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 DEVELOPING MISSIONAL CAPACITY
 

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Has anyone been on one of those rides at the theme parks where you are against the wall of a large cylinder and it starts rotating and then when it gets fast enough the floor is dropped out from your feet. You are pinned against the side of the cylinder. How does it work? Centrifugal force. This force pushes the object away from the centre of rotation. The opposite is Centripetal force, A force focussed inward towards the centre. An example is gravity. The earth is revolving around the sun, and the only thing stopping earth from flying off in a straight line is the pull of gravity towards the sun. So the earth orbits the sun.

But my point is there are two forces at work in the world. Centrifugal force - outward, centripetal force – inwards.

These two forces, inward and outward are at work in any church and are in tension with each other. My observation is that the inward force almost always is stronger than the outward force. (Church survey for Central 54% wanted the focus on spiritual growth, 48% on developing community, 17% on community needs, 12% on reaching others)

The inward force is when the church focuses on itself. It is the desire to grow in faith, in fellowship, Its primary concern is its own health and well being. The outward force is when the church looks outside itself to those not in the church and to the community that it is in. Rightly there is a tension between these two. Inward growth and outward focus

The story of the early church recorded in Acts is the story of these two forces at work. Jesus' instructions were to go into all the world and make disciples. But the church stayed put and grew inwardly. This is despite Jesus' instructions. Matthew 28:18-19 and Acts 1:8. The Holy Spirit was given to empower witness.

Many people would say the Luke agenda in writing Acts, which is spread over 25 years, is to show the centrifugal force of the gospel. The thing that seemed to propel the church out was not really obedience to this command, but persecution. Believers were scattered and as they went they told others about the hope that they had. Acts 8:4

There is an old well known parable that still is powerful today. On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur there was once a crude little life-saving station. It was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea; with no thought for themselves, they went out day or night tirelessly searching for the lost. So many lives were saved by this little station that it became famous. Some of those who were saved, and others, wanted to be associated with the station and give of their time and money to support its work. New boats were bought and new crews were trained. The little station grew.

Some of the new members were unhappy with the crude building. They felt the rescued needed a more comfortable

place as their first refuge. The building was enlarged, with nicer furniture. Now the life-saving station became a popular gathering place, and was re-decorated beautifully and furnished as a sort of club. Less of the members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work.

About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet and half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick, and some of them had black skin, and some spoke a strange language, and the beautiful new club was considerably messed up. At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's life-saving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal life pattern of the club.

But some members insisted that life-saving was their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a life-saving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own life-saving station down the coast. They did. And the same thing happened to them.

If you visit the seacoast today you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters, only now most of the people drown.

It is powerful because it has a dig at whether church have lost their purpose. It has a dig at where churches spend their money flash buildings. It has a dig at the fact that it is easy for members to say. Reaching the lost is for specialists. Why we hire staff. It has a dig at the fact that if new people come to church, lives messed up huge impact. It is a parable that speaks to the power of centripetal force that is so powerful.

The next two weeks, as we often do at the beginning of the year, we are going to be looking at our priorities. Next week, conversation will be around 4 of them. But this week I want to just focus on one. Developing missional capacity. If you look closely at the 5 priorities, 3 are inward focused: community, faith, being inclusive. 2 are outwardly focused: this one and serve the city.

This priority is talking about growing in our ability to be effective as witnesses in the place where we are. There are a whole lot of questions that go with this;

Do we have a growing love for the lost?

Are we concerned about the state of our community and society, and world?

Do we feel confident to be able to have faith conversations? Are we having those?

Is how we are living being salt and light to a secular world?

When we were debating the wording of this priority we couldn't decide between capacity or capability. Capability is our ability to do something. Capacity is the extent to which we can do something. Capacity was chosen because the



idea is that everyone is part of this. Our vision is to see every person involved; that every person gets the fact that mission is central to following Jesus. It is not an optional extra for a few paid people. You cannot be a Christ follower, a Christian and not be concerned about mission. Mission is all around us. It is wherever God has placed you. In your family, farm, school, work place, club, neighbourhood. We want every person to be comfortable and regularly having faith conversations. Every person working to be a Christian kingdom influence where they are. The kingdom is where the values of the king are at play: Care for others, poor, environment, honesty, justice, kindness, grace etc. The goal is 100% capacity. Every person.

There are two powerful drivers of the inward pull within a church. 1. Selfishness. We all grapple with selfishness. We want what is best for ourselves. Our first priority is our own well being. From a young age, we are encouraged to put ourselves first. We are all really busy and so we are just keeping our head above water looking after ourselves. We see church as a consumer product to meet my needs. The problem is that Jesus said. It is more blessed to give than receive. Acts 20:35 Lay down our lives for the kingdom. Mat 16:25 Jesus came not to be served but to serve Mark 10:45. Selfishness means it is hard to put others before ourselves.

The second powerful driver of inward pull is that we increasingly live in a society where church is marginalized. Churches are no longer central to communities and society has moved away from Christian values that were once held on common. So churches can either: 1. accommodate the community values by compromising it's own. 2. become ardently opposed to the community in radical opposition. 3. withdraw into isolated enclaves. (There can be confusion sometimes with the word for church in the NT. The word is ecclesia, meaning "the called out ones". This does not mean we physically separate from the world. We are to be separate in lifestyle but we are never called to isolate ourselves from the people around us.) 4. be a creative minority. Few people are asking the question: What must I do to be saved? Instead people are asking the question: What can I do to make my life work. So how we live our lives is more important than giving people information.

An outwardly focused church:  
# never separates good deeds from evangelism  
# believes presence in the community is vital for it's health  
# equips and frees people to serve the community outside the walls of the church.  
# is more interested in influence than in attendance.  
# cares deeply for the well being of it's community

So we have this priority. The challenge is over the last 5 years are we becoming more inwardly focussed or more outwardly focused? Which way are we heading? A sports team spends a lot of time in training. But any sports team will tell you that the only way they really get stronger is by playing matches. Some of those matches they will lose. But actually they probably learn more from their defeats than their wins. Their losses make them stronger. The argument from many Christians will be that we need to focus inward to strengthen our faith,. They want the fellowship and Bible study to grow inwardly stronger. They

argue we need to look after the people we have in the church before we can look outward. Measure of truth to this. But how much more we would grow if we were engaged in the game. If actually we were trying to figure out how to respond to a work colleagues questions. To their hostility. If we were discipling a new Christian, who asks all kinds of difficult questions. If we actively serving those less well off, with no motive other than to love. I wonder how much these statements are because we fear getting in the game. I wonder if we fear getting rejected by people, or fear we will look silly offering to pray for someone, or if we just want to be liked and fear stating an alternative view.

When we did the church wide survey, we were very similar to many other Baptist churches in our stats. Except one that really stood out for me. We don't invite people to our church services. 16 % in the last year compared to 31% for rest of Baptists. I am not sure why. The other survey done of NZ faith said that 25 % would come to a service, event, community service if they were invited. Maybe people are more open that we think to exploring issues of faith.

This is one of our 5 priorities as a church. To be a church that is engaged with our community. To see every person caring deeply for those around them. And to see fruit from this. People coming to faith. Where we have a reputation in the community for being a community that cares and serves others, not just ourselves. We provide opportunities to serve others as a church. Wood chucks, Grace meals Busy Bees, Serve the city, Youth ministry. But these are not only way we can serve others. Many of you volunteers with other community groups. We teach on how to have faith conversations. We teach God's heart for this world. We pray for our city and it's well being.

Biggest question. Is your heart growing for what God is concerned for? If the honest answer is no, confess that and ask God to grow it. Ask for opportunities to serve others.

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## REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

Discuss the tension between being inwardly focused as a church versus being outwardly focused. (and the survey results) Have we got the balance right? Do as leaders we focus on what people want or what we might need?

What does Jesus example and teaching tell us on this matter?

Is the parable of the life saving station still relevant for us?

Discuss the two drivers of inward focus. Are there others? Which is the strongest for you?

How might focusing on others actually be the catalyst of spiritual growth?

Discuss the stats on inviting others to church events? Why might this be? How could we get better at this?



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