

SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

A conversation guide for church leaders

Are We Equipping Saints with Knowledge or Tools?

EFCA churches and pastors are well known for teaching scripture in our family of churches. The proclamation of scripture is powerful and used by the Holy Spirit to influence and change the Christian's heart. But I confess, being taught scripture alone is often not very effective in changing my behaviors and I don't believe that I am all that different from many or most others in that regard.

As a leader in the church, I am taken aback by the admonition in James 1:22 (NIV): "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." We often are taught from this verse about the need to be doers and not idle hearers. Yet we seldom are taught about what it means to "deceive yourselves" and the devastating consequences of being self-deceived. In my world of working with church leaders (and with myself), spiritual self-deception seems to be a much bigger problem among Christians than lack of knowledge of scripture, and the seemingly incessant emphasis and demands by some for more and more teaching unaccompanied by more and more doing is problematic. Too many Christians know what to do, but don't do it - and that's something we should talk about.

My desire to avoid self-deception caused me to consider how we might equip people to do the work of the ministry rather than merely know about it.¹ Then it dawned on me that, in the rest of the world, when a leader wants to equip a worker to do required or desirable tasks, three things are required for the worker *by the leader* – knowledge, tools and practice. I have been thinking that "equipping" requires much more from leaders than dispensing Bible knowledge alone – those we lead also need tools to help them effectively implement their new knowledge and become doers rather than mere "knowers," and they need practice to make them proficient in using those tools and performing the work to be done. A combination of knowledge and tools and practice might well be the game changer we need in the process of equipping people to be doers of the word rather than hearers only.

Here are some conversation starters that might help us develop some tools that will help create doers out of hearers.

¹ Ephesians 4:11-13.

- Have a heart-to-heart conversation with your team to assess whether the church you serve is filled with hearers only or doers of the Word. How would we know if our teaching has been yielding the desired results in the hearts and lives of those we teach and lead? How might the people we lead (and we as well) be “deceiving ourselves” regarding the difference between being hearers and doers of the Word? If our calling is to equip, and all we are doing is proclaiming, are we fulfilling our call? What are some of the problems associated with deception in these matters?
- In what areas does spiritual knowledge appear to be lacking? In what areas is the doing of the word apparently lacking? Is the problem a lack of knowing or a lack of doing?
- Some areas in which churches report that congregants have repeatedly been provided with knowledge but are lacking in being doers of the word include personally and intentionally sharing the gospel with people they know, meaningful engagement in prayer, showing Christian love (agape) toward one another, relationships within marriages, showing compassion for the downhearted and those in need, and loving our neighbors as ourselves. How is our church doing in these and any other areas you identify? How are we leaders doing in these things?
- How might we help the church move from being hearers only to being doers by equipping them – providing useful tools to help them behave differently? Here are some things on my list – what should be on your list?
 - Providing a fill-in card upon which to write the names of people in our circle of relationships for whom we are intentionally praying for and seeking opportunities to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ?²
 - A church helped its people reach out to show love, concern, and willingness to care for their neighbors by printing and providing small cards for them to drop off in their neighbors’ doorways when COVID had made closer personal contact unadvisable.
 - Pastors spend much of their time preparing sermons that they share once and, more often than not, that their congregants will never think or talk about again. Ouch! That hurts. Some leaders have equipped their congregations to think about the sermon content and suggested action steps throughout the week by:
 - Creating and distributing a study guide with daily reflections.
 - Posting video content prepared by the pastor or staff or other leaders one to five times during the week reminding congregants of sermon content and ways to be doers of the word during the week.
 - Having small groups during the week review and discuss sermon content during their meetings rather than focusing on other topics.³
 - What other strategies might you consider to help weekend services produce life change rather than mere pleasant experiences with friends and increased knowledge?⁴

² 8 to 15: *The World Is Smaller Than You Think*, Tom Mercer (2017)

³ *Sticky Church*, Larry Osborne (2008)

⁴ I love this quote attributed to D.L. Moody: “The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives.”

Something to Talk About

July 1, 2021

- Most people I know are apprehensive of publicly engaging in new behaviors that they have not yet done (such as sharing their faith with others). Practice enables people to gain and hone skills in a safe and supportive environment so that they will have increased confidence in engaging in those same skills in real life. As it pertains to those issues identified in the third bullet on this list, how might church leaders provide opportunities for congregants to practice new behaviors that have been taught to them and for which they have been provided appropriate tools?

It is so frustrating to spend one's time preparing quality and important teaching only to find that our teaching is not producing the needed changes in people's behaviors. That's why it is important for leaders to remember that true learning that actually results in changes in behavior usually requires tools and practice in addition to knowledge. As leaders seeking to influence Christians to greater Christlikeness, it is important for to approach equipping the saints we lead in all three areas: Knowledge, effective tools, and practice. And that's something to talk about.

Let us know if we can help and how your conversation goes.

Contact Bob Osborne by e-mail at bob.osborne@efca.org.

This is one of a series of articles intended to facilitate and guide church leaders' conversations about significant issues that often are not talked about among pastors, boards, and church leadership teams.

Prior articles can be found at <https://efca-west.districts.efca.org/something-to-talk-about-archives/>.