

NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT
QUALITY CHARACTERISTIC III

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“Passionate Spiritually”

Some time in March or April of this year, once we have finished this series of eight sermons on the quality characteristics, about thirty of us will complete the church survey. In this way we will compose a snapshot of how we see our church stacking up in these quality areas. It will reveal what we believe is our weakest area (minimum factor) which will then become the focus for our planning efforts as a Council.

Incidentally, Christian Schwartz’s research and follow-up over the years have clearly shown that, to be guaranteed that a church will grow in numbers as well as in quality all the scores need to be above 65.

Today our focus quality characteristic is “Passionate Spiritually.”

Their research has clearly indicated that church development is neither dependent on spiritual persuasions (such as whether our church is “charismatic” or “noncharismatic” nor on whether we use liturgical prayers (as we do!) or practice what’s called “spiritual warfare”. Neither of those things is proof of our “passionate spiritually” or any lack in that area, even though these are sometimes pointed to by some groups as the cause of church growth within their ranks.

Rather, the point separating growing and non-growing churches is a different question, namely: “Are the Christians in this church ‘on fire’? Do we live committed lives and practice our faith with joy and enthusiasm?”

Since there are significant differences in this area between growing and declining churches (of various “spiritual types”), Christian Schwartz calls this quality characteristic “passionate spiritually.” This concept of “spiritual passion” and the widespread notion of the walk of faith as “doing one’s duty” seem to be mutually exclusive. That is – if you have one, you don’t have the other.

Furthermore, they have noticed that in churches which tend toward “legalism” (that is, where being a Christian means believing in the right doctrine, following a rigid moral code, affirming that church membership is what’s important), spiritual passion is usually below average.

The nature of this quality characteristic becomes evident by examining the prayer life of the Christians who take the survey. While the amount of time that a Christian spends in prayer plays only a minor role with regard to the quality and growth of a church, whether

prayer is viewed as an “inspiring experience” or not has a significant relationship to the quality and quantity of the church.

Similar results were found with respect to personal use of the Bible and other factors affecting personal spirituality. That is, if our devotional life is truly inspiring, it will positively affect the quality and the growth of our church!

This quality characteristic has been widely criticized in the past: for example, with the charge – “Passion alone is no reflection of one’s loyalty to the truth.” Even sects, so that argument goes, are characterized by great enthusiasm.

Now, this observation is true. Christian Schwartz has not yet researched the causes of growth among sects, but he suspects that their enthusiasm is likely one main reason for their impressive growth record. Of course, in no way does this prove or validate the truth of their theological claims, despite their enthusiasm and successful numerical growth.

On the other hand, “pure doctrine” alone, as countless examples illustrate, does not cause growth to happen. A church, regardless of how “true”, how orthodox its dogma and its view of Scripture, can hardly expect to experience growth – as long its members do not learn to live their faith with contagious enthusiasm and to share it with others.

Wherever a “defense of orthodoxy” replaces the expression of a passionate faith in Christ Jesus, a false system is at work. On such an ideological ground, “rigid fanaticism”; but no truly free passion, will flourish.

This third quality characteristic – “passionate spirituality” clearly demonstrates in practical life the theological core of the matter in church growth: the life of faith as a genuine relationship with Christ Jesus.