

SUNDAY ARTICLE

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The Glory of Plodding

Kevin DeYoung

It's sexy among young people – my generation – to talk about ditching institutional religion and starting a revolution of real Christ-followers living in real community without the confines of church. Besides being unbiblical, such notions of churchless Christianity are unrealistic. It's immaturity actually, like the newly engaged couple who think romance preserves the marriage, when the couple celebrating their golden anniversary know it's the institution of marriage that preserves the romance. Without the God-given habit of corporate worship and the God-given mandate of corporate accountability, we will not prove faithful over the long haul.

Without worship and accountability in our Christian lives through the church, we will not prove faithful over the long haul.

What we need are fewer revolutionaries and a few more plodding visionaries. That's my dream for the church – a multitude of faithful, risk-taking plodders. The best churches are full of gospel-saturated people holding tenaciously to a vision of godly obedience and God's glory, and pursuing that godliness and glory with relentless, often unnoticed, plodding consistency.

My generation in particular is prone to radicalism without follow-through. We have dreams of changing the world, and the world should take notice accordingly. But we've not proved faithful in much of anything yet. We haven't held a steady job or raised godly kids or done our time in VBS or, in some cases, even moved off the parental dole. We want global change and expect a few

more dollars to the ONE campaign or Habitat for Humanity chapter to just about wrap things up. What the church and the world needs, we imagine, is for us to be another Bono – a Christian, but more spiritual than religious and more into social justice than the church. As great as it is that Bono is using his fame for some noble purpose, I just don't believe that the happy future of the church, or the world for that matter, rests on our ability to raise up a million more Bonos (as at least one author suggests).

With all due respect, what's harder: to be an idolized rock star who travels around the world touting good causes and chiding governments for their lack of foreign aid, or to be a line worker at GM with four kids and a mortgage, who tithes to his church, sings in the choir every week, serves on the school board, and supports a Christian relief agency and a few missionaries from his disposable income?

Until we are content with being one of the million nameless, faceless church members and not the next globe-trotting rock star, we aren't ready to be a part of the church. In the grand scheme of things, most of us are going to be more of an Ampliatus (Romans 16:8) or Phlegon (v. 14) than an apostle Paul. And maybe that's why so many Christians are getting tired of the church. We haven't learned how to be part of the crowd. We haven't learned to be ordinary. Our jobs are often mundane. Our devotional times often seem like a waste. Church services are often forgettable. That's life. We drive to the same places, go through the same routines with the kids, buy the same groceries at the store, and share a bed with the same person every night.



Church is often the same too – same doctrines, same basic order of worship, same preacher, same people. But in all the smallness and sameness, God works – like the smallest seed in the garden growing to unbelievable heights, like beloved Tychicus, that faithful minister, delivering the mail and apostolic greetings (Ephesians 6:21).

Life is usually pretty ordinary, just like following Jesus most days. Daily discipleship is not a new revolution each morning or an agent of global transformation every evening; it's a long obedience in the same direction.

It's possible the church needs to change. Certainly in some areas it does. But it's also possible we've changed – and not for the better. It's possible we no longer find joy in so great a salvation. It's possible that our boredom has less to do with the church, its doctrines, or its poor leadership and more to do with our unwillingness to tolerate imperfection in others and our own coldness to the same old message about Christ's death and resurrection. It's possible we talk a lot about authentic community but we aren't willing to live in it.

The church is not an incidental part of God's plan. Jesus didn't invite people to join an anti-religion, anti-doctrine, anti-institutional bandwagon of love, harmony, and re-integration. He showed people how to live, to be sure. But He also called them to repent, called them to faith, called them

out of the world, and called them into the church. The Lord "didn't add them to the church without saving them, and he didn't save them without adding them to the church" (John Stott).

"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7). If we truly love the church, we will bear with her in her failings, endure her struggles, believe her to

be the beloved bride of Christ, and hope for her final glorification. The church is the hope of the world – not because she gets it all right, but because she is a body with Christ for her Head.

Don't give up on the church. The New Testament knows nothing of churchless Christianity. The invisible church is for invisible Christians. The visible church is for you and me. Put away the Che Guevara t-shirts, stop the revolution, and join the rest of the plodders. Fifty years from now you'll be glad you did.

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Rev Kevin DeYoung is Senior Pastor of University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan

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