

Transformation Through Relationship

About three years ago, following a period of essential healing, a vision began to emerge at Bethany Church. Through the power of prayer, the very apparent inward working of the Holy Spirit, and the dynamic leadership at the church God began a process of transformation. It became apparent that God was calling Bethany Church to become different. A convergence of factors including congregational empowerment, the development of a shared commonality of purpose, and a reaffirmation of a primary emphasis upon Biblical teaching and preaching resulted in a variety of highly successful initiatives. It was also decided that we would not be a church which emphasizes programmatic solutions nor one that attempts to emulate other more successful churches. Church growth as a goal moved to the back of the church's priority list. Subsequently, it became apparent to the leadership that the most powerful gift of Bethany Church is found in the ability of its people to relate to others in a loving Christian manner.

Bethany Church became a church defined by relationships. The congregation became a group of people who purposefully choose to come together to create a family of believers with Jesus Christ at the center. The church intentionally or, perhaps even unintentionally, made the decision to grow in grace and love. Becoming genuine, authentic, and transparent people of God became a foremost emphasis. With the transformation in full swing, a discipleship group was formed. It included ten individuals who met for a full year to study Greg Ogden's book, *Discipleship Essentials*. At the completion of this group process it became apparent that something was still missing. I, as the pastor, spoke of my limitations in the domain of discipleship. It was most apparent, however, that we needed an outlet for the people we were becoming in Christ. People began to ask, "How can I share this with others?" We went back to the Lord in prayer and we waited for the Lord to respond.

Last winter, as a result of a snowstorm, the Navigators presentation at EST, one for which I was not to be included, was rescheduled. In a most fortuitous event, God placed a member of the congregation in Myerstown for a church planting meeting prior to the presentation. I remember the phone call most vividly, "Pastor John, I believe this is what we have been praying for." I attended the meeting. I heard Don Graybill and Steve Gilmore of the Navigators speak. I listened ever so intently to Norma Minnich of the Reedsville Church as she told her powerful story of association with the Navigators. Following another meeting as well as a compelling presentation by Norma during worship service, Ministry Council approved the initiative for Bethany Church.

We have begun the process of embracing the Navigators methodology because it fits so nicely with who we are becoming as a church. It is not a program. It does not demand conformity to a Navigators doctrine. The emphasis is not on numerical growth. The focus is on the spiritual development of God's people. The Bible is foundational. It is a most pragmatic approach. It demands accountability. It is founded upon relationships. It is systematic, organized, and purposeful. It permits Christian intimacy in small group settings. It demands commitment to God as well as one another. The leadership we

have experienced from the Navigators has been loving, exceptionally competent, and spiritually and Biblically sound. Steve is willing to listen. Presentations are made through an easy conversational style. Passion for God is apparent.

We wished to start slowly. Maybe three Core Team members and perhaps two triads by the end of six months. Well, we have seven in our Core Group and we now have five triads up and running after just five months. There is a growing interest in the church. A group of twenty turned out for the first large group presentation. We are eager to see our first multiplication of groups. We never know what the Lord has in store, but we do recognize God at work in our midst. It is marvelous as a pastor to see lives transformed, enthusiasm grow, risks being taken for Him, congregational energy expanded, and a sense of confidence emerge as we serve our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Navigators has played an instrumental role in this process.

Thank you and God bless!

Pastor John
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