

What is the Product of the Church?

Dr. Dale V. Salico

"I know exactly what we are producing at General Motors, but I want to know what goes out the door at the end of our church's assembly line?" Great question, Craig!

Craig was a bright management guy at the GM plant in Lockport, New York, where I was pastoring a church. I hadn't thought of a church in this way. I needed to think through that analogy.

After what felt like a long time I said, "It seems to me that the raw material entering our 'factory' is non-believers in a seeking mode. When they decide to become followers of Jesus, in essence, they've decided to step onto the assembly line. The end product is a fully-committed, informed, world-impacting follower of Christ. Everything we do in the church must focus on helping people move along in this process."

While the analogy has its limitations, thinking about the church as an assembly line clarifies what church is really all about. Try this question: "If the product of the church is 'fully-committed, informed, world-impacting followers of Christ,' how is our product doing in the marketplace?" The answer, "Too much like Buick."

- Among the builder generation we have about a 60% market share.
- With Baby Boomers we approach 40%.
- Of the Gen-X, less than 20% are buying.
- Only 10% of Millennials think our product is worth a second look.

No business lasts long with that kind of consumer demographic. What's wrong? Most people think the problem is marketing: "Our churches are out of style. We just need to give the Gospel a facelift and sales will soar."

I disagree. The problem is deeper than style. It's quality control. Christians coming off our assembly line don't look like "fully-committed, informed, world-impacting followers of Christ." In critical measurements of performance (like marriage success, honesty, integrity, community involvement, and workplace ethics), Christians attain standards no higher than anyone else. Non-believers are not impressed.

(What is the Product of the Church?, cont.)

in our lives. Sin is so deeply engrained in our minds and in society that even Christians cling to their "favorite sins." They think of turning from sin as the loss of something highly valued. Isaiah saw the hideous result of sin:

Why should you be beaten any more? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness--only wounds and bruises and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil.²

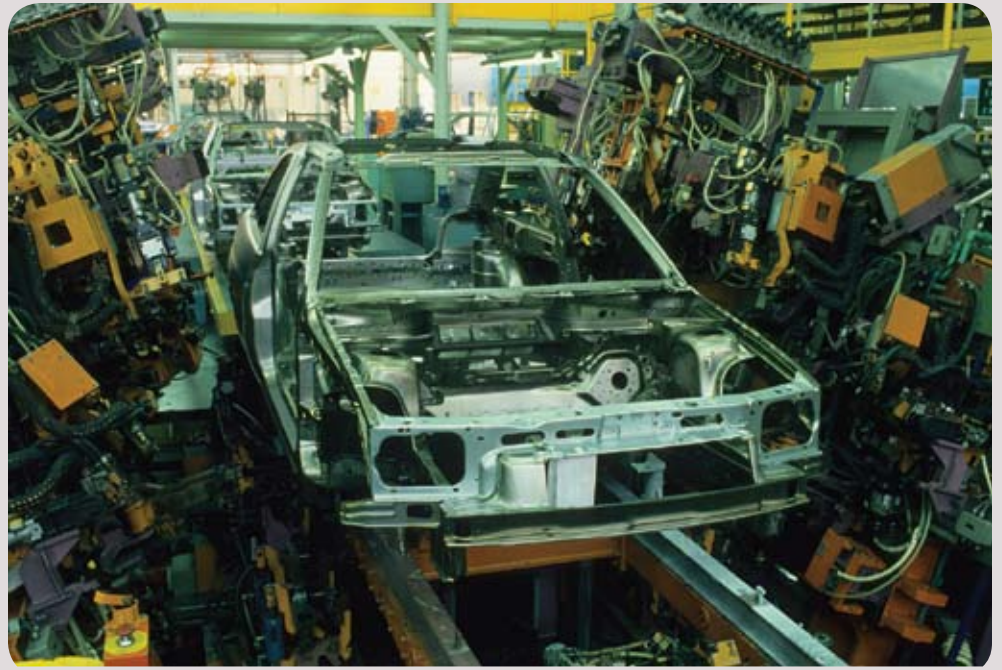
Second, Christians not only underestimate the power of sin in our lives, we underestimate the reformation God wants to accomplish in our lives. Jesus expected His people to be as attractive and transforming as a brilliant light shining in darkness.

You are the light of the world. ...let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.³

These words describe the dazzling effect a genuine Christ-follower who, by the power of the Spirit, lives the Sermon on the Mount in the world.

The most serious limitation of the factory assembly line analogy is that it minimizes what God wants to do in our lives.

The difference between the "raw material" (unbelievers), entering the Church at the beginning of its "assembly line," and what comes out the door as the final product (Christ-centered people who impact their worlds for Christ), is infinitely and eternally greater than the difference between the iron ore, unformed rubber and plastic brought to the factory, and the finished automobile that rolls out the door.



In contrast to what passes for acceptable in the Church today, Jesus set a much higher standard.

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.¹

Christians seem to spend more time explaining why Jesus could not have meant what He said than reaching for the benchmark He set.

Why so content with spiritual mediocrity? Two reasons: First, we underestimate sin's devastation

(continued on back page)

Think about it...

1. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Why? "The greatest problem with the Church in America today is that leaders think "program" instead of "production.""
2. Imagine a church where leaders were as committed to spiritual formation as industrial leaders are committed to production. What would that look like?

¹ **Matthew 5:48**

² **Isaiah 1:5-6**

³ **Matthew 5:14-16**



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Unlocking a preferred future

transformations

A movement of Baptist churches committed to change their worlds for Christ.

[april-june 2009]

What do these three have in common? God-exalting Worship, Learning and growing in Community, Spiritual Disciplines
 They are three traits of churches that are vital and growing. They are three of the 10 traits that are part of the Prevailing Church Journey (PCJ); **a process that leads to a preferable future** through discernment, planning and coaching. Enjoy the articles by four experienced practitioners, and may they help you thrive in your ministry and personal life. For more information on joining the PCJ, go to www.transmin.org and click on Prevailing Church Journey.

God-exalting Worship

Dr. Dane Aaker, Lead Pastor, Centerpoint Church, Colton, CA



Worship services have become much more meaningful since we started to pray for and plan for a “transcendent moment” in each worship service. We define a transcendent moment as a point in the worship service where our worshippers transcend the mundane details of life and connect with God. It is full of awe and wonder.

Transcendent moments usually happen when we slow down and introduce something out of the ordinary into the service.

Some examples of transcendent moments here at Centerpoint:

- One time we introduced communion with some Scripture reading and then had complete silence as the elements were passed out; no talking or music. It allowed us to reflect on God and prepare our hearts without distraction.
- Another time, votive candles were placed all over the front of the sanctuary. As we sang our music set, we invited people to come forward to light a candle and offer up a prayer to God.
- Recently, we played a video of snow falling with soft music in the background and asked people to take time to ask for forgiveness and to ask God to wash them white as snow. Psalm 51 scrolled by at the end of the video. *“Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins...”*

We try to use a variety of elements like videos, music, dramas, Scripture readings, silence and testimonies.

It takes a lot of planning ahead, but at that moment when our congregation encounters the living God of the universe, it is worth it all.

*“We were introduced to the idea of a “transcendent moment” when our Creative Planning Team read Nancy Beach’s book, *An Hour on Sunday*.”*



Spiritual Disciplines

Dr. Pat Meye, Founder and Director of Renewing Life Center, Las Vegas, NV

Spiritual disciplines transform individual lives and congregations. It is a transformation that is directly linked to the fulfilling of the two great commands. Jesus’ teaching, recorded in Matthew 22:37-41, centers the Christian life in the making of right relationships, first with God, then with one another. Spiritual disciplines are *tools* to facilitate this transformation of relationships.

Spiritual disciplines have nothing to do with performance or a self-directed spiritual perfection; rather, they continually turn our eyes to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. They position us daily in response to God reaching out to us, thus allowing us to live in the world, not of it.

Christian history, beginning with Jesus’ own practice recorded in the gospels, defines four key disciplines for us:

PRAYER: a relationship, often of helplessness, where we bring our own needs and those of others to the One who empowers His will to be done. To pray is to invite Jesus into our hearts so we may fellowship with Him and receive from Him mercies designed to accomplish His purposes.

STUDY: daily engaging with the written, authoritative words of God, allowing hearing and obeying to counter the false testimony of who God is in the world.

SERVICE: giving our life to God through a specific task where self decreases that God may be glorified.

WORSHIP: opening the heart and responding to God’s overtures of love, giving glory to Him in return.

Disciplines, in the end, keep us in right relationship with God, transforming people and congregations in the process. In this, they make all the difference in the world!

To read the entire article, including subsequent disciplines that continue the transformation process, go to www.transmin.org and click on Spiritual Disciplines by Dr. Pat Meye.

Learning and Growing in Community

Rev. Mark Lambert, Church Resource Minister, Transformation Ministries

Community—a word we hear a lot—refers to a group of individuals who often have common experiences, values or goals, as well as concerns and struggles. They create powerful connections extending from local populations and geographies to nations and global entities.

When used in reference to the Church, the term “community” relates to the communion of the Saints, a biblical name for those who belong to the Savior and recognize they have joined their lives with Him in the greatest struggle of human history, God’s redemption of the human race. It is a battle intensely fought in every human heart, never completely won this side of glory, but with tremendous promises guaranteed those refusing to leave the fight; who continue to gain ground on the forces of sin, bondage and immaturity in their own lives and reach out in love to those who live around them.

I am on the front lines of this battle every Tuesday night as I meet with my Lifegroup. Twelve regulars come together to talk openly about our lives (confidentiality is our only rule), relate to a biblical passage, give counsel, share concerns, and then pray for each other . . . a two-hour experience where a common life of love, counsel and concern is emerging.



Our group is a wonderful cross-section of our demographic community. They range from seminary student to local business owner; from unsaved to one struggling to move from religious legalism to authentic personal faith. Then there’s me, a “professional Christian,” who probably benefits as much from this group as anyone else.

Nine years ago, I dropped out of local church pastoral ministry to become a Church Resource Minister. As a result, I have gained a certain camaraderie with many pastors and church leaders. In addition, many people have come to recognize me and seek my counsel. Most Sundays, I’m the guest preacher at a different church. It is a high and holy privilege to serve the Lord in this larger venue, but 5 years ago, my wife, Evelyn, and I noticed something essential was lacking. We had no place to open our hearts in love, grace, repentance and forgiveness beyond our own marriage. We no longer lived day-to-day in a Christian community. We felt like spiritual vagabonds with no place to “know and be known.” Until this new role, I had always been an integral part of a local church community with its joys, struggles, and responsibilities. I had become a man who works on Sundays and must nurture his spiritual life apart from any particular congregation.

Evelyn and I have found the Lifegroup to be our primary weekly connection to the body of Christ. Our lives are being deeply altered as we walk together in spiritual communion, learning from the Word, the Spirit, and from one another.

For testimonials and further information about Northpoint Church’s Lifegroup model, visit www.transmin.org and click on Learning and Growing in Community.



**For more information on the articles in this newsletter visit:
www.transmin.org and link on the April - June
 Transformations Newsletter**



LOCATION: Riverside Convention Center, Riverside, California

SPEAKER: Leith Anderson, Pastor of Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, MN, and NAE President
 Don’t miss the ministers and spouses training event Thursday afternoon with Leith Anderson.

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Conference details available at www.transmin.org