

# McChurch?

By Don Sullivan

I always find the words “cultural relevance” a bit of a bother. And by “a bit of a bother,” I mean “inspiration to vomit profusely as though I had eaten a culture of Salmonella.” It’s not that I feel that being relevant in culture is bad. Quite the opposite, actually, as I believe that our goal should supremely be to reach culture with the most impactful and meaningful message we can possibly give them. So, I think cultural relevance is absolutely essential to our mission as Christians. Without cultural relevance, we “have no goods in the marketplace.”

However, I think the problem comes with the “marketing” of church relevance. In spite of the untapped power of the transforming truth of the gospel (“We are all flawed and fallen, failures one and all, but God loves us and is not willing to leave us in the mess we are in, but wants to empower us to be more like Jesus”), we too often put that priceless gem on the shelf behind the useless junk and peddle our inane and useless goods to an audience that sees a church looking suspiciously similar to the world we are supposed to separate from. Now that I have gotten that out of my system, what do I mean by that? Well, this is what I mean:

We have an incredible gift from God in our relationship with Him. We are fallen. Each one of us has figured out some way to screw up our lives royally. We are “royal failures” in front of God. And really, our deserved fate is to spend eternity separated from His love and kindness. Now, think of this: separate from God means separated entirely from those things that basically make the universe livable. It means being separated from the goodness that we have come to know, even if we don’t follow God, as He alone is the reason for all goodness in the universe.

Now, think of the last time you went to Wal-Mart. Remember how long that line felt, as you were trapped behind miles of people buying consumerist junk, waiting for your own turn to buy consumerist junk? Okay, multiply that long, aggravating time frame by infinity, and then think of being separated from everything good in life (really, being in line at Wal-Mart is as close a simulacrum of Hell that I can think of), and you begin to understand the concept of eternal separation from God. Now, God, in His goodness, wants to save you from that. On top of that, He wants to put His

spirit in you, and grow you into a new creation in Christ, that is no longer a slave to sin and evil, but is free to operate on the purpose for which you have been designed. Being equipped with that knowledge of our position before God, the amazing grace afforded to us, and the ability to give ourselves to God to be transformed and experience His transforming love, one would think that is all the cultural relevance needed. I mean, really, when you consider that being sinful and depraved has never fallen out of style, and the stakes of being so has never changed, I don't think we need another trump card to successfully spread the gospel.

But... **NO!!!** The transformative nature of the gospel and our opportunity for redemption and relationship with God is **NOT ENOUGH** for us. We need worship bands that have such a meticulously crafted sound that they could record a CD (and many do). We need light shows, and smoke. We need "music that is awesome" because that's what people want now. Our desire for cultural relevancy has created a "need" to craft a spectacular show to entertain the unsaved masses so that we can carefully and surreptitiously co-opt them into the church with a gospel message wrapped in secular dressings that the un-churched will find more "palatable." Or, rather than practice a spiritual discipline such as drawing close to God, we need a new gimmick to draw us into fellowship with the Creator of the universe. We have books on "30 Days to Spiritual Breakthroughs," and "prayer circles," and "prayers of Jabez," all of which are designed to "draw us closer to God."

I have one question. **WHY?** How is it that, after 2000 years of Christianity working just fine, we, for some reason, need to "gimmickize" the gospel to explain to people the depths of our depravity and the heights of God's love? Why do I have to watch lamentable YouTube videos of some hotshot pastor (I'm talking about you, Steve Furtick) attempting to look like a rock star and failing (though succeeding wildly at looking like an uneducated baboon). Why have we replaced the true power of cultural relevance (the gospel) with this fake and weak substitute that comes wrapped in a nice shiny package that, upon further inspection, is no true cultural relevance at all, but rather, another case of Demas loving the world?

What is more culturally relevant to you: The timeless message of salvation, or the newest Coldplay song played by a worship band? If the first one is the answer, then why have we allowed, and continue to allow, the truly

relevant and priceless to be overshadowed and hidden by the cheap trinkets of our romance with relevance?

Here is a challenge for the church: Lose the reliance on marketing and “church relevance.” Rediscover the fire of holding a message that God died to give you. Let that message of fallenness and redemption simmer in your heart, until you realize just how small we are and how amazing our God is. And then, when you simply can’t hold that in anymore, and feel like the sheer weight of God’s love is going to cause you to burst at the seams, pour it into a world that hasn’t heard that most precious of tones, the sweet sound of God’s salvation for those who love Him. Watch the sparks fly and see the transformation available from that which is truly “culturally relevant.”