

## God Has Been Preparing Us!

Like every church leader, I sometimes think the church is progressing too slowly. Sometimes I think we are not doing enough. Sometimes I think we are not organized enough. Sometimes I think I am not leading well enough. There have probably been times when all of these things were true. But if I'm honest, I think some of my (our) thoughts are really the Devil talking. If I am not careful I will be led to misinterpret the calm times as God's inactivity in our church. I will think that since we are not seeing a harvest of spiritual fruit yet nothing is really growing. The longer I have had a hand in leading BCC the more I have come to see that the slow harvest times are really God's workshops- preparing us for the future.

Here are the workshops I believe God has put us through since our inception in 2004 that I believe have prepared us well for what is to come:

### **Workshop #1:** "You Don't Know It All Tinky (I made up that name)."

For the planters of BCC, we all graduated and moved to NJ with either 4 or 8 years of college under our belts. Bruce McClarty once said, "It took me 4 years to go to graduate school and 4 years to get over it". I would say the same for our team. In some ways graduating from college only solidified my belief that I knew all there was to know about how the world turns. I therefore came to NJ convinced that God sent me here to set NJ straight. I believe our first church-growth workshop came in the form of a confession: "Ok Lord, we don't know everything".

### **Workshop #2:** Spiritual Growth Happens Intentionally

Perhaps this is a workshop many of you would never sign up for because common sense should teach it. But it wasn't common for me. The intentionality of spiritual growth came as a new insight about 2 years into the church-plant. We learned that we could not use the same methods of outreach we used in 1960 and expect the same results in 2008. We needed to intentionally absorb ourselves in the culture of our day to discern the most effective methods to get the age-old, timeless, unchanging message of Jesus across today. Growth was not accidental and when we realized this we began to see tangible fruit.

### **Workshop #3:** Everyone Is *Not* The Same

A ping-pong ball exercise taught me this best. Place a strip of tape on the floor somewhere in the room you are in. Pretend that line is the finish line. Then gather 10-12 ping-pong balls into a 5 gallon pail and drop them anywhere on the floor in front of you. As you do this you will find that no ball ends up in the exact same spot even though you dropped all the balls together in the same spot. Where each ball ends up has a lot to do with the other balls dropped with it and the direction they were all heading in at the moment of impact. Here's the application: God dropped all of us into this world in different family groups. Depending on the particular family group you got dropped with has a lot to do with where you end up and what it will take for you to roll to the finish line before you die. Workshop #3 taught me that I did not choose my family of ping-pong balls and neither did my neighbor. Place me in their pail of ping-pong balls and I would probably end up exactly where they did. It's hard to turn people to Jesus when you think everyone should be exactly where you are. Until we learned this, we were too judgmental to reach people.

### **Workshop #4:** Love Often Develops Through Conflict, Not Despite It

In a perfect world conflict would not happen. People would behave toward people out of sincere love- out of self-denial instead of self-protection. But that's not this world. In this world there is conflict and a lot of it. The ironic thing is that when conflict is talked through, sins are confessed, forgiveness is granted

and reconciliation is made, a deeper level of love is possible than it was before the conflict. As members of Christ's church we do not have the freedom to church-hop every time a conflict arises. We must do the difficult work of working things out. As we do this, the church grows stronger and the Evil one loses his power to divide. Carl and I have had more conflicts than you can shake a "the sword of the Spirit" at; but we are better friends now and respect each other more because of it.

#### **Workshop #5: Without Vision People Perish**

Just as vision is critical to your physical body, it is also important for the ministry of the church. **Proverbs 29:18** says, "*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*" Vision is the church's preferred picture of the future. It is what she hopes God will do through her. A vision provides direction for a congregation and ensures that she is not running aimlessly. Lately at BCC the vision has been in its final stages of formation. Not until recently have we understood the need to have a powerful vision to carry us into the future. Nehemiah had a vision of rebuilding the Jerusalem wall. David had a vision of a temple for the Lord. So what's BCC's vision? Thankfully God has led us to workshop #5 and that vision will be cast soon!

Looking back I see that in each workshop God has been preparing each one of us. In the next few months I believe God is preparing us to cast a new vision for BCC, begin implementing that vision in various ways, and begin helping each member discover and develop their gifts for ministry. Are you prepared for the future with BCC? Are you a Christian yet? Do you know your gifts? The curtain for the future of BCC is being opened and I can't wait to see what's on stage!

Getting ready, Shaun