

8 Ways a Local Church Can Put Believers in a Straight Jacket

I have served as a senior pastor for 30 years, and I have also worked extensively with political, community and business leaders over the past three decades. As my understanding regarding the kingdom of God and marketplace ministry has evolved, I see church with a new lens and notice the frustration many young people and professionals have regarding their local churches. Many in these categories feel limited rather than celebrated and released into their callings.

In the context of this article, I use the word “straightjacket” as a metaphor to mean limitation and constriction of leadership potential. I believe if the church does not shift towards a kingdom mindset and move away from an empire-building mindset, we will continue to alienate some of the best and brightest young leaders in our generation. I speak this as a leader who believes the local church is the visible expression of the invisible Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), and the hope of the world.

The church as structured in the New Testament is able to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6). I write this article with a deep yearning in my heart for the church to go to the next level so we will not continue to be irrelevant to the surrounding culture and miss great opportunities to disciple world-changers.

The following are ways the local church has become a straightjacket instead of a releaser of kingdom purpose:

1. When church leaders are the only ones viewed as ministers

For the church to disciple nations (Matt. 28:19) and exert

cultural influence (Gen. 1:28; Matthew 5:13-16), we must recognize and even commission (not ordain or give out ecclesial titles) those called to high-level marketplace leadership in the secular arena. After all, Jesus rose from the dead so He could fill all things (Eph. 4:10). The only way this can happen is for the church to nurture, celebrate and release members called to the marketplace. If a church makes a conceptual distinction between church leaders and marketplace leaders by only referring to the former as ministers, then we are missing an opportunity to strategically place believers into every sphere of society.

Ephesians 4 teaches that Christ gave the church five-fold ministers to train God's people for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12). Based on the context starting in Ephesians 4:10, we need to redefine the work of the ministry to include the filling up of all things on the earth, which means the equipping and sending of saints into every sphere of life, not merely equipping the saints called to full-time church ministry.

2. When business leaders are only valued for their tithes and offerings

Many high-level business leaders I meet are very frustrated because they are either sitting under a pastor that has a lower level of leadership than they do, or they are only valued in the church because of the amount of tithes and offerings they give to the congregation. Business leaders in the first category should find an apostolic leader in the body of Christ (even if they are not in their same geographic region) they can receive input from, even if it is not their local church pastor.

They should stay in their local church as long as their family is receiving nurturing and pastoral care. This is a better option, for this would not allow these business leaders to get frustrated and opt out of church altogether (which many

unfortunately do). Those only valued for their financial giving will be underutilized in the church; they will feel like they are in a straightjacket instead of a place that enables their leadership gifts to flourish.

3. When the pastor is an empire-builder

When a pastor is an empire-builder, they only want to utilize marketplace leaders and their finances to build bigger buildings and support their programs. This is all good and fine, but limiting, since the message of the kingdom (Gen. 1:28; Eph. 4:10) commands Christ-followers to fill up everyone else's buildings, not just our own. Empire-builders are only committed to people commensurate to the support they receive for their empire.

Kingdom-builders wash the feet of marketplace leaders and help equip them to maximize their purpose in their cultural sphere. Pastors committed to releasing Christian leaders called to the secular arena will never have any lack of financial giving towards their own local church programs because of the law of reciprocity: Whatever you sow you will reap.

Marketplace leaders in an empire-building church will usually feel like they are only being used instead of being celebrated and blessed.

4. When the preaching centers on escape rather than engagement

Pastors who focus their preaching mostly on heaven and escaping the earth will greatly limit the vision and capacity of their members called to influence and engage the earth. After all, the Bible is not a book about heaven but the most practical book ever written regarding the stewardship of the earth.

5. When the view of the kingdom is mystical

Many in full-time church ministry have a dualistic view

regarding life: that God only values spiritual things and the physical world is not as important. This goes against the fact that Jesus is both Creator of the material universe as well as the Redeemer of our souls (John 1:3-4; John 12-13).

Consequently, pastors with a dualistic view will only focus their preaching and ministry on prayer, healing, and the spiritual disciplines and gifts. Their view of the kingdom is limited to things spiritual. Marketplace leaders find such myopic focus mystical and not practical. (Of course, they see the importance of the spiritual disciplines, gifts and prayer, but they integrate it into their function in the secular arena.)

Marketplace leaders are used to mapping out business strategies; they utilize budgets and have practical goals and objectives. Hence, mystical leadership that does not connect to practical living frustrates and limits their participation. In the kingdom of God we are called to be “spiritual” instead of “mystical.”

Spirituality does not mean non-engagement with the material world, but the ability to function in every aspect of life while walking in the fruit and power of the Spirit (the Spirit-controlled life as shown in Acts 1:8 and Galatians 5:22-23).

6. When young people are not matured into disciples

When a local church merely has a vision for youth that involves entertaining them with games, concerts and fellowship, they greatly limit their vast potential and pigeonhole them into a straightjacket. Young people need to be challenged, trained and given a sense of purpose and not just entertained. Youth groups that do not disciple and preach a strong word can easily become havens for sex and drugs.

Youth groups should not go for large crowds at the expense of compromising the primary call of the church, which is to make

disciples.

7. When leaders are not nurtured and sent out

When a local church only has a vision for itself and not for church multiplication and cultural engagement, high-capacity leaders will feel limited and bored. The only healthy churches are the ones who continually recognize the potential of new members and harness and harvest their potential for the glory of God.

8. When the pastor is a micro-manager

Marketplace leaders and young professionals are often critical thinkers who value creative freedom. Pastors who have to be involved with the entire minutia in tasks they assign to their leaders will frustrate and alienate them. Conversely, kingdom-minded pastors would usually lay out the framework for tasks assigned to these leaders and give them the opportunity to improvise and exhibit freedom to operate within the framework.

Joseph Mattera *has been in full-time church ministry since 1980 and is currently the Presiding Bishop of Christ Covenant Coalition and Overseeing Bishop of Resurrection Church in New York. He is also serving as the United States Ambassador for the International Coalition of Apostles, and as one of the founding presiding bishops of the International Communion of Evangelical Churches. Visit him at .*