

## Running Programs or Changing Lives?

By Bob Young

Are you running programs or changing lives? The question hit me “head on.” Wow! I have experienced it, I see it in some of my past ministry, I have seen it in my church consulting, it happens far too often in the US churches. Nor are mission churches immune – lots of activity and little progress. Programs, ministries, and a flurry of activity, but the multitudes remain untouched. Ministry without mission, programs without preaching, intense effort but little evangelism.

Something is wrong. Something is wrong evangelistically. Spreading the gospel depends on too few. A few churches grow little by little but real numerical growth is slow. New believers are few. Something is wrong spiritually. Too many church members are plateaued. Their walk with Christ is little different than it was years ago. Churches are running programs – more programs than ever before. Programs attract consumers so that many churches deal with more people than ever. Churches are multiplying ministries—more ministries than ever before. Still the questions echo: Are lives being changed? How many lives are being genuinely changed? Weekly attendance is stable despite the constant flow of new people and new commitments. Genuine conversions are less and less frequent; effective discipleship training is rare.

How can you know if your evangelism and discipleship efforts are bearing fruit? Many characteristics could be mentioned. Here is a short list.

- New believers (those who did not previously know Jesus) are constantly being added
- Evangelism is the work of the entire body of believers, everyone is making more disciples
- All believers are empowered to move forward in faith and actively participate in God’s purpose—both of new Christians and experienced Christians
- Numerical growth is near 25% per decade
- Spiritual development is encouraged and facilitated; spirituality is the expectation and the norm
- Unhealthy and sinful patterns of thought, behavior, and relationships are handled so that problems do not resurface
- New spiritual leaders are constantly developed and are involved in pursuing God’s purpose
- New churches are regularly planted

Jesus taught that two great commandments summarize the whole of Scripture – to love the Lord your God with all your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself. I call them #1 and #2. Both commandments relate to evangelism and discipleship. This is how people are saved, this is how people stay saved.

How can the local church move forward? What is needed? What is the goal? A mature relationship with God; and mature, loving relationships with others. Programs are great. Ministries are wonderful. Multiplied lives changed by receiving the gospel and following Jesus, lives where people genuinely love God and neighbor, are even better!