

The Ultimate Church Diagnostic

Seven questions toward a biblical local church ministry.
It'll "slap the sass out of you."

This is my feeble attempt to answer the questions. Each one of them could be a biblical thesis project. Most pastors and church leaders only need thoughtful reflection on Item #1 to give course corrections for their church. Yet, each item has its own merit and place in building a sound, biblical ministry philosophy.

1. Whose kingdom are you building?

- There are really only two intuitive answers to this question:
 - a. God's kingdom, or
 - b. My kingdom.
- Clearly, "My kingdom" is rhetorically, theologically, and biblically the wrong answer. This is so obvious, that it puts pastors and church leaders in a terrible ethical dilemma. They know the right answer; if they could change their answer to match their heart's wishes, they would answer, "God's kingdom." However, if ruthless honesty prevails, "My kingdom" would be the all-too-common, truthful answer.
- If you answer, "God's kingdom," it implies that you are willing to bow to God's ways, God's Word, and NOT to man's ways, man's means, and/or some "movement" or self-made, grandiose "vision".
- The converse is also true: if you answer, "My kingdom," it implies that you are willing to bow to man's way, man's means, and/or some "movement" or self-made, grandiose "vision," and NOT to God's ways and God's Word.
- If you answer, "God's kingdom," as one pastor friend says, "It slaps the sass out of you."

2. Who do you want to attend your local church meetings?

- There are really only two approaches to answer this question:
 - a. Believers.
 - b. Whoever we can attract to the church.
- The point of this question is biblical ecclesiology. Biblically, the church is an assembly of believers.
- There is no biblical justification for making the church an assembly of "seekers". To pattern local church ministry after a "seeker"-oriented philosophy is 180° out of phase with a good Bible understanding of:
 - a. The nature of the church – comprised of believers.
 - b. The nature of man – "no one seeks after God."
- Church meetings, while not excluding non-believers, should be designed for corporate worship, edification, and fellowship for believers.

3. What are the primary intended results of the ministry of your local church leaders?

- This is a test of your understanding of the goal of local church ministry. Again there are only two categories of answers:
 - a. Equipping the saints and discipleship; or,
 - b. Some other answer.
- The "Some other answer" category is filled with well-meaning, unbiblical answers, such as: "Win people to Christ", grow in numbers, extend our influence for the sake of Christ, etc. These answers may be noble and even "biblical" in the limited sense that such activities and outcomes may be the natural outgrowth of Christian zeal and maturity. However, they fall short of the intended results articulated in Scripture; see Ephesians 4; also see the answers to items #1 and #2 above.

4. What primary purpose/s of your local church do you want to be obvious to even the casual observer/attendee at your church worship services?

- Which side of the spectrum of answers does your church reflect:
 - a. Glorifying God, God-centered worship, prominence to teaching God's Word
 - b. Making people feel comfortable, an enjoyable experience, winning the appreciation and allegiance of "seekers," sharing the Gospel
- This is another test of ecclesiology from a participant perspective. Here's another way to look at it, either:
 - a. We show up to please God; or,
 - b. God shows up to please us.
- This shows up in very practical and particular ways. In our welcome, do we say, "We're so privileged to have you join us this morning. We hope you have a wonderful experience here. We trust that our ministry will meet your needs and build up your self-esteem." Or, do we say, "We appreciate you joining with us in exalting and glorifying God today. We hope you will learn of His greatness here. We trust that our ministry will be used by God to help you see your helplessness and His merciful Provision."
- Convicted yet? But wait, there's more ...

5. What is your vision for your local church's role in evangelism and missions?

- If our vision for outreach is only to fill our pews, then our world is too small. A solid ecclesiology begets a solid missiology. Do we desire to:
 - a. Fulfill the Great Commission through active participation simultaneously in "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and uttermost parts"; or,
 - b. Win our community to Christ, grow locally, plant other churches like ours – THEN, begin to build outward geographically.
- Go back to step #1. If we are obedient, we cannot remain restricted to building our church, our Jerusalem, our ministry.
- The local church, as God's primary means of accomplishing His purposes on earth, is obligated by the commands of Christ, the clear teaching of the New Testament, a God-reflecting passion for the lost, and the sweep of God's plans evident throughout all of Scripture to be personally, directly, and integrally involved in fulfilling "the Great Commission".
- If missions is not at the heart of everything the local church does, then that local church does not clearly understand or reflect God's heart.

6. Describe the teaching and preaching ministry of your church using one-word or one phrase descriptors.

- This item tests your bibliology. Is your teaching and preaching ministry characterized by:
 - a. Systematic, expository, verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter; or,
 - b. Relevant, story telling, compelling, engaging.
- This is not a question of style, per se. It is a question of content.
- Does your ministry radiate a high view of God's Word? Or, are you so concerned with "relevance" that the preeminence is given to illustrations, audio-visual excellence, "felt needs," and human sources?
- The answer to this question is very important, because it deals with the core content and curriculum of all that the church teaches (see items #3 and #4).
- The Scripture is: inspired, sufficient, the sole source of normative revelation and guidance, the only authority for Christian faith and practice.
- Without a strong commitment to making the teaching, explanation, and application of God's Word central to our ministries, we are not qualitatively different than a secular institution or child-care service.

7. What is/are the main factor/s in the decision-making of your leadership?

- This is applied theology. Do you and your leaders look to:
 - a. God's Word, prayer, theology; or,
 - b. Demographics, numerical goals, practical considerations.
- Now, of course, we would all like to say that we seek God's will through God's Word and prayer in the decision-making process. But, this question doesn't ask for wishful answers. This asks what actually are the main factors.
- Also, this doesn't mean to imply that the "spiritual answer" mutually excludes practical considerations. This simply asks what actually are the main factors.
- The consequences of the differences are huge. On the spiritual side, expressions of dependence on God, His Word, and alignment with doctrine will yield rich spiritual harvest. On the earthy side, expressions of independence from God, His Word, and doctrine together with dependence on worldly frameworks and quantitative objectives will yield "every evil thing" (see James 3).

Summary Chart Form		
God-centered	Item	Man-centered
God's	1. Whose kingdom? ←-----→	Mine
God's people, believers	2. Composition of the Church? ←-----→	World's people, non-believers
Equipping, discipling believers	3. Results of ministry? ←-----→	Whatever
God-centered	4. Purpose of worship? ←-----→	Man-centered
Biblically balanced, God's plan	5. Church's role in evangelism & missions? ←-----→	Self-centered growth
High view of Scripture	6. Teaching of God's Word? ←-----→	Low view of Scripture
Dependence upon God and His word and alignment with sound teaching	7. Decision making driven by ...? ←-----→	Dependence upon man and man's tools, techniques, and metrics

Two big caveats:

1. Are there spaces between the extremes? Yes. In fact, any two churches answering all questions on the "God-centered" side may have very different expressions of those answers in their ministries. But, it is likely that members from one of those churches visiting the other church would quickly see the common ministry philosophy. Consider that, for example, local church anywhere around the world, in any cultural and socio-economic context, in any prevailing religious and political climate should be able to answer on the God-centered side, while their outward expression, liturgy, etc. may be very different.
2. Could I be mistaken or too judgmental or simplistic in this whole approach? Probably. I am human. I could be way off the mark. But, maybe, just maybe, I'm on target. What are the risks to writing off this line of thinking? You decide – before God; – you and your church reap the harvest.

With utmost love and affection for our Lord Jesus Christ and His Church,

David Meade