Winning People to a Biblical Worldview

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The Problem:

Church planting is a unique struggle. A new church offers some special challenges to spiritual renewal and biblical thinking. 1) The church is the new. Except for the planter there may be no normal pattern of how the Christian should look, think, and behave. 2) There may be a lack of godly encouragement from others. There are probably few influences outside of the planter to impress a biblical worldview on the church members. 3) The norm in an immature group of believers might be very low. It is tough when ‘normal’ is immature and worldly. Even a small amount of growth may cause a believer to seem like a spiritual giant. 4) Immaturity can outpace the teachers. The planter may be overwhelmed with people who need encouragement; this can cause you to feel like you are in triage mode all the time.

Since worldliness is the default setting of every person, the church plant must be proactive and eager to help its people turn from worldliness to godliness. First, we must have biblical thinking since we are ‘transformed by the renewal of our minds.’ This challenge is essential to the health of a church plant, and other external factors add to this problem.

The battle against worldliness is exacerbated by:

- A Worldly Christian Culture: In a culture drowning in nominal Christians everybody will do what is ‘right in their own eyes.’ This causes a greater challenge for the church. It normalizes sin. It destroys the distinction between believer and unbeliever. Unbelievers going to church and calling themselves ‘Christians’ will normalize sin for the innocent. Further, the plethora of big, feature packed, seeker-sensitive, churches where people go and remain both anonymous and unchanged has not helped matters.

- An Isolated Culture: In a solitary world, much of life is filtered through Facebook, email, Skype, the internet, and the phone. This has drastically reduced accountability. Personal relationships dwindle to an electronic bottleneck that filters life into a lopsided imbalance of likes, activities, and photos with a pithy comment thrown in for good measure. While sometimes revealing the heart, this limited flow of information can allow worldliness to go unchecked; it can reduce the opportunity for constructive input and pastoring too. These tools prohibit naturally occurring Christian edification replacing them with pseudo relationships.

- Expository Preachers Who Study Too Much (see points III. A. and III. C.)

- Lazy Christians: Biblical discernment will not happen by accident, you must work to become biblical.
• **Blind/Willful Ignorance**: People who would rather not know and/or rather not have their behavior curbed.

• **Out-of-Touch Pastors**: Pastors can be so removed from people, their struggles, or life that they fail to shepherd their people appropriately.

**World-Lite**

Perhaps one of the general problems that can face the modern church planter is the philosophy that has invaded our world and churches, “the customer is always right.” We could rephrase this as the church philosophy commonly known as ‘seeker sensitive.’ The result is that we have churches that look, talk, and act like the world in many ways. Of course, the worst excesses of the world are rejected. Many of our evangelical churches simply seem like ‘world-lite.’

The ‘World-Lite’ types usually struggle with failure in how they regard sensuality, fun, and personal success. **This is worldliness.**

**Pharisee-Lite**

On the other end of the spectrum are very conservative churches (we have about 4 within a 2–15 min. drive from our church). Typically these churches emphasize standards, dress, translations, and door-to-door evangelism. While this is not all bad, these churches can often convert a person to their way of behaving without changing his thinking. We now have a person who conforms outwardly but may not know why he is supposed to be behaving in this way. Many of the people who have come from these churches are ‘Pharisee-Lite.’

The ‘Pharisee-Lite’ types usually struggle with a type of legalism that views behavior, translations, and church methodology through a narrow lens with no liberty. If you embrace the right position then you are good. Pride and ignorance abound. **This is worldliness.**

Crossway has new converts, former mega-church attenders, and former members of Jack Hyles patterned ministries. We have a former pastor, a former financial officer who was over an entire denomination, two DBTS grads, and a few jobless people on welfare. I am always stunned at how the world has captivated the minds and hearts of the people that God has placed in our church family.

Statements that reveal our struggles at Crossway:

• “Ladies should not wear purple because it draws attention”
• “High-heels are immodest”
• “I told him, ‘He can look [at girls], but he can’t touch!’”
• “God wouldn’t give me this desire if it He didn’t want me to do it.”

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1Not every church that holds these standards would fit this description. I speak of very specific churches and then more generally from my experience as we disciple people who have backgrounds in these churches.
I. Foster an Environment of Healing and Help

A. People who are seeking hope, repentance, forgiveness, instruction, and change should be welcomed and embraced.

- God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (1 Peter 5:5)
- Jesus was considered a friend to sinners. (Luke 7:34)
- Jesus’ mission is to rescue the lost sheep. *For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners.* (Matt. 9:13)

B. If people do not feel safe to seek help, they will not get help. Instead they walk away in frustration and suspect that hypocrisy is more valued than truth.

C. Let people know that honest questions are appreciated. The truth is never afraid of honest questions from sincere believers who seek God’s mind on a matter. Answers should be given directly and graciously.

D. Be cautious about public statements about someone’s struggle or public church discipline. It seems that only the most severe, unrepentant cases need to be brought before the whole congregation. In this event, your love for the Savior, his faithful people, and the sinning member should be driving motivations in bringing the situation before the congregation. These attitudes should be explicitly stated and apparent to all who observe their pastor.

E. Allow people to express different opinions and hold to different standards than you have or desire for them. I was recently around another church group that all were so strikingly similar that it made me question the origin of their approach to life and standards.

*Galatians 5:13*  
13 For you were called to be free, brothers; only don’t use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love.

II. Foster A Mindset of Discernment

*Hebrews 5:14* But solid food is for the mature--for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil.

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2 All Scripture is from the HCSB unless otherwise noted.

3 As my wife and I were discussing this group of believers she noticed that all of the ladies looked the exact same. They all had similar styled clothing; they all had the same hair cut/style; and they even had their nails done the exact same way. They were clones of each other! Looking back on this situation I find it a little bizarre—1) they might all really like that look, or 2) they possibly all have made one person (the pastor’s wife?) the standard of what is appropriate for a woman to look like, or 3) more probably someone has given the impression that this pattern is ‘the pattern’ of godliness.
A. Be Patient

New believers and immature believers will not have the spiritual discernment to see some of the worldliness in their lives. This is part of the reason they have a pastor. One of your goals as a shepherd is to help them to grow as a discerning and committed follower of Christ.

B. Ask Questions

Questions force people to think for themselves and arrive at their own conclusions. Questions allow people to personally hold the answer rather than having a, “Well my pastor said…” type of position. Questions reveal thinking. This allows the pastor to challenge, praise, support, and give guidance. Often you will be surprised at how easily people begin to see how God might want them to alter their behavior/thinking. Often you can bring up a scripture verse and watch them wrestle with the implications.

C. Praise People for Biblical Thinking and Behavior

D. Be Sympathetic

E. Be Thoughtful in Your Applications When You Preach

1. Demonstrate Discernment (take your people from the Bible to everyday life, and don’t skip any steps)
2. Don’t Fail to Give Obvious Applications
3. Hit All Demographics
4. Aim for the Heart (“Do not Love the world” 1 John 2:15)

F. Be Biblically Thoughtful and Honest

G. Find Creative Ways to Shepherd People

Help them to see the issue clearly. Recently I came across an excellent example of this concerning prayer. The question was asked, “If you pray for the same things that an unbeliever would pray for—money, health, happiness—then you are not praying like a Christian.” What a good clarifying thought. The health, finances, etc., that the world wants can be a huge portion of the prayer lists for the average Christian. This captured a clarifying thought in a few simple words and challenged me to embrace and pray for spiritually valuable goals. This type of creativity takes time and meditation.

H. Pray

Acts 6:4 *But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the preaching ministry.*
III. Spend Time with Your Church Family

A. You Must Spend Time with People

*Proverbs 27:23* Know well the condition of your flock, and pay attention to your herds.

*1 Pet. 5:1-4* I exhort the elders among you: 2 Shepherd God's flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but freely, according to God's will; not for the money but eagerly; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

B. You Must Spend Yourself On God’s People

*Acts 20:28-31* 28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock that the Holy Spirit has appointed you to as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. 29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 And men will rise up from your own number with deviant doctrines to lure the disciples into following them. 31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for three years I did not stop warning each one of you with tears.

*John. 10:11-15* 11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and doesn't own the sheep, leaves them and runs away when he sees a wolf coming. The wolf then snatches and scatters them. 13 This happens because he is a hired man and doesn't care about the sheep. 14 "I am the good shepherd. I know My own sheep, and they know Me, 15 as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father. I lay down My life for the sheep.

C. You Must Serve Your People

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4The MacArthur Study Bible front cover says, “For thirty years, for thirty hours a week, Dr. John MacArthur pored over every page of Scripture. Explored every verse. Dug into every difficult passage.” While I don’t doubt that this may be true, thirty hours a week may not be possible for you. If you give yourself thirty hours a week in the study, a few hours for administrative work, a few hours of actual preaching and teaching, and a few hours for prayer then you will have nothing left for your people (assuming 40 hours of work in a week). The problem with this is two-fold. 1) This is a mischaracterization of John MacArthur. 2) This is lazy. Almost every man in your church works more than 40 hours, and then they volunteer for the church. Also, MacArthur says in his book, “I realize all pastors do not have a personal assistant or a large staff to share the responsibilities of their ministry. Neither did I in the early years. But my commitment to studying the Word has never changed. If other details take my time, I simply put in longer hours that week,” *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 274.
**Ezekiel 34:2-6** "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy, and say to them: This is what the Lord GOD says to the shepherds: Woe to the shepherds of Israel, who have been feeding themselves! Shouldn't the shepherds feed their flock? 3 You eat the fat, wear the wool, and butcher the fattened animals, but you do not tend the flock. 4 You have not strengthened the weak, healed the sick, bandaged the injured, brought back the strays, or sought the lost. Instead, you have ruled them with violence and cruelty. 5 They were scattered for lack of a shepherd; they became food for all the wild animals when they were scattered. 6 My flock went astray on all the mountains and every high hill. They were scattered over the whole face of the earth, and there was no one searching or seeking for them.

**Mark 10:45** 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life-- a ransom for many."

**D. You Must Lead Your People**

**Hebrews 13:17** 17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

(See also, 1 Peter 5:1–4)