

The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel

By: Mark Dever and Paul Alexander

Why do churches function the way that they do? Have the leaders of those churches ever evaluated their actions and motivations in light of Scripture? In *The Deliberate Church* Mark Dever discusses the functioning of Capital Hill Baptist Church where he is the teaching pastor/elder. Through that he challenges ministers and laymen to evaluate the way their own churches function.

Book Structure

The book is broken down into four sections: Gathering the Church, When the Church Gathers, Gathering Elders, and When the Elders Gather. Each section has several chapters that further break down these topics into more specific areas. Then to further help the reader understand the topics at hand, the chapters have “think tank” sections. These sections offer reflection questions about the topic and the Scripture that teaches about that topic. In these four sections almost all parts of church life are touched through topics that include: the preaching of the Word of God, the music in worship, the elder meetings, member meetings, church membership, and church discipline.

The style of this book makes for an easy read because of the frequent chapter changes. Although the language and style are easy to read, it can be time consuming (in a good way) because of the probing questions that are asked. If this book read carefully and worked through prayerfully it can be very profitable in trying to understand how a local church body is meant to function. I suggest reading it from cover-to-cover, but it is also in a format that would make for easy reference.

Assessment

The prefaces and forward to this book are most encouraging and help to understand the hearts of the authors and elders of Capitol Hill Baptist Church where this strategy of ministry and church growth had been implemented and tested over the past ten years. Mark Dever’s purpose with this book was to answer the questions that he has been asked over and over again from pastors who have had contact with him over the years. It is however, not a pick-up-and-implement-easy-to-use-program. Furthermore it is not a new improved ministry style; from the outset the authors say, “*it’s not new*. It’s old...really old”. What is it then? “Simply put, it’s the Word building the church” (20). This is and must be the place that all churches start and strive to stay, built by the Word of God.

This book does an excellent job of taking the perspective of doing church biblically and applying that perspective all parts of church life. Because of this, there are some things that will be radical to many contemporary evangelicals. For example the regulative principle, plurality of elders (or the term eldership at all!), and a serious stance on church membership will all be new and probably unnerving to many Christians. But these things are good for all Christians not just pastors to deal with.

Chapter 12 entitled “Music” was personally the most encouraging. There are several principles that helped tie many of my thoughts together. Dever argues that singing in worship is corporate, participative, and public as opposed to an individual

devotional time within the Sunday service. In summary, he argues that songs with deep theological truth should be sung as a corporate body of Christ where church members participate together as one voice in public. This is in contrast to many contemporary evangelical churches that have solo after solo and promote individual worship experiences in the worship service. If nothing else, this chapter is a must read.

The Deliberate Church is the best book that I have ever read on practices of the local church, but there are a few minor ideas taught in this book that I am not completely in agreement with. For example, I took issue with the combination of the Church Covenant and Lord's Supper.

Nevertheless, that does not take away from my final assessment that I endorse this book wholeheartedly and recommend it for all pastors, elders, deacons, seminary students, and laymen who want to be challenged to evaluate the way their churches function. Dr. Dever has done the Church a great service by being willing to teach and disciple not only those at his local church, but others in Christendom as well.

This book is available in the GRBC library and at:

http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1581347383/sr=8-1/qid=1151290964/ref=pd_bbs_1/104-4833473-6924711?ie=UTF8