

“TRAINING DAY”

Ephesians 4:1-16 August 4, 2024

The Founder is a 2016 film which depicts the supposedly true story of how Ray Kroc, a struggling milkshake mixer salesman from Illinois, met Mac and Dick McDonald, who were running a burger operation in 1950s Southern California. Kroc was impressed by the brothers' speedy system of making the food and saw franchise potential. Kroc soon maneuvers himself into a position to be able to pull the company from the brothers and create the multi-billion-dollar empire we know as McDonalds.

There is a pivotal scene in the movie when Harry Sonneborn, future CEO, gives a business strategy to the struggling Kroc that changes the company's whole direction. He tells him, **“You don't know what business you are in. You are not in the hamburger business. You are in the real estate business. You ought to own the land upon which that burger is cooked. You should be buying plots of land then turning around and leasing said plots to franchises. Who as a condition of their deal should be permitted to lease from you and you alone. This will provide you with two things. One a steady upfront revenue stream. Money flows in before the first stake is in the ground. And two, Greater capital for expansion fuels further land acquisition which in turn fuels further expansion and so on.”**

Kroc had a vision and he had passion, but not the working strategy to carry it out. Once he put those concepts together the business took off.

Presently, McDonald's has a \$188 Billion net worth, employs 2 million employees, and has 42 thousand restaurants worldwide.

Regardless of how you may feel about McDonald's, it raises some important questions. **Church**, do you know what **business** we are in? Do we have an operating strategy? Are our actions executing that said strategy? While the Church is more than an ordinary business, there is much we could learn from the business world. I don't believe a church will be effective without a clear mission and a doable strategy and a people committed to executing the said strategy.

One of the people who understood this was the Apostle Paul of Tarsus. I would argue that the Book of Ephesians is a **church how to manual**. Through it, Paul summarizes God's mission, strategy and execution work in the first three chapters. In the second half, he takes that mission to the Church and gives it a working strategy. That fact alone makes this little letter invaluable. It challenges us to be more than a place of nice spiritual thoughts and once a week worship. We are to join Jesus in unleashing the life changing power of the gospel into the world.

I. MISSION

Hirotaka Takeuchi is a Professor of Management Practice Emeritus in the Strategy Unit at Harvard Business School. He wrote, "A dynamic, long-term plan requires a mission that's clear, focused and invaluable: "Look at what Walt Disney wanted: **'to create timeless, universal family entertainment.'** If you have those five words, there's

no doubt in the mind of employees or anyone else what you're about."

This might sound touchy-feely to business leaders trained to prefer quantifiable metrics like sales growth and operating margin. Takeuchi doesn't care. **"Consultants argue that strategy comes from big data,"** he says, **"but it really comes from the heart."**

The best mission statements touch the heart. They have the power to motivate us to action and gain buy in from others. Our mission tells us the reason we exist, why we do what we do, and why we get up in the morning. The Church's mission comes from the heart of God, **"For God so loved the world that God gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but may have eternal life"**.

Paul expands this idea when he writes. **"Christ has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body."**

No matter which statement you prefer, both testify that God's great desire is to unite humanity with God's loving heart. What business is the church in? The Redemption, Reconciliation, and Peacemaking business. Uniting people in Christ.

The work of Christ was/is to remove the obstacles of sin, hatred, prejudice, exploitation, and any other hurdle that divides and dehumanizes people in order to create a new love fellowship with each other and God. Jesus called this the Kingdom of God. It is a community on earth where all people live in harmony, are healed, and empowered to

bless the world. Is this a huge God sized vision? You bet! But it is the reason we exist, Church.

II. STRATEGY

Once **Ray Kroc** had a strategy, he went on to develop exacting standards for how each McDonald's should be run, from food preparation to cleaning. To ensure the standardized operation of the outlets, he created a program in 1961, later known as **Hamburger University**, to train franchisees. No matter what McDonald's you walk into, the Big Mac, the coffee, and the Filet-O-Fish sandwich are all the same. You may not like the food, but you know what to expect.

Every job I have ever had involved some kind of training, from newspapers to machine shop to seminary. Why would we think the church is any different? If we are going to live out the Peacemaking Mission of God then we need skills in listening, biblical literacy, prayer, mobilization of resources, engaging people with good news, understanding neighborhoods, building partnerships, spirituality, working with immigrants, sorting through issues of the day, and so forth. I grant you training takes time, but it keeps the church relevant and effective.

Paul's strategy was to create small churches where groups of people were trained as disciples of Jesus. Unlike McDonalds, you can't fit people into the same mold. People grow at different rates, have different life experiences, and are wired differently. That's why there is no one size fits all class. However, the most effective and successful

mission churches have people committed to small group ministry – where people continue to learn, keep accountable, pray, and care for each other. It is out of the small group settings that people blossom and the Kingdom flourishes.

A. SHARE THE VISION

Notice Paul begins the training with sharing the vision “**There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all who is in all, who is above all, and through all and in all.**” Paul is challenging the church to know and embrace the reality of being united with each other and God. Stop making so many distinctions and celebrate all the ways we are one, because the mission adventure won’t really be effective unless we do.

Jesus constantly spoke about the Kingdom of God. He kept lifting up the vision before the disciples in his stories and actions. He embedded a picture of that life in their hearts and minds, until they could think in no other way.

The first training work of the Church is to keep lifting our mission up so that everything we do lines up with it. The benefit of this is it makes our decisions easier, it focuses our work, and it helps us tell others who we are and what we are about. **Share the vision.**

B. TRAINING IN CHARACTER

Founder and editor of the New York Tribune, Horace Greeley wrote, “**Fame is a vapor, popularity an accident, riches take wings**

and those who cheer today may curse tomorrow. Only one thing endures -- character.”

Paul says it this way, **“I...beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”**

In every one of Paul’s letters he speaks about the importance of maturity and the Christian character. He describes it with powerful words: **humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, love, unity, and peace**. We are being trained to imitate Jesus. These fruits of the Spirit come forth as we walk with Jesus and each other. God is busy rounding off our hard edges, blind spots, and character defects to bring integrity to our gospel work. No matter how great our gifts may be, without the character of Christ we usually fail miserably. As we develop a servant heart, genuine love for others, and show forgiveness, our very lives become a testimony to what God can do.

B. GIFT DEVELOPMENT

In watching **the Olympics**, I am amazed at what those young athletes are able to do with their bodies, in particular the gymnasts. It’s incredible how they can spin, jump, twist, balance on a beam, or vault high in the air and stick a landing. Truly they are gifted, medal winners or not. But no matter how gifted they are, they did not get to the Olympics without training. Hours, days, months, and years spent in the

gym, weight room, being coached, stretched, and challenged. They had to learn routines, techniques, eat properly, and give up other parts of life to achieve their level of excellence.

Believe it or not, each of us has been gifted, and those gifts need development. **Paul writes, “But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift,” “The gifts he gave were ...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of come to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”**

The good news is we have each been given a gift. It might be a natural gift, a spiritual gift, a learned gift, a resource gift, and usually they come in combination. Paul lists vocational gifts here, but they are a short list not the full list. But the important point is, the gifts are meant to be developed and used. That’s our responsibility. The gifts are developed by learning about them and putting them to use. This involves a certain amount of trial and error and practice and reflection, so the gifts are honed and ready for use.

This isn’t just for our personal satisfaction. The gifts are to be used to help other people of faith. Paul tells us they are to be used to equip, to build up, to create unity, to gain understanding, and to grow up. To not share your gift leaves a hole in the body. To act like we have no gifts is affront to Holy Spirit. Develop your gifts so others are blessed.

III. EXECUTE

Once we embrace the vision, are trained in character and gifted, the last part of Paul's formula is to be sent out into the world. **“For we are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”**

The work of redemption and **peacemaking** begins by seeking out the brokenhearted, the least of these, the hurting, the impoverished, the lonely, the addicted, and the lost. You don't have to look very far.

We execute the strategy by building partnerships, creating networks, and mobilizing resources. Talk with people and more importantly listen to people. Speak truth in love, with the intent to bless not rip apart. Pray for others and take an interest in what they are doing. Most importantly, watch how God is moving and join in.

Without a clear mission the church will wander aimlessly or work without passion.

Without a doable strategy we can spend a lot of energy without really accomplishing the work of Peacemaking.

Without execution – people willing to be trained, gifted and sent, well, nothing gets done. The Mission and Strategy will remain on paper as nice ideas.

Richard Rhor wrote, “I think what Jesus calls the kingdom of heaven or the reign of God is when we live inside of the Big Picture and not inside of the small pictures that we create and seem to prefer. Most of us live inside of our own small, self-created kingdoms: the kingdom of being American or the kingdom of being Catholic or the kingdom of

being white. That's all going to pass away. Those are *not* the kingdom of God.

The reign of God will not pass away. It's the eternal state of things, how things finally and fully and freely are. To live in the reign of God is to live with that kind of big perspective, where we move beyond the tiny human-made boundaries that we all create. Most of us are afraid to venture out of our little comfort zone of "people just like me."

We know we're living in God's Big Picture when we can see God in all cultures, in all social classes, and even in all religions. Every time we pray "thy kingdom come" we're praying that God can grant, and we can participate in, a universal, truly "catholic" world where all of us can love one another without distinction, and without discrimination."

Church, do you know what your business is? Then get together, get trained, and get moving. Amen.

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

Sunday, August 4, 2024

Second Scripture Lesson

Ephesians 4:1-16

4I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. ⁷But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." ⁹(When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) ¹¹The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. ¹⁴We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.