

Leadership Letter #3 – September 9, 2006

To my dear Nigerian pastor friends:

Greetings again to you. This is the third "Leadership Letter" I've written in the last couple of weeks. My goals in writing these letters are (1) to help prepare you and your country for our conference for Church Planting in November; (2) to help focus our efforts in prayer, recruiting and preparation for the conference; (3) to give you some solid Bible teaching that relates to planting healthy churches; and (4) to help further prepare you as a leader.

### **Growing Healthy Churches**

This week I have a few thoughts about "church health." About twenty years ago in America, church leaders started talking about "church growth." Growing churches larger and larger was the emphasis. And it was good ... but with that teaching came some concerns. One of those concerns was that "size isn't everything" and that many times problems were created by focusing only on growth. Recently many church leaders have focused not so much on "size and growth," but on "health and right priorities." And I believe that when you have a healthy church operating with right priorities, that church will grow.

Let me give you an example. Linda and I have three children: Brandon, who is now 23 years old; Becca, who is 20 years old; and Brooks, who is 16 years old. When our children were young, we never worried about their "size." We didn't tell them to "grow." We focused on their health: were they getting enough exercise? Were they eating healthy food? Were they getting enough rest? If they were sick, were we helping them get well? Why did we do that and not worry about how quickly they were growing? Because we knew that if they were *healthy*, they would eventually *grow* as they should.

The same is true for churches. If a church is healthy, it will naturally grow. But if it is not healthy, no matter how many people come, it will be in danger until they are able to get healthy. Here's the principle: focus on health and growth will come.

So how does a church stay healthy? It stays healthy by operating on Biblical priorities. Last week I sent you a Bible study about faith-hope-love – the three measuring sticks for a church. This week let's take a look at Acts chapter two and see what are God's priorities for a healthy church.

**Acts 2:42-47** <sup>42</sup> *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.* <sup>43</sup> *Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.* <sup>44</sup> *All the believers were together and had everything in common.* <sup>45</sup> *Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.* <sup>46</sup> *Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,* <sup>47</sup> *praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

In this passage, I see five clear purposes for every church. Are you are familiar with Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Church*? I think is one of the best and clearest books written on church health – buy it and read it ten times if you are not familiar with it! In that book, Rick shares a proven five-part strategy that will enable

your church to grow ...

- warmer through fellowship
- deeper through discipleship
- stronger through worship
- broader through ministry
- larger through evangelism

I'm enclosing a Bible study I've written on "Sharpening the Focus of the Church" that will help you dive into each of these principles on a deeper level. But for now, what I would like to do is put these five principles into a memorable package so that you will be able to easily teach them to others. The order won't quite be the same, but I've found that this is the best way to help people remember them.

Let's take the word FLOWS and separate it into its five letters, F-L-O-W-S.

**F = Fellowship.** We receive encouragement from other believers when we relate properly in community. The early believers in Acts 2 were "devoted to the fellowship ... all the believers were together in one body." People today are looking for authentic community – and the best place to experience it is in the body of Jesus Christ, the Church.

**L = Learning.** This can come from preaching on a Sunday morning, teaching in a Bible study, or by one-on-one discipleship. The early church was "devoted to the Apostle's teaching..." They knew that the Word of God was truth – and that it was the basis for all that they did.

**O = Outreach.** This is evangelism. The early church was on mission with God to reach their community for Christ. In Acts 2 we see that thousands came to Christ through their preaching (v. 41) and God graciously "added to their number daily those who were being saved" (v. 47).

**W = Worship.** "They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and prayers ... praising God." Exalting the Lord corporately is one of the main focuses of the Church when it gathers together.

**S = Service.** We are each given spiritual gifts and abilities to effectively serve the Lord in ministry. We ought to meet people's legitimate needs and help them through the gifts and abilities God has given to us.

Can you remember those? Sure you can. Anybody can ... because all it takes is remembering one word: FLOWS. It's especially easy for you because the Nigerian church planting movement is known as Living Spring Ministries. Living Spring ... where the grace of God FLOWS to all people. The church in Jos has even written a song about "FLOWS." Talk to Ken to get the words and music.

### **Living by the Five Purposes**

Now that you can remember it, let's talk about how to insure that these five purposes remain the top five purposes of the church.

It's easy to get involved in a lot of things. Over the years the church in America has gotten involved in many political issues, and it has lost the power of God as it has lost its focus. One thing that has encouraged those of us in America who know Pastor Ken Eze and Living Spring Ministries is that he is committed to remaining focused on the five priorities God has called the church to live by. Don't get distracted. Remain faithful. Stay focused. That's what God wants from us as leaders.

At the upcoming conference for Church Planters, we'll not only be talking about planting new churches, but we'll also be talking about *church health*. One of our speakers, Pastor Stephen Bowe from First Baptist Church Lehigh Acres, Florida, has seen his church turn around dramatically in the last year.

When he came to First Baptist as its new pastor fourteen months ago, Stephen came to a church that was very divided and carnal. But through faithfully teaching the Word of God, preaching the gospel of grace, and focusing the church on what God has called it to be and do, he has seen great things happen. Sunday morning attendance has grown dramatically, people have repented and confessed sin publicly, and many people have come to know Christ as their Savior and Lord. They are currently involved in helping to start a new church in their area, CounterPointe Church, pastored by church planter Mike Lowery. Through his leadership, Stephen has returned their church to God's purposes and intentions ... and God has blessed their efforts greatly.

Stephen will be speaking on the subject of "Turn Around Churches," where he will share the story of what God has done in the life of their church. He will also be leading a four-part workshop on "Growing a Healthy Church."

### **Action Points**

Because they really fit with what I've presented in this letter, allow me to simply repeat the six actions points that were in the letter last week.

1. **Pray.** Pray hard every week (maybe even every day) for this conference. Ask God to bring the type of people we have talked about. Pray for the leaders and speakers of the conference.
2. **Come.** Come yourself to the conference. Come with a hungry heart and a teachable spirit. Come ready to listen to God. I believe He will speak to MANY at that conference about planting churches throughout Nigeria. God may even call you to a new ministry situation.
3. **Invite.** Invite many leaders to come. Each of you know pastors, church planters and potential church planters who need to be at the conference. Do you know pastors of large, influential churches that might become "church planting centers?" Invite those pastors. Pray that they catch the vision. Last week we were in a planning session with Ken and I asked him to give me the names of several young men he knows who could be church planters in a year or two. He listed 2 names. By God's grace, those men need to be disciplined, brought to this conference, prayed for, and ultimately sent out as church planters. Maybe they go with another young planter, or maybe they go with a seasoned leader who can continue to develop them.
4. **Teach.** Teach your church what we are talking about here. Ask them to pray. I

want your people to have a vision for this conference. Get them involved. Some of them may come to the conference to serve. We will need servants and workers to make the conference successful.

5. **Give.** I know Nigeria is not a rich country. And we in America are raising money to help make this conference a success. But you never want to be in a position where you are a "taker," and not a "giver." Teach your people principles of generous giving. Isn't it interesting in the Bible that when Jesus used an illustration of a generous giver, He did not point to someone who had a lot of money ... but to a widow who only had a few coins to her name ... but she gave what she had ... and God was pleased. We in America love you all and are committed to being generous with you ... but we want to inspire that same generosity in you so that you can be generous to others. Teach your churches to give. God will be very pleased. *(By the way, just so you are aware of our funding policies, all money we give from America will be given to Living Spring Ministries, and we will ask Ken Eze to distribute the money as he sees fit. We will not accept funding proposals outside of Ken's recommendations.)*

6. **World Vision.** Finally, I want you to begin thinking beyond your borders. Ken was telling us about a few churches that Living Spring has planted in Cameroon. Let's get some leaders from other countries to this conference. Let's have Nigeria be known as a blessing to all of West Africa ... and ultimately all the world.

### **Next Steps**

1. Please forward this email – and the previous email letter – to other pastors you know. Encourage them to become part of our movement.
2. Also, send me their email addresses, so I can keep in touch with them. I'll send them future "Leadership Letters" directly, plus I will know more people to pray for.
3. Attached (as a pdf file) is another Bible study for you. As I mentioned earlier, this is a study on "Sharpening the Focus of the Church" – and it talks about the five priorities of the church. Would you take one hour this week and go through this material personally – and then teach it to your leadership. I believe it will be helpful.
4. Please keep in touch with me. Let me know any prayer requests that you have as our time in November approaches.

Henry Oursler