

# XL ENT NEWS

PROVIDING EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP  
THROUGH QUALITY CHRISTIAN TRAINING

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2 Timothy 2:2

And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

The latest youth ministry paradigm to sweep the country is known by several different titles, but most generally as "Purpose-Driven" ministry. Although its individual expressions differ, purpose-driven ministry usually contains the following elements:

1. Primary emphasis on evangelism
2. Determination of a set of biblical purposes around which all church functions are structured (i.e. Evangelism, Ministry, Fellowship, Discipleship, Worship)
3. A "seeker sensitive" emphasis (a "seeker" being a non-Christian who is interested in the things of God)
4. A "seeker service" of some sort—a "worship service" or event in which a seeker can participate and feel comfortable, usually including such elements as:
  - a. The latest in Christian music
  - b. Mostly performance-based worship songs (not much singing required)
  - c. A secular element (song or media clip) to help the unsaved relate
  - d. A drama to emphasize the main point of the service
  - e. A "talk" on an issue which relates to unsaved students and peaks their interest to know more about the spiritual
5. A separate worship service for those who are saved, dealing



- more with spiritual growth issues
6. Small groups to help the saved stay closely connected in fellowship and discipleship
7. A heavy emphasis on organization and promotion to keep all elements running smoothly and effectively

The general idea is that teens will be drawn to the seeker service, eventually become Christians, and then "cross the line" to become more sincere disciples of Christ, and finally go out to win more friends for Christ.

At first glance this looks like a great way to do ministry. However, there are some deep-seated problems which do not appear on the surface and this approach needs to be analyzed. It is important to remember that organization, growth, or even effectiveness are not the proper benchmarks for evaluating success in ministry. The principles of the Word of God are the only foundation from which success and failure can be determined. We must be Bible driven, not purpose driven. Some of the problems inherent in the purpose-

driven movement are discussed below. It is important to understand that this analysis is not a condemnation of many sincere people involved in this movement; it is an attempt to show its dangers.

### *1. Purpose-driven ministry sometimes loses sight of principle.*

Although many purposes for the church can be determined from Scripture, those purposes can be defeated if they are pursued in a manner contrary to the underlying biblical principles. For example, worship is certainly a purpose of the church. But how can a person who does not know God worship? The principle that worship is a heart response of love and sacrifice to the God who has died for us is overlooked when we try to provide a worship experience for the unsaved. Only when the Spirit lives inside a person do they have the capacity to worship. Thus, any service focusing on worship by the unsaved has to provide its own catalyst of emotional manipulation in order to simulate true worship. In this manner a biblical purpose is cut off from its biblical principle, and thus becomes a work of man.

*2. Purpose-driven ministry is often evaluated on worldly formulas for success rather than on conformity to the Word of God.* One of the greatest dangers of the purpose-driven movement is the tendency to define success by the number of people involved. The argument runs something like this: "God wants everyone to be saved, thus a program

### *This Issue...*

*The Purpose-Driven Ministry*  
*Book Nook — Can Man Live without God?*  
*News from the World of XL*

which gets the most people exposed to the gospel is, by definition, pleasing to God.” This certainly appears to be a most compassionate and loving approach to ministry. Any disagreement with this principle sounds almost heretical, as though the person disagreeing is some kind of extreme legalist who wants to keep people from Christ. This often leads to a utilitarian mindset: “if it works, use it.” The end—reaching people for Christ—is used to allow just about any means.

The problem is that this formula ignores the Word of God. The Scripture says that effective ministry is that which pleases God, obeys His commands and brings the greatest possible honor and glory to Him. Before any method can even be considered, it must first be tested to be sure it is in complete compliance with the guidelines of Scripture. It may be that a method of ministry is biblically correct and also reaches a large number of people. The reverse, however, is not automatically true.

**3. Purpose-driven ministry is often immersed in the culture, not separate from it.** Purpose-driven ministry often seeks to imitate the exciting, pleasure-filled, emotion-producing aspects of the culture in order to draw those who will feel uncomfortable otherwise. This is a very serious mistake since it causes those involved in this type of ministry to begin to think like, talk like, dress like and act like the culture they are seeking to imitate (for what they consider to be worthwhile reasons). A subtle, but unavoidable, thing then begins to happen. The Christians become more and more like the

unsaved, while the unsaved change very little from their original state, even when professing Christ! Thus the biblical command is ignored which says, “do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)

**4. Purpose-driven ministry sometimes waters down the gospel in order to make it palatable to the unsaved.** Another unfortunate side effect of the “numbers mean success” philosophy is the need to make the requirements of the gospel less stringent in order for more people to

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respond. Having a “seeker” mentality will often lead one to present the gospel as simply the best of a variety of options, based on the fact that it meets the felt needs of the seeker. Often little is said about the need to repent from sin, humbly submit to Christ, and abandon all in order to follow Him. These things are seen as unnecessary additions to the gospel;

non-essentials which can be mentioned after a person has responded to Christ.

This ignores the clear call of Scripture, which presents salvation as a command, not as an option. It is the only means of saving our soul from the eternal wrath of a Holy God, not simply the most effective means of feeling fulfilled and enjoying peaceful living. Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Me.” (Matthew 16:24)

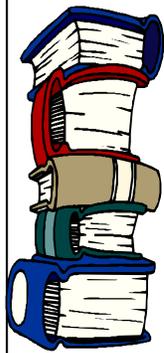
**5. Purpose-driven ministry often views evangelism as an end unto itself.** The

primary mission of the purpose-driven church is to reach the unsaved at all costs. Unfortunately, the cost often involves stunting the growth and maturity of the church as a whole. Spiritual growth is actually undermined by the very premise for their ministry of evangelism.

God’s Word is clear that evangelism is the result of maturity. When the people of God are spiritually mature, equipped for work, pursuing holiness and longing after God, they naturally become the world’s most powerful evangelists. When a church seeks to substitute its shallow program for depth in the personal spiritual walk, they are literally destroying the next generation. It is my contention that the purpose-driven movement is sacrificing the church of tomorrow for shallow converts of today. As the entire church is moved toward needs-based religion and success-oriented programming, it is destroying the ability of the body of Christ to raise up powerful, holy, spiritually mature leaders for the next generation. People may be getting saved, but in a manner which will render them ineffective in setting the pace for the generations to come.

**6. Purpose-driven ministry tends to seek to meet felt needs rather than biblical needs.** It is a hallmark of the purpose-driven mentality that the key which will draw people to Christ is solving their earthly problems. If Christianity can be presented as that which produces solid marriages, good family values, reduction of stress, increased effectiveness and discovery of one’s true purpose, then it will be accepted. Christ then becomes simply an extremely effective psychologist who exists for the purpose of solving our problems. (The expedience of this premise is demonstrable; just look at

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# Book Nook

## **C**an Man Live Without God? Author: Ravi Zacharias

Many modern writers agree we live in a post-modern world. Gone are absolutes (pre-modern world); gone are opinions (modern world); we now live in an age where skepticism reigns. An “open mind” is deemed the highest good. Never could we believe a “narrow” or exclusionary world view (post-modern). Yet, has post-modern thinking settled these ultimate questions of life: What is man’s purpose? Is death final? Is there an answer to the universal suffering of mankind?

It is against this backdrop that Dr. Zacharias asks a profound question, “Can man live without God?” The anti-theist would say “yes,” the Christian would say “no,” and most others would say, “that is your opinion and I’m afraid you don’t have a very open mind.” Certainly this is the pivotal question of history. Is there a God and, if so, does He have an influence on my life? Should I live for today or invest for eternity?

### *Anti-Theism*

Ravi begins to answer these questions by first analyzing the tenets of anti-theism.

The basic argument against anti-theism is our inability to arrive at goodness apart from God. Most people would agree that where there is lawlessness, chaos exists. Also, people like Hitler or Genghis Khan seem to have violated some basic human rights. The question is, where

do we get this basic idea of right and wrong? Certainly, if relativism is true, Hitler’s idea of right and wrong can be no better or worse than yours.

Philosophers like Immanuel Kant think that Hitler must have been morally wrong because “amorality can be defined as rules of conduct that are neither theological in their basis, nor legal, nor aesthetic, but are freed from these disciplines.” In other words, “we don’t need God to agree on right and wrong.” But, are “the rules of morality rational and compelling for all rational beings”?

History doesn’t support Kant. Marxism took Kant’s teachings to exalt the state regardless of the effect on the individual. Certainly Western man does not believe that reason is objective. If reason were objective, the skeptic would not exist. The Middle Eastern world considers reason “revealed” whereas the Far East believes reason is “intuitive.”

Most Westerners think that Millovich shouldn’t kill Albanians, but Slovak orthodox Christians wouldn’t agree, nor does much of Russia.

Therefore, without God, we can not determine right and wrong.

Ravi goes on to bring up a number of other arguments, including the more subjective argument questioning anti-theism’s ability to fill the ubiquitous longing for purpose, hope, and support. He also carefully discusses how Christ fills this void. He weaves these arguments in a readable and convincing manner that leaves the reader very little room for dissent.

### *Christianity, the Logical Choice*

What do you tell your children or others when they ask you hard questions about Christianity?

Quoting Ravi directly, “But in all fairness, there is another side to this story, justifiably provoking the contempt of the skeptic. Much of what has passed for the Christian message has been nothing more than frothy God-talk—mindless, thoughtless, and in its exploitation of people, heartless. This too will not do. Just as so much of anti-theistic thinking when scrutinized is sensically impoverished, so also much religious verbiage, steeped in emotional drivel and bereft of reason, can be tossed at unsuspecting audiences in the name of orthodoxy. The ruinous end of the latter, in its destruction of lives plundered materially and spiritually, may be greater than the ideas perpetrated by the openly cynical.”

Christianity is the logical choice. Not only does Christianity answer the hard questions of life, but it does so in an intellectually defensible way. Of course we can’t understand all of God’s mind or wonderful plan (“So are My ways higher than your ways” Isaiah 55:9), but He has revealed a part of Himself to us.

I applaud writers like Ravi Zacharias. I encourage you to read his book as a supplement to your regular quiet times.

✍️ Andrew Riser



This year’s XL Conference *Youth Ministry Transform or Conform*, is heating up to be our largest ever, with around eighty adults attending. People will be coming to beautiful Colorado from the states of Washington, California, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas... and the list goes on. We hope to see you there!

Mormonism, one of the fastest-growing religions of our day.)

The problem is not that Christ is incapable of these things, but that they are by-products of the true result: salvation from the eternal wrath of God. If salvation is presented as the cure to an earthly problem, it is often accepted insincerely. We must learn to present salvation for what it really is: a command for the sinful and disobedient to believe on the God of heaven, thus repenting of sin and submitting to His will. God will meet our needs, but in His own time, in His own way, and for His own glory.

*7. Purpose-driven ministry tends to communicate the idea that there are two or more levels of acceptable Christianity, and that total commitment to Christ is optional.* In

an attempt to deal with the reality of what is observed in the church, purpose-driven ministry often separates people into artificial categories, such as community, crowd, congregation, committed, core. This tends to promote the idea that it is optional to move through these stages. It also develops the concept of approaching each of these groups with a different message tailored to their particular level. Nowhere in Scripture is this sort of approach found. Total commitment to Christ is the foundation of our salvation, not a secondary decision we make at another time in life. While there are some Christians who are more committed than others, all Christians need to hear the same message: total surrender. We do not approach those who are less committed with a watered down message of partial obedience. This is

dangerous at best, and absolutely lethal to the church at worst.

It is important that we do not simply analyze the purpose-driven movement, find its flaws and then feel good about ourselves. The key is to search the Word of God to determine the *theology* of ministry which God would use to see this world drawn to Him. The bottom line is that the world is desperate and dying, and we must expend all efforts in God-honoring ministry. Many of us would be put to shame by the passion and drive found in many purpose-driven churches. We must be careful not to avoid things simply because they are also used by the purpose-driven movement. If a purpose and principle are firmly based in God's Word, then we must use them for His glory.

*✍Chris Riser*

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