



THE PURPOSE DRIVEN CHURCH BY RICK WARREN

Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1995.

The Purpose Driven Church is a book by Rick Warren. The author is the pastor and planter of Saddleback Valley Community Church in Lake Forest, California. He started the church in 1980 on Easter Sunday. The book chronicles the events before, and after that event in five parts. Part one begins with the story of Saddleback and myths about growing churches. Part two discusses how to become a purpose-driven church. Part three examines how to reach out to the community God has given you most effectively. Part four talks about church growth and part five discusses how to build up the church. It also discusses the methods, purposes, techniques, curriculum, and Biblical basis for the way Saddleback does church. Rick Warren is not some overly talented giant of the faith. He graduated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1979 and after some extra guidance from Roy Fish; he packed all of his belongings and moved his family to southern California. The reason for this location was because it was one of the most unchurched areas in the country according to Warren's research. Rick Warren always has that mindset as he writes this book. You can feel his passion for the lost as he opposes church myths, provides the biblical basis for God's ideas on how to conduct a church.

Summary

The book begins with the author simply telling the story as to how Saddleback Valley Community Church came into being and why. The "why" takes up a great bulk of the first half of *The Purpose Driven Church*. Why a new church? Why California? Why are Christians not the focus and mainly, why be a purpose driven church? Beginning with the passions that were developing at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Rick Warren attempts to describe what led him to move his family to start a church in an area where they did not know anyone, and with limited resources. He describes how his passion to be a pastor and change the world for Christ reached a pinnacle when he heard W.A. Criswell speak. It was not his sermon that moved him the most, but afterwards he went down to meet the long-time First Baptist Dallas pastor. Waiting his turn in the long line, he shook his hand and immediately, the pastor felt a strange sense to tell Rick Warren that God was going to do more in his life than He ever did in the ministry. Obviously moved tears, the young pastor-to-be was even more motivated than ever to discover how to best grow a church in the area that most desperately needed a growing church.

The second half of part one leads right into part two. The author exposes the common myths about church growth for what they are. For example, the main myth he addresses is that "you must compromise the message and the mission of the church in order to grow" (53). He extensively goes on to talk about how Jesus drew thousands even though His messages did anything close to tickling the ears.

These myths led easily into part two where he discusses how to become a purpose-driven church. Rick Warren challenges the reader to evaluate what drives his church? What is the top priority that designates how to implement a new idea? What hoops must be jumped through before a new Bible study or ministry can be formed. He then concludes that a healthy church is a church that is purpose-driven. Not people-driven, program-driven, but purpose driven. The pastor must then, define, communicate, organize and apply his purposes to his church. Rick Warren main theme in part two can be summarized with the idea that anytime someone suggests an activity or an event or a new program you should simply ask, "Will this fulfill one of our purposes?" If it does, do it. If it doesn't, don't do it (88).

Part three of the Rick Warren's book describes how to reach to the community God has given you to minister to. The first step is to discover who your target person is. Who is the type of person a pastor needs to hone in on in order to be effective. For Saddleback Valley Community Church that person is "Saddleback Sam." Some characteristics of Saddleback Sam are that he is well educated, likes his job and where he lives; he enjoys contemporary music, and is self-satisfied (70). Once a minister has discovered his target audience, he can devise his strategy accordingly.

Part four and five take up the majority of the book and they cover that largest amount of content. Every pastor wants to know how to bring in the crowds to his church. Rick Warren describes how Jesus attracted His audiences, how worship can be a witness, the seeker service, music, and how to preach to the unchurched. All of the chapters in part four are centered on non-Christians and how to best reach them. This may not seem like a new concept and Warren believes that it is alarmingly rare in churches today. Most churches according to Warren and centered on what is pleasing to Christians, not what creates the best environment to reach non-Christians who have never attended church in their lives. This includes music, preaching, building appearance and other factors. However, it is essential not to waver from what the Bible says about how to do church. In fact, this book is simply a reminder of how God guided us to organize churches and an appeal to return.

Part five describes with great detail the inner-workings of Saddleback Valley Community Church. This section describes the process of a non-Christian entering Saddleback, embracing salvation, becoming a member, developing into a mature member, and the final goal of becoming a minister. Part four shows the minister how to bring in the crowds, and part five shows the minister what to do with them once they come.

Everything revolves around membership. Membership matters and Saddleback and church discipline is administered. Rick Warren is not afraid of removing people from membership but always with the goal of reconciliation. This section discusses the importance of education and communication to the people from the leaders of the church. The people must understand the numerous benefits of membership such as: the provision of a spiritual family, a place to discover their spiritual gifts, and it gives them the accountability they need to grow (313). Another vital tool to the success of Saddleback is their membership covenant. The membership covenant is four simple commitments. I will protect the unity of my church. I will share

the responsibility of my church. I will serve the ministry of my church (321-322). Rick Warren provides three specifics as to how to practically live that out, and the verses in scripture that command those characteristics of a Christian.

Critical Evaluation

Rick Warren clearly states the purpose of his book and thesis. He spent good proportional depth and detail to each subject. I say proportional because clarifying church membership and discipline received more words as did the chapter on music. Music is important, but understanding how to lay a foundation of evangelism, service and love is simply more important. There is a large quantity of scriptural backing to any idea, or concept that needs biblical credibility. For example, when describing the benefits to membership, or the four membership covenants, there are scripture references to those concepts (313, 321). The biggest strength to this book is the scriptural basis for the concepts implemented at Saddleback.

Conclusion

Overall, I believe this to one of the greatest pieces of Christian literature written in the twentieth century. The practical ideas for education and the description of a seeker service are great, but this book is profound for its reminder of biblical church membership. That concept is absent from so many dying churches and it is obvious the reason for their fate. People were never challenged and loved through clear communication of what a Christian looks like and the loving discipline needed, when one goes astray.