

The Upside Down Church: by Greg Laurie with David Kopp, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois, 1999 (35 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

“Some might say that Harvest Christian Fellowship has done everything backwards, yet it may be leading more people to Christ than any other church in America today. Here are the surprising secrets of its success.”

CHAPTER 1. THE UPSIDE DOWN CHURCH: God’s Original Plan Was the Right One

1. God’s Original Plan Was the Right One

We recently celebrated twenty-five years of ministry. As I look back on my life, I don’t know what I have done much differently. It was never our goal, per se, but we have become one of the largest churches in the country, with some fifteen thousand attending on an average Sunday. We see an average of three to four thousand people come to Christ every year in our church services alone. Thousands of others come to faith through our various outreach ministries, including the Harvest Crusades. One-fourth of the people in our congregation are actively involved in some type of ministry today. More than 60 percent of them came to faith at our services. [Page 1]

2. THE UPSIDE DOWN CHURCH: God’s Original Plan Was the Right One

It is hard to explain all that the Lord has faithfully done in our ministry over the last twenty-five years. I’m reminded of a statement Warren Wiersbe made: “If you can explain what is going on then God didn’t do it.” [Page 2]

3. Evangelistic Doors Open: The Harvest Crusades

I had read a story about a young Charles Spurgeon, who had some vision of grandeur for himself and his ministry that was opening up in London. The Lord reminded him of a passage in Jeremiah: “Do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them” (Jer. 45:5, NKJV). It’s hard not to be accused of egotism when you suggest that a huge meeting be held and you are to be the one doing the preaching. I just stopped worrying about trying to make it happen and concluded that maybe this was not God’s will for my life. I was reminded of Paul’s words when he said, “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content” (Phil. 4:11, NKJV). There is a real temptation for those of us who are called to serve the Lord to see the grass as greener elsewhere—to think that bigger is always better. That we should be moving up some sort of ladder of spiritual success. But I have found, in retrospect, that we should be thankful for any opportunity God has opened for us, no matter how large or small it may be. As Warren Wiersbe has said, “You can never be too small for God to use, only too big.” [Pages 10, 11]

4. Evangelistic Doors Open: The Harvest Crusades

What God requires of us is faithfulness. And if we are “faithful in the little things,” He will give us more to do in His perfect timing. Scripture reminds us to not despise “the

day of small things” (Zech. 4:10, NKJV). You are learning important lessons—lessons you will treasure for years to come—through what God is doing in your life right now. A minister of a smaller church once met the great C.H. Spurgeon, who was at the zenith of his ministry, and complained about the small size of his congregation. The minister voiced his envy of the thousands who came to hear Spurgeon each week. Spurgeon asked him, “How many people attend your church?” The minister replied, “About one hundred.” Spurgeon replied, “I think that is enough to give an account of on the Day of Judgment.” [Page 11]

5. The First Disciples: Radical or Right?

The early church leaders were simply living their Christian lives according to what Jesus taught. What we consider to be radical behavior was nothing more than a sincere attempt to live obediently. What many of us consider normal Christian living today—compared to what the first church experienced—is not normal at all. It’s woefully inadequate, as a result, pitifully ineffective. [Page 14]

6. The First Disciples: Radical or Right?

When unbelievers said of the early Christians that they “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6, NKJV), it was clearly not meant as a compliment. In fact, it was an accusation and a criticism, they upset the norm. They changed the way people saw religion, God, politics, church, and personal relationships. [Page 14]

7. The First Disciples: Radical or Right?

Then, as now, it was really the sinful people whose ideas were all turned around, backwards, and upside down. So when they early Christians were said to be turning the world upside down, they were actually putting right what had been wrong since the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden. [Pages 14, 15]

8. “You Have a Little Strength”

Today we have a unique opportunity to get the gospel out. Countries that were previously closed are now open. And we have technology to project the gospel message to more people than ever before. [Page 21]

9. PASTOR TO PASTOR: *From the Inside Out*

Too many of us are caught up in the outside stuff—focusing on numbers, building programs, and the latest ways to attract new members. And in the process, we’ve lost sight of our first love. We’ve lost our light, our burning fire, to see people turn to Christ. [Page 22]

10. PASTOR TO PASTOR: *From the Inside Out*

I firmly believe that a vial small-town church that is ignited for God is far more capable of setting the world on fire than a huge church that has turned into social club. [Page 23]

CHAPTER 2. A FEW GOOD CHRISTIANS: How Twelve Men Turned the World on Its Ear

11. How Twelve Men Turned the World on Its Ear

When we look to the disciples, we can see three things that made them people God could use to build His upside-down church.

- They walked according to the Spirit, not the flesh (human inclinations).
- They kept in mind the purposes of God, not the priorities of people.
- They acted according to God's methods, not their own. [Page 28]

12. According to the Spirit

I believe one key reason the church is not affecting the world today as it ought is that it is not relying on the Holy Spirit. Far too often we are relying on programs or on surveys and entertainment. We are relying on other means instead of depending on the Holy Spirit to do His work. As a result, we fail. We can't turn this world upside down on our own power. [Page 28]

13. According to the Spirit

To be filled with the Spirit means that I am carried along by, and under the control of, Jesus Christ. It means I fill myself with the Word of God so that His thoughts become my thoughts, His standards my standards, His will my will. When we are filled with the Spirit, we are walking thought by thought, decision by decision, act by act, under the Spirit's control. [Page 29]

14. According to God's Purposes

If we want to become part of an upside-down church, we have to keep in mind not our own priorities but God's. [Page 32]

15. According to God's Methods

The first Christians didn't out argue pagans—they outlived them. It is worth noting that Christianity made no attempts to conquer paganism and dead Judaism by reacting blow by blow. Instead, they Christians of the first century outthought, outprayed and outlived the unbelievers. Their weapons were positive, not negative.

As far as we know, they did not hold protests or conduct boycotts. They did not put on campaigns to try to unseat the emperor. Instead, they prayed and preached and proclaimed the message of Christ, put to death on the cross, risen from the dead, and ready to change lives. And they backed up their message with actions: giving, loving. [Page 33]

16. According to God's Methods

...has our passion for what is temporarily good displaced our passion for going about God's business God's way? When did our *work* for Jesus begin to overtake our

worship of Him? Are we more inclined to protest than we are to pray? Are we more interested in who is in the White House than in who is in God's house? Are we more interested in boycotts than we are in the salvation of family and friends? [Page 34]

17. According to God's Methods

Our primary weapons are spiritual, and our job is to be ambassadors to the world—ambassadors who understand our Leader's policies and employ only His upside-down tactics (taken from Matthew 5):

- Give to those who take.
- Love those who persecute us.
- Bless those who curse us.
- Humble ourselves.
- Lay down our life. [Page 34]

18. You and the Church

I have often said that if you are looking for the perfect church, don't join it because you'll spoil it. There is no church that does not have some flaws. The church is not supposed to be a museum for saints but a hospital for sinners. It's supposed to be a place where we can come and learn, grow, and help one another. And it's a place where we can go to be transformed.

Listen to what the Bible says in Hebrews 10:23-25:

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. NKJV [Page 37]

CHAPTER 3. CONSUMERS OR COMMUNERS?: Church Growth Rules That Could Be Making Yours Sick

19. GROWTH OR HOAX?

In a recent article entitled "The Myth of Church Growth," published in *Current Thoughts and Trends*, David Dunlap cites some troubling statistics. For example, at the very time megachurches have sprouted across the landscape, the proportion of Americans who claim to be "born again" has remained a constant 32 percent.

According to Dunlap, growth isn't coming from conversations but from transfers; they account for up to 80 percent of all growth taking place today. [Page 41]

20. The New Consumer Church

Experts are telling us that people no longer attend a fellowship of believers to commune with God. They come to consume. And in order to thrive, churches are going to have to adapt to the needs of the “spiritual consumer.”

When you label someone a consumer, you’re zeroing in on one thing: consumption. That means it’s all about appetite—what goes down the hatch. And churches that adopt a consumer-oriented approach in order to bring in the crowd often look to marketing experts to help them find out what consumers are hungry for. [Page 42]

21. PASTOR TO PASTOR: *Risky Rules for Growing*

Could any of these church growth rules be making yours sick?

Risky Rule #1: If it brings people in, it pleases God.

Risky Rule #2: The less confrontational or overt the gospel message, the better.

Risky Rule #3: Feed a church what it seems to be hungry for.

Risky Rule #4: Target your church to a particular demographic group. [Page 44]

22. New Ways of Doing God’s Business

I thank God for the diversity of church expressions in the body of Christ. And we should be careful about putting our own limits on the ways God can work or the approaches God can bless if He chooses.

But at the same time, we need to be aware of choices—even well-intentional, highly attractive ones—that take our focus, time, and energy away from God’s original plan for the church that we see reflected in the book of Acts. [Page 45]

23. God’s Original Church Growth Plan

Acts 2:42-47 describes the first church. In this passage we find four foundational qualities:

- They were a worshiping church.
- They were an evangelizing church.
- They were a learning church.
- They were a loving church.

Think of the word W-E-L-L: Worshiping, Evangelizing, Learning, and Loving. At a glance, these four foundations don’t appear to be remarkable or, for that matter, upside down. They may not have the marquee appeal of a star-studded Sunday program. [Page 47]

24. Original Church Growth Rule #2: Become an evangelistic church.

I'm totally in favor of meeting people with Christ's message in creative ways. But this should work to strengthen the gospel's impact, not obscure it. If people walk away having a good feeling but no idea who Jesus is, we've really missed the boat.

This does not mean that drama is wrong or that using videos, music, or any other means to communicate the gospel is wrong. We do some of those things at Harvest. But it does mean that we must be sure that gimmicks don't take place of the gospel, and that we are actually proclaiming the whole gospel—including judgment, sin, and salvation.

Paul put it this way, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (Rom. 10:14. NIV).

We must realize that God's primary method of converting people is through biblical preaching. Scripture reminds us, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of [the message] preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21, NKJV). [Pages 50, 51]

25. Original Church Growth Rule #4: Become a loving church.

But the problem with designing a church to cater specifically only to a certain group of people is that we miss out on the great beauties of diversity.

Jesus said, "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel." He did not say, "Go only to the people you can personally relate to" or "Pick a particular demographic group, and then go love them." Paul wrote to the Colossians, "So naturally, we proclaim Christ! We warn everyone we meet, and we teach everyone we can, all that we know about him" (Col. 1:28, Philips).

I think it's wonderful when someone walks into the church and sees different ages, different cultures, different tastes, different races—with one thing in common: Jesus Christ. That is a truly loving church. And that church will grow. [Page 54]

CHAPTER 5. "DO YOU KNOW JESUS?": Practical Principles for Witnessing

26. The Philip Principles: #6. Tell your story.

A good testimony is one that does not glorify the past. It glorifies what God is doing in life in the present. I have heard people get up and talk about their life before the Lord and all the horrible things they used to do. And as they were describing it, it almost seemed that they had more fun before they became a Christian.

You also want to avoid focusing on what you have given up. "I had the success and the fame and fortune. But I gave it all up for Jesus!" When you say something like that,

you are putting the emphasis on the wrong thing. You ought to be emphasizing what Christ gave up for you. Prior to knowing Christ, you were an empty, guilty person headed for certain judgment. All you gave up was an eternity separated from God. That was no sacrifice. [Pages 88, 89]

CHAPTER 6. THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO GOD: There's Good News—and Some Bad News

27. There's Good News—and Some Bad News

I heard a story once about a group of servicemen who had a new chaplain appointed to them. These guys weren't believers, and they wondered what kind of religion this fellow really had. They approached their new chaplain and said, "Tell us, do you believe in a real hell?"

"A literal hell?" the chaplain asked.

"Yes, that's the one." one of them answered.

The chaplain, who was rather liberal in his theology, said, "No, rest assured, boys, I don't believe in a literal hell."

He thought this would make them happy. But their response surprised him. They said, "Well then, you are wasting your time and our time, because if there is no hell, we don't need you. But if there is a hell, you're leading us astray. Either way we're better off without you." [Page 91]

28. Evangelism or entertainment?

Question:

How does Harvest Christian Fellowship decide what kinds of entertainment, drama, music, and recreation are an appropriate part of spreading the gospel, and what kinds aren't? Any criteria?

Answer:

I look for a clear and uncompromised message. Otherwise, why would the church want to sponsor it? I also look for high quality.

If we are going to have a musical artist, I want to have personally seen the artist in action or have an endorsement from someone I can trust. Merely listening to the CD or reading the press packet is not really very helpful in making the evaluation.

I want musicians, actors, and worship leaders who are talented and relevant, but what is most important is that they use their gifts to minister to people rather than to put on

a show. We like to embrace many musical styles at Harvest. Our criteria are authenticity, compassion, and a heart for God's kingdom and people. [Pages 97, 98]

29. The Gospel Unplugged: #2 The most effective message is a simple one.

Someone once asked the great British preacher C.H. Spurgeon if he could put in a few words what his Christian faith was all about. Spurgeon said, "I will put it in a few words what his Christian faith was all about. Spurgeon said, "I will put it into four words for you. Christ died for me." [Page 101]

CHAPTER 7. WALK THIS WAY: The meaning of Upside-Down Discipleship

30. The requirements of Discipleship: #1. Love God more than anyone else.

If you are going to be a follower of Jesus, you are not going to get along with everyone. It's not that you shouldn't be loving, considerate, and caring person. You should be more so. But if you are a true follower of Jesus, some people will be offended by this. They may think that now you feel you're superior to them. Or they may miss the way you used to party with them. Or they may suddenly feel less comfortable swearing up a storm when you're within hearing.

For whatever reason, we have to expect some conflict. And here's the bottom line: Either you are going to have harmony with God and friction with some people, or you are going to have harmony with people and friction with God. IF there is no conflict with any person in any area of your life because of your faith, I would suggest that you consider this principle very carefully. [Page 116]

31. The importance of "little" jobs

Question:

How does Harvest involve "the little people." not just to get the work done but as lay ministers? How do you make them feel that they're turning the world upside down by ushering?

Answer:

Warren Wiersbe said, "You can never be too small for God to use, only too big."

We have ministry opportunities for everyone at Harvest, no matter what their gifts and calling are. Yet even if a person has a gift of communicating, we would not immediately place such a person in leadership.

We believe faithfulness is of the greatest importance.

We will intentionally give relatively menial tasks to people who want to serve so that we can test that faithfulness, much as Stephen and Philip waited on tables.

If they are faithful, in time they can advance to greater opportunities. If a person objects to this, it shows me that he or she does not have a true “servant’s heart,” which I believe is essential for effective leadership.

Even if people do not feel called to teach or preach, there are many opportunities for them to serve in ministries ranging from new-convert counseling to helping people find a parking space. [Pages 126, 127]

CHAPTER 10. UPSIDE-DOWN LOVE: The Way to Show the World

32. Pastor to Pastor: *Do You Know What Your Congregation Is Reading?*

Business Week magazine made this astute observation in an article on Christian retailing: “The books selling in Christian bookstores today are the touchy feely ones that focus on self-esteem, self-fulfillment, self-analysis. While devotionals, and missionary biographies gather dust on the shelves, so do books encouraging self-sacrifice.”

It’s embarrassing that even we believers can be obsessed with self. One popular Christian author made this statement in his book: Christianity is an adventure of self-discovery that helps believers to become aware of their innate goodness.” Innate goodness? Not according to Romans 1 and 2.

Another book said, “The Bible makes people feel good about themselves. Many try to use it to make people hate themselves, but the Bible promotes psychological and emotional health.” Is that so?

What about the statement Jesus makes to the church of Laodicea (Rev. 3:17): “You are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked” (NKJV). Or James 4:8-9, which says, “Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom” (NKJV). The Bible will lead us to spiritual health, but it will do so through the truth about our sinfulness and the hope of forgiveness and restoration. It’s not just a feel-good-about-yourself book. Most of the time, Jesus (and all the prophets, Old Testament and New) are trying to get people to wake up to what isn’t good—so that healing can begin.

I’m not against self-esteem, and I’m certainly not against emotional healing. But we need to be careful not to misuse Scripture to support these quests as ends to themselves. And we also need to make sure we’re going to God, to His Word, for help. [Pages 166, 167]

33. HATE VS. HUMILITY

Question:

Greg, are you saying that the Bible teaches us to hate ourselves? And how come humility gets no respect these days?

Answer:

Let's understand. The Bible does not teach self-hate. The Bible does not teach that I am to be some miserable, always-down-on-myself person. The Bible is saying that you should see yourself as you are. You love yourself. But God is asking that instead of being so concerned about yourself, you give that same energy to others. That's part of what it means to deny yourself.

The Bible's main purpose is not to promote psychological encouragement or emotional health (although these are natural results of a thriving relationship with God). The Bible is given to reveal who God is. It is here to tell us how to come in contact with Him and how to be like Him. That is going to require that we see ourselves as we really are: Sinners separated from a God whom we have offended by our willful disobedience and the breaking of His commandments. [Page 167]

CHAPTER 11. KNOCK, KNOCK, WHO'S PRAYING?: The Power of Upside-Down Prayer

34. The Lord's Prayer

Question:

How do you recommend that a church prioritize prayer?

Answer:

In addition to our many prayer meetings through the week, we have done a special intercessory prayer meeting on Sunday morning.

We modeled it after the Lord's Prayer. The prayer Jesus taught us, which really is a model for all prayer, break into two sections. The first three statements ("Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done") deal with God's glory. The second ("Give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our debts, lead not into temptation") deal with our need.

So we would start with teaching segment number one. This would introduce the prayer, and the teacher (I would have three of our associate pastors teach this) would teach on coming before God with reverence and thanksgiving and ask for His will and kingdom in our life. Then there would be a musical break that would emphasize in song these themes, and individual people we had already picked from our congregation, who would be sitting on the platform, would come and pray relatively short prayers along those lines.

Then we would go to the next sections and include intercessory prayer for our leaders, nation, church, etc. There would be prayer for those in special need and so forth. It's a way to model prayer and at the same time drop it right in the lap of someone on Sunday morning who would not necessarily attend one of our other prayer meetings. [Page 194]

CHAPTER 12. MORE THAN MUSIC: How to Worship in Spirit and Truth

35. Lessons from the Well

What does it mean to worship in spirit and in truth? It simply means that we are to worship rightly with both our mind and our heart. You worship in truth when you worship the one true God and when you know who you're worshiping and why.

When we worship in truth, we are agreeing with God about who He is, what He can do and has done, and what He is asking of us. Then we respond by telling Him so. "Yes, Lord, You are very great. Yes, God, You are awesome, and I love you. I praise You and honor You for who You are and what You have done. I lift up Your name right now!"

This is why Bible study and worship go hand in hand and are both crucial to the church. Worship is going to be more affective when it is based on an accurate understanding of who God is. So as we learn more about His nature, His character, His plans, and His purposes, then our worship is in truth—a response to what we know is true about God. [Page 199]