

11 Obvious Signs of a Personality-Driven Church

I have been striving since the early 1980s to help the church follow in the way of Jesus and the apostles. That being said, one of the earmarks of the first-century apostolic church is how the church edified itself in love (Eph. 4:16) and was led by a team whose primary purpose was to equip the church to perform the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11, 12).

Of course, even the first-century church had a primary apostolic leader who served as the first among equals with the other apostolic leaders. In Acts 1-11, Peter was the lead apostle of the church; and from Acts 12-21, it seems as though James, the Lord's half-brother, was the clear leader. Also, in Acts 13:1,2, it seems as though a team of prophets and teachers were the leaders of the church until somebody matured as the primary leader in this nascent fellowship.

In this article, I am defining what I call a "personality-driven church" as a congregation that showcases nobody else but the founding pastor/leader. All the attention is on that lead pastor /visionary. He lacks a strong team around him that can function as a fivefold ministry gift to the church (Eph. 4:11). As a matter of fact, it almost seems as though the culture of the church forbids anyone but the lead pastor from being highlighted, celebrated and showcased.

Furthermore, when I use the term "personality-driven," I am not referring to an evil leader and or a church that is preaching a false gospel; I am merely accentuating the myopic focus some churches have on their primary leader. Of course, when there is a new church plant, there may not be other leaders mature enough to perform most of the ministerial functions; hence, the lead pastor will be the center of gravity until other leaders mature.

Unfortunately, I have seen congregations and ministries who have been in existence for decades who still function as if everyone in the church is immature and incapable to minister except the lead pastor. Conversely, I know other churches that have developed such strong team ministry that the lead pastor can be away from the pulpit for months at a time without the church skipping a beat because they have matured so many great leaders to preach, teach and serve the congregation.

The following are the first four of 11 traits of the personality-driven church:

1. All the marketing centers on the lead pastor.

I have been to some Christian conferences in which there was a life-size picture of the lead pastor in the hallway of the conference center. The lead pastor was highlighted in such a way that every other speaker was barely mentioned in promotions, even though they had significant ministries as well. For example, near my house, there is a church with an 8-10 foot poster of their apostle (that's his title) on the outside of the church building. Perhaps said apostle means well, but he is conveying a message to all outsiders that the church is centered on him and not on the congregation or on the Lord Jesus.

2. The ministry profile features only the lead pastor.

There are some church websites that focus so much on the lead pastor you have a hard time knowing what the congregation as a whole is doing. Lead pastor ministry profiles like this on congregational websites give the impression that the church is functioning more like a private non-profit ministry of the lead pastor as opposed to a New Testament Church. When I go on a church website, I desire to see what the church congregation is doing, not just what the lead pastor is doing and saying. To me, highlighting the ministries and volunteers of the congregation can poignantly illustrate a healthy New Testament

church culture.

3. All ministry focus is on the lead pastor.

In some churches, the services and all the ministries are all focused and or emanate from the lead pastor. During the services, the lead pastor does all the preaching all of the time (unless he is out of town), almost all the announcements and all the offering devotionals. Of course, it is possible that this could be the style of some healthy churches as well. The point here is their church culture is too dependent upon the lead pastor and not enough on the love and service of the whole congregation. In healthy churches, numerous people are involved in public ministry, and there are numerous ministries led by various individuals. Another trait of healthy churches is that people are committed to the vision of the church, not just to the visionary of the church. Having a church that focuses on cell ministry (small groups) is also a good sign that the ministry to the congregation is spread out among many lay leaders.

4. People are only loyal to the lead pastor.

In personality-driven churches, people are consistently pressured to speak about their loyalty to the lead pastor. Of course, the lead pastor is also the primary visionary who represents Christ to the congregation more than anyone else (Zech. 13:7); however, loyalty should also be to the vision of the congregation as well as to the lead pastor. When a local church develops an inordinate loyalty whose sole focus is towards the lead pastor, said leader can preach false doctrine and lead them to destruction, and much of the congregation will follow him without question.

Check back next week for Part 2 with the remaining traits.
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