



## Are You Thinking Any Differently?

By Topper Reid

**E**arlier this year I finished reading three books, pretty much all at the same time. As a result, I experienced a major shift in my thinking about how we are currently doing church in USAmerica (as Leonard Sweet would say). The three books I read were *Simple Church*, *Present Future*, and *The Barbarian Way*. Mixing all three of these books together was akin to watching Emeril concoct a wild dish on his TV food show!

As a result of this reading experience, I have asked myself, "Could we be a little off in the way we now do church?" Before you commit me to some heresy asylum, let me explain. I am sharing a bit of my spiritual

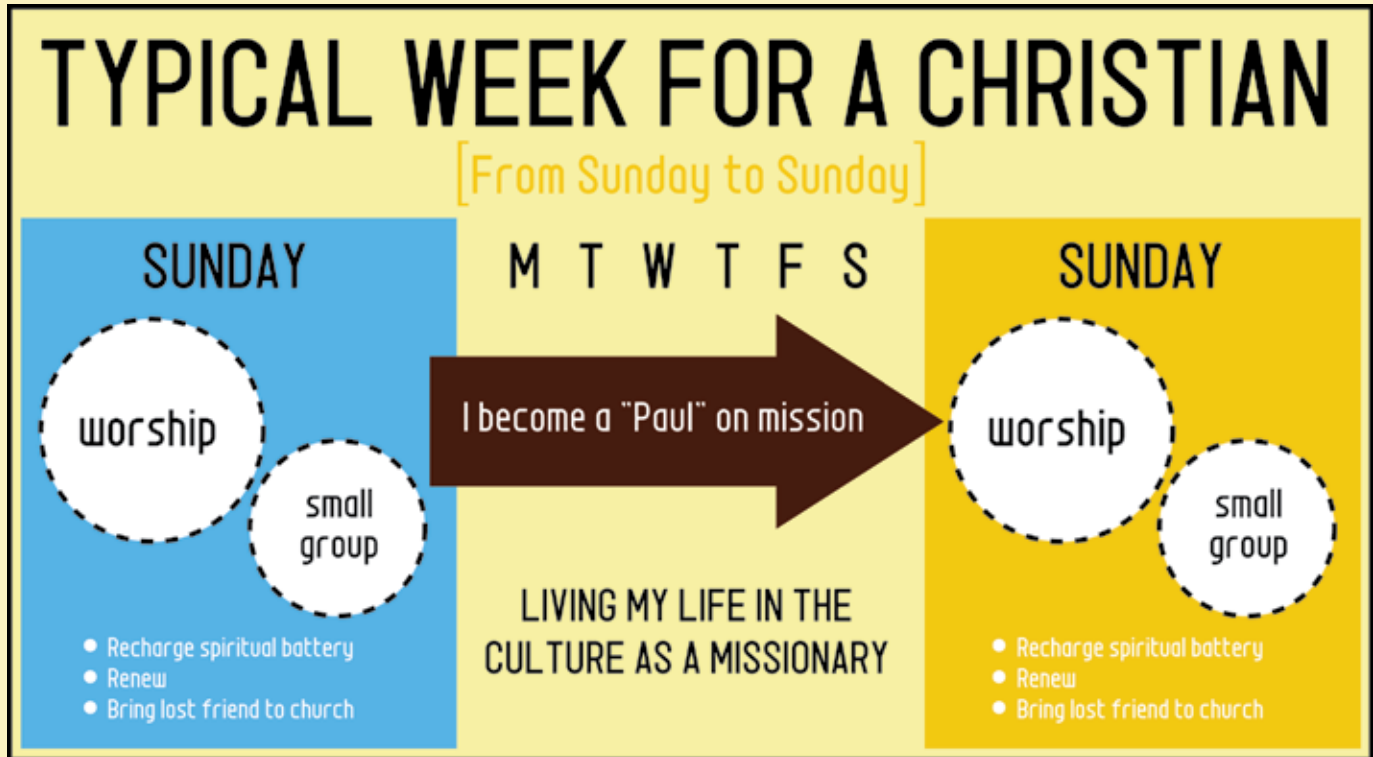
journey and being transparent with you in my thinking. I don't mean to say that we are doing church all wrong; it may be that our focus is blurred, and our priorities are out of balance.

*Simple Church* (by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger) communicated to me that churches need to know where they are headed, have a plan to get there, budget and communicate accordingly, and focus on the essential elements that will lead the church to reach its vision. Streamline; focus; keep it simple.

*Present Future* (by Reggie McNeal) totally messed with my mind!! This book helped

me see that many of our churches have become more "club-like." Some churches seem to focus more on themselves and providing member services as opposed to providing potential Christian services. My thinking on how we evaluate our spiritual effectiveness (spiritual scorecards) as individuals and collectively as churches was challenged as well.

*The Barbarian Way* (by Erwin McManus) helped me see that Christians in our churches need to be more aggressive and jump into the culture with the Gospel message. They need to take risks and do whatever needs to be done to share Jesus with a lost and dying world. As "barbarians,"



we must lovingly do this with reckless abandon and with “no fear.”

Now, mix these three books together, and my paradigm is completely altered! I would like to share with you what I have been pondering as I think about how we might do church in the future.

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**The church should be a place where Christians can come to worship God (and bring their lost friends) and recharge their spiritual batteries before they re-enter the culture to live their lives as missionaries.**

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Church, in its “Simplest,” “Present Future,” and “Barbaric” way should have three components: 1) worship, 2) small groups, and 3) Christians living their lives in a lost and dying world as a missionary for Christ.

The church should be a place where Christians can come to worship God (and bring their lost friends) and recharge their spiritual batteries before they re-enter the culture to live their lives as missionaries. The Apostle Paul was a tentmaker by vocation, but he was “on mission” every place he went on a daily basis. The concept of “every Christian a missionary” and “on mission” for Christ every day,” is the paradigm shift we need to embrace.

As I view church, I see Christians compartmentalizing their daily lives. I go to church, go to work, do my hobbies, attend church outreach, and occasionally go on a mission trip. Instead of all these activities blending into one, I compartmentalize them into many different segments. I should be on mission all the time – everywhere I go! The Apostle Paul never compartmentalized his life activities.

I am not so sure the church is equipping the average Christian to understand this

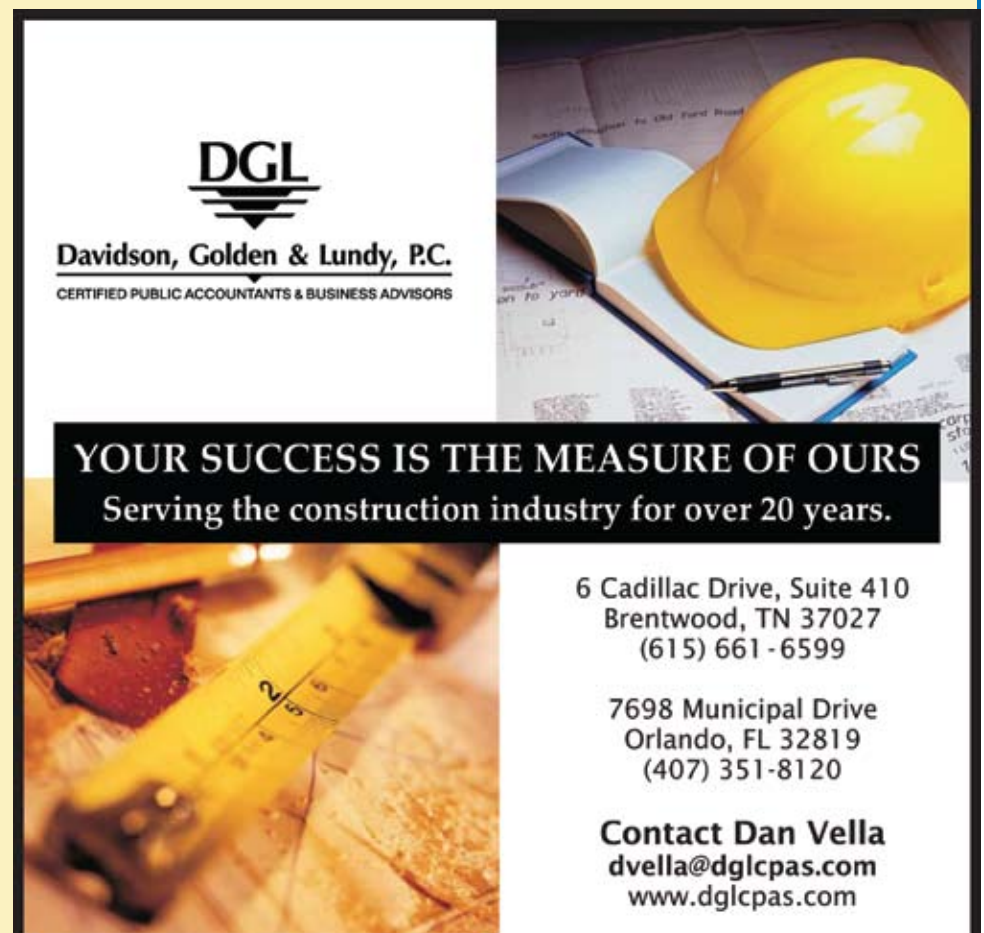
concept, much less live it out in everyday life. If we were on mission everyday wherever we go, USAmerica would be becoming more of a Christian nation. Statistics reveal that our churches are not keeping pace with increases in population. More and more people need Christ than ever before. There are more lost people in USAmerica than Christians!

This is the picture of church I see coming into focus: Church members come to church on Sunday, or whenever, to worship God and renew and recharge their spiritual batteries. They have been out in the “world” all week, so they might bring a lost friend to worship. They attend a small group to study God’s Word, to be held accountable, to develop friendships, to pray for needs, and to talk about how they can minister as a group to the community. Then they re-enter the culture to become “Pauls” on mission 24/7 for Christ. Can we lead a paradigm shift to become missional everyday and not just when we are involved in a church activity?

All of the other “stuff” (programs) that churches do is what I am struggling with. We need to have a better balance in our focus on how much we budget money- and time-wise for our members and how much we budget to reach potential Christians. There are so many of our resources placed on member services that may not produce reaching lost people for Christ.

As I continue to alter my thinking about how we do church, the biggest challenge I see is how we stop doing all the “programs” and focus on equipping our church members to become an army of “Pauls” affecting our daily traffic patterns for Christ. Just think of the potential ... if every Christian reached one person for Christ in one year!!! Wow!!

We have an opportunity to impact the Kingdom as never before. My prayer is that we can make the necessary changes and do church in a way that will help us reach this end. ♦



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