

Dare To Evaluate?

One of the most important reality checks in any church is to develop a safe environment for evaluation to happen consistently. Last Saturday morning in our leadership team meeting we pulled the plug on one of our monthly ministries. Why? It was not bearing fruit like it once did. In Luke 13 there is the story about a fig tree that was planted in a vineyard but was not producing fruit. The owner said, "Cut it down," but the gardener wanted to give it a fourth year of being unproductive. There was a time in reading this story I would say, "Three cheers for the gardener for trying to save the fig tree." I no longer cheer for the gardener. Three years for any ministry to be unfruitful is too long! Too much is at stake. There is urgency to the Kingdom of God so we need to be bold and courageous in cutting down what is not being fruitful. Following are some principles for healthy evaluation to happen in every church.

Leadership Corner

WITH MEL SHETLER

Always begin by asking, what has gone well in this particular ministry?"

When we first ask what has gone well, it helps to identify what the original need was. It also helps to honor the hard work and creativity of members whose contributions served for a time and purpose. There are some ministries that can be corrected by a clearer vision along with better tools and training for the leaders. This kind of evaluation will help us discern if the ministry needs correction or to be cut off.

Be Patient When You Need To Cut Off a Ministry

People need time to adjust to the idea. Such necessary changes should hold up to the test of honest evaluation. Some may get defensive in the process, but we need to learn how to give and receive honest evaluation without feeling like we have sinned.

Be Aware How Much Energy It Takes To Keep a Barren Ministry Going

Everyone connected to a barren ministry gets tired. Such programs draw energy from sources where there is fruit and sap the life out of it. It is serious not to evaluate barren programs because enough of them create a barren church. The owner raised a good question with the gardener. "Why should we let the barren fig tree drag down the production?"

Begin Evaluating Weekly Ministries

What was effective? What did not go well? Did the Sunday morning service come across as we had hoped it would? Was the message clear, authentic and biblically relevant? Was the congregation's time wasted at any point? How could we have done that differently? Are the same people talking up during sharing time? Is what they are sharing producing life? Is it all secondary sharing, like pray for my Aunt Sarah...? Are people using the prayer time to make announcements? In spite of our efforts, are the Bible classes delivering what we hoped? These kinds of questions in a safe setting where people's ideas are honored and valued are most productive.

Our Best Planning Tool Is Learning From the Week Before

The goal of evaluation is to keep growing every week. It is all about learning from our mistakes. From our earliest days we have taken a lot of risks and made many mistakes. We have borrowed things from others that have worked well and other ideas have failed miserably. Over time we build a folder of "knowledge and wisdom" that guides our choices and guards us from making the same mistake again. The goal is not perfection, but excellence that inspires people and honors God. **BB**

