.

It is relatively easy to lose the sense of God's presence in the midst of His church. Everything about us appears to happen according to natural causes. We can progressively surrender our belief in divine intervention, power, presence, and existence. Such deterioration of faith must be vigorously resisted.

Jesus expressed concern that when He returned to earth He might not find faith at all (Luke 18:8c). Yet the Bible insists that "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). The preservation of faith should be high on the agenda of the church.

But is the preservation of the *Gift* of Faith critical? Yes, without any question. The Christian challenge is so great that the church desperately needs the *Insight*, *Instrumental*, and *Interventional*

special abilities of the Gift of Faith.

The question is how can this gift be recognized and confirmed in a particular church? Will the pastor possess the gift of faith? What are the implications of the gift being possessed by a lay person? How would the gift be utilized if several laypersons had the gift of Mountain Moving Faith?

Part of the spiritual preparations for breaking the 200 Barrier is for the church to take positive steps toward the renewal of faith and the recognition of the Gift of Faith.

Adapting the suggestions given in the textbook, Ten Steps to Breaking the 200 Barrier, the pastor could:

1. Prepare and preach sermons based on biblical passages about faith.
2. Circulate faith inspiring books for church members to read.
3. Distribute to the people books and magazine articles about great churches.
4. Ask people to compile a list of accounts of Mountain Moving Faith.
5. Invite people of great faith to speak in the church.
6. Encourage the people to pray that God will increase their faith.

A church that is earnestly praying for God to help them be faithful to the task He has called them to do . . . and that truly believes He wants to accomplish a great work of the Kingdom through them . . . is very likely spiritually prepared to break the 200 Barrier.

In this final study session a strategy will be considered and a methodology initiated to begin the effort to break the 200 Barrier.

Let's think about the developments we will face as the church breaks the 200 Barrier. The grid on the screen displays several of the major concerns. The columns to the right provide a place for us to describe our present situation, the concerns of years one and two, and a final column for conditions in year three when we have reached our goal.

The building is not the most important determinant of growth but it does have an immediate bearing on a number of growth related issues. For example, a limited number of Sunday School classrooms will restrict Sunday School growth unless additional space can be secured. On the other hand, it is possible to grow a church with a different infrastructure than the Sunday School. (This is risky restructuring and should not be adopted lightly.)

It is easy to conclude that an expansion of facilities will be required. But what about the present debt? How realistic is it to think about assuming an additional building payment?

By far the best plan for most churches is to think creatively about the use of facilities. What rooms can be freed up for growth related use? What about multiple use of space? Are there rooms nearby that could be rented?

If additional space must be constructed, plan how the existing space can serve your needs until the new facilities are completed.

Based on existing facilities, plus what can be provided within two years, establish a three-year goal of at least 300. An even better goal would be 350 or higher. Do not set the goal above 500.

The reason the goal must be at least 300 is because of what we call "the gravity effect." Family-type operations are ingrained in the

culture of the church. It is very easy to drift back into the former way of doing things. To avoid this possibility it is essential to get far enough into the new way of doing things that there is minimal inclination to return to the former processes. The new structure needs to escape gravity's pull back to a family-type organization. 300 is the numerical minimum but 500 is better.

1. Think about all of the expenditures that will be added or increased as a result of breaking the 200 Barrier.
2. Consider the necessity of employing additional staff persons. At what points will they be added?
3. Give thought to the need for additional lay leaders. Of course there will be more people to draw from but how will they be trained? Who will provide the training?
4. Go through the exercise of dividing the numerical goal by 12. ($300/12=25$ or $500/12=42$) This will give you the number of small groups the church will need when the goal is reached. Sunday School classes will count; so will recreational groups. Plan the necessary annual increments to support the goal.
5. The music program of the church will need to greatly expand and in all probability change. More than a larger choir will be necessary. There should be several smaller musical groups and an age-graded music program. Remember, this is an item of added cost.
6. Pastoral expectations will change with growth. We need to think about some of the differences that will occur.

Thinking through what it will be like for the church to break the 200 Barrier is a very important step in the project. Anticipating

changes and needs and preparing for them is essential to success.

"In any given group of occurrences, a small number of causes will give rise to the largest proportion of results" (textbook, p. 60). This statement is not justification for operating a minimal program. Rather, it calls us to concentration on growth effectiveness while we are engaged in breaking the 200 Barrier. In order to grow from 100 to 300 in a three-year period requires results-oriented programming.

Let's make a list of all the activities we have at our church.

Of course, this list is not complete but it helps us realize the wide range of activities involved in our programming.

Now, let's briefly attempt to guess (a careful study would be required to know for sure) which two or three activities are the most effective at producing growth in our church.

Now, let's make a list of assumed growth-producing activities in which our church is *not* presently involved. We will be guessing because we do not know for certain that these activities are truly growth effective or that they would produce growth in our particular situation. Nevertheless, this exercise is important.

Can we agree on three or four of these suggestions that we think would work in our church?

Let's see if we can synthesize the two lists. First, we'll just record the present growth-producing programs and the new ones we think would be most effective.

Let's reduce this list to three activities that we feel relatively certain will produce rapid and significant growth.

Are you comfortable with this list? Do you think it really represents the "critical few" activities for our church?

This is just a beginning. We will need to have a committee take what we have done hurriedly and give both extensive and intensive consideration to the process.

What do you think creates excitement in the church?

In what ways can these excitement creators be programmed?

Are there any suggestions for creating excitement in the list given in the textbook that aren't on the list we have made?

Creating excitement and morale are important to growth and essential to breaking the 200 Barrier.

There is a time for everything in Church Growth too! There is a time to study, a time to research, a time to plan, a time to organize, and a time to staff—but ultimately there is a time to grow! Step 8 of the *ten steps* is "where the rubber meets the road."

A one day attendance campaign is a good way to initiate a growth thrust. The current approach to this type of effort is a friend day program. Several commercial varieties are available.

Telemarketing is a newer approach to reaching large numbers of people. In spite of great skepticism the program has been amazingly effective. Complete plans are commercially available.

Sunday School renewal is an effort worthy of serious consideration. In most instances several new classes would be required, including new teachers. More importantly, a new attitude toward the Sunday School would be necessary.

Several other ideas and programs are available. Selecting one and committing to it is the important, the absolutely necessary, task.

Growth histories, like this one, consistently reveal that new converts are the backbone of church growth.

Some people have assumed that rapidly growing churches are receiving many members by transfer. However, the facts reveal that even in areas of population explosion, growing churches increase mainly from new convert growth.

The priority on evangelism must be maintained. New converts need discipling and some attention should be given to new convert follow-up. Unfortunately, it is easier to encourage a new convert than it is to win a soul to Christ. The emphasis must be kept on soul winning.

1. On this grid let's see if we can determine the priorities of our organization and the state of equilibrium. Let's list the activities, commitments, and investments in evangelism and education that we're presently pursuing.
2. Now, let's list our priorities for quantity oriented programs and our priorities for quality focused programs.
3. Let's do the same with people and facilities.
4. Now, let's describe our efforts to provide the funding to secure additional staff vis a vis our decisions to hire staff to facilitate growth.
5. Finally, let us describe the excitement that we have in the church because we are growing and then make a list of what we are doing to build morale.

Operating a growing church is not simple. Many concerns must be integrated, balanced, and sustained. Without leaving important tasks undone, the absolutely essential task of evangelism must be given top priority.

Step 10 is not just about leadership; neither is it just about change. It is about the critical function of maintaining equilibrium in

the organization as it undergoes change.

Fundamentally this is the responsibility of the pastor. He alone has the breadth of access and authority to keep the church in both balance and motion.

The church must commit to following the pastor's leadership.

This does not mean that they must follow blindly without the right of even asking questions or occasionally disagreeing. But it does mean, in matters of opinion, that the pastor should be supported in his decisions. Constantly second guessing the pastor's decisions or following a popular lay leader's inclinations will spell defeat for the barrier breaking effort. Permission to lead must consistently be given to the pastor and not to anyone else.

It will be the pastor's responsibility to manage the conflict that results from the change taking place. He must keep the goal before the people. He can help them understand the need for certain adjustments. His sensitivity to particular groups and persons will reassure and calm the distressed.

Lay leaders can be of great help in responding to complaints and calming fears and apprehensions. Rather than just listening, without comment, to the critics of the pastor and program, answer their objections and dispel their misconceptions.

The people must continually be helped to understand that dramatic changes are occurring but that the end result will be appreciated by everyone.

People will not, over time, automatically adjust to change. Rather, if permitted, they will force adaptations to the changes that will very likely supplant the growth of the church. It is the task of

leadership, pastoral and lay, to keep the church on an even keel while it is navigating stormy waters.

Nothing may be allowed to slow the momentum and growth of the church. Leadership must see to that. Getting growth going and keeping it going is the leader's primary task in the effort to break the 200 Barrier.

Your church can break the 200 barrier. Henry Ford's assertion is appropriate at this point, "If you think you can, you are right. If you think you can't, you are still right!" It is a matter of believing that this is something God wants us to do and then committing to do it.

For the glory of God and the building of His kingdom, let's commit for our church to break the 200 Barrier.

- 1.The pastor may assume that the church wants to break the 200 Barrier and announce the appointment of the Planning Committee.
- 2.Or the pastor may choose to discuss the matter with the group and ask them to express their preference by vote—voice or secret ballot.
- 3.And the pastor may choose to reserve the final action for the Church Board.
- 4.General instructions for the Planning Committee are included here.
- 5.In any event, the session should be closed with prayer for the continuing process of breaking the 200 Barrier.